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by

Atifa Manzoor

May 2017

THE TALE OF THREE CULTURES
IDENTIFYING MINORITY TEACHERS' CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCES IN
THE CLASSROOM

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Background: Culture plays a large role in the classroom and is mostly spoken of in recognition of diversity amongst students but not often as part of the teacher's identity. This study closely examined the "lived stories" of three minority teachers, their culture and identity. It delved into who they were personally and professionally, illuminating how teacher identity influenced their relationships with students, curriculum and classroom. Purpose: With more emphasis placed on culturally responsive teaching, the field has become aware of recognizing the cultural capital students bring into the classroom. This study explored the teaching of three minority women seeking to answer the questions: How do minority teachers identify themselves and their culture? How does their cultural identity influence their teaching in regards to classroom curriculum, environment and relationships with students? How are critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching evidenced in their classroom? Methods: With three participants, the researcher included, the main method of research was narrative inquiry, using interviews to gain insight on their background, teaching, and experiences with culture in the classroom. In addition to interviews, journals were employed to evidence researcher experiences. Participants also reflected on their classroom using designated prompts. After a clean transcription, all data was then coded to reveal major themes. Results: After researching the cultural identity of minority teachers, there was an awareness of their culture influencing their classroom. Major themes to emerge from the data were: minority teachers as role models, teaching students more than the curriculum, building a positive classroom atmosphere and culturally responsive teaching. Conclusion: Although not obvious to participants but only through reflection, minority teachers had

something more to offer students. They provided a unique perspective to which some students might relate. With an ever-changing demographic, it is advantageous to have diversity among educators that mirrors that of the student population.

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Chapter I

Just the Beginning: My Story

Introduction

It is funny the way life tends to work out. My parents have the belief that one always ends up where one is meant to be, even if detours are taken along the way, because it was destined for them. I clearly think back to a couple of years ago, when I sat down with my advisor to brainstorm possible research ideas. No matter what I suggested, he always came back to a topic tied to culture, more specifically, to me and my culture. Even then I brushed it off. I am not sure if I was resisting because it seemed like an obvious choice, being that I am an American Muslim,¹ or if I did not want to bring attention to myself and my culture. A couple of years down the road, various dissertation topics later, and pushing my previous hesitations aside, I decided to study and to write about culture, more specifically, my culture. This is how it all began.

The candidacy proposal. As the story goes, things never go as planned and my candidacy proposal was no exception. There I was, seated around a long oval table ready to present the first two chapters of my dissertation to my committee and peers. After rambling on about my research for what felt like an hour, it became apparent to my committee that the direction of the research was not what was coming through as my interest. In my presentation, as I spoke of my recent trip to Pakistan to conduct preliminary research, I continuously interchanged the use of “we” and “them” sometimes referring to “we” as the U.S. and Americans or “we” as Pakistan and Pakistanis. I did not realize my switch of the word and how that correlated with the way

¹ Although it is traditionally termed “Muslim American,” I choose to lead with the commonality of being American first then Muslim.

I identified myself with both groups. Although it should have been more obvious to me, it was perfectly clear to my committee; my research should not be about the implementation of social studies curriculum in Pakistan but something more personal that only a few could speak to. My focus should be on my cultural divide, the fine line I walk between both cultures and how that influences my teaching.

Since I was younger, I found it difficult to grow up in a culture completely different than my own. Once you stepped into my house, you were greeted with the smell of curry, prayer rugs, salwar kameezes, and the sounds of Urdu rolling off my family's tongue. In America, I was always considered an immigrant and a foreigner. Even though I have made America my home, I am an American citizen, and know no other way of life, I always knew my place as an immigrant with the idea (most often hidden in the back of my mind) that I did not fully "fit in."

Boy meets girl. My father grew up in the rural village of Toba Tek Singh outside of the bustling city of Lahore in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Following tradition, his mother was not sent to school for an education but was taught domestic duties that would teach her the responsibilities of a housewife. My paternal grandfather was a school teacher in the town's school. This made it possible for all the male children to attend school. My father was the eldest male in the family with two younger brothers and five sisters. He continued his schooling through college in a time and place where opportunities were limited. His sisters would follow in my grandmother's footsteps and stay home once primary school was complete.

My mother grew up as a city girl in Shorkot, also located in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. My maternal grandmother was also a housewife. She tended to the house,

her husband and their five children. My mother was the second daughter in a family of seven, with three younger brothers and an older sister. With an interest in school, studying, and education, my mother not only went to school but completed high school during a time when women's schooling was rare.

My parents met through family. Country boy meets city girl. In a culture and country that values a man's occupation; my father did not have much to offer my mother. He would eventually work for his father-in-law but at the time of their engagement, my father could not offer my mother much except his love, hard work, and dedication to doing whatever he needed for their relationship and future family to be successful. They married and with that one decision, my parents would continue to defy the norms of culture throughout their marriage for the benefit of their family.

Then there were four. This is where I come in. When I was born, my sister was six and my dad realized that things needed to change so that his daughters would have a chance at a successful future. My father instilled in me the importance of education, not only for success but its importance to combat ignorance. In Pakistan, it was difficult to obtain a lot of things but the most difficult of all was an education. Living in a country with Muslim ideology makes it hard for a girl to achieve the kind of success my father envisioned for his children. Traditionally it would be the males in the family, as in my father's case, that would go off to school and receive an education. Women were, and in many cases still are, expected to stay at home and learn the household duties for their future role as housewives. Some women went to school but many dropped out before reaching high school, and if they were lucky to be able to pursue education to that extent, high school would be the last bit of schooling they would receive. Realizing this,

as well as the importance education played on our future standard of living, my father decided to migrate across the Atlantic to the United States of America. To those in Pakistan, and many around the world, the United States (U.S.) is the land of opportunity; a place where no matter religion, race, or creed, one can obtain success through hard work. With a vision of a future where his daughters can be independent, receive an education, and work toward a career, my parents were off to New York.

In the borough of Queens at the age of one, my family, which consisted of my dad, mom, and older sister, lived in a converted basement apartment. It had a small kitchen, bathroom, and a bedroom, if you could consider the tiny space a bedroom. By my parents leaving a comfortable life behind, it is apparent to me not only how much my father values education but how important it was for my future. He would do anything so that my sister and I might advance in school. We could not afford the luxuries in life but my parents provided us with everything that we needed to be comfortable. We were never aware of our lack of fortune nor did we feel unequipped to compete amongst others in an academic setting.

Journey to teaching. In third grade my teacher Ms. Speakman gave us an assignment. It was to answer a simple question, one that is asked of children often: what do you want to be when you grow up? Out of paper plates and a balloon, we created a picture of ourselves blowing a bubble (I call this the bubble gum dream assignment) and attached our responses to our paper plate self-portraits. My response was that I wanted to be a teacher. At the time, I was unsure why I wanted to be a teacher but at the age of eight my goal was set and without realizing it, my path was laid out before me. Although

my reasons for wanting to become a teacher were unclear until college, my purpose would continue to evolve as I furthered my education and encountered new situations.

Upon receiving my degree, I was lucky enough to land a job teaching Contemporary World Cultures in the school where I student taught. I could not have been more thrilled that I would be teaching World Cultures. It was a topic I was interested in and one that would allow me to open my students' eyes and minds to a world outside of their "bubble" of a town. As a pre-service teacher, one is often asked to recount one's teaching philosophy, what one hopes to achieve as a teacher, and the classroom atmosphere one would provide. Teaching a topic like World Cultures would provide me the platform to engage in dialogue with my students about tolerance and exploring other people's way of life in a globalized world. I was ready to challenge my students and come upon their own learning as we navigated through their questions and concerns together. Aside from one issue where I was questioned by a fellow employee as to why I was teaching Asian philosophies and religions, my first year went smoothly. I can safely say my first two years were fantastic. Whether that was the result of a young teacher's passion or naïveté, I had no qualms regarding what I taught or how I taught, I simply taught and seized teaching opportunities as they presented themselves.

Unfortunately, every year after that presented another issue, concern, or complaint. One year, a parent sent me an angry email about her son coming home confused about religion, and, in particular, his religion of Christianity. Recognizing an email would not suffice, I called the parent to listen to her concerns, explaining the discussions that took place in class and attempting to calm her nerves. After a pleasant ending to our phone call, she emailed the science teacher on an unrelated matter but

ranted about how I was trying to convert her son to Islam through my lessons and curriculum. I could not help but begin to feel targeted. I was teaching the curriculum in alignment with state standards. Added to that, I was teaching the same lessons and using the same activities as the other sixth grade teachers. However, I was the one receiving more emails and having more conversations with parents regarding the subject matter. Luckily, I had a supportive administration that knew my character, was aware of our curriculum and how we as a team teach it. All the same, I could not help but feel as though I needed to change. I felt as though I needed to hide who I was ethnically and religiously and “fly under the radar,” so to speak. Reflecting upon this in the midst of this inquiry, I recognized that I changed as an educator after this incident. My lessons, particularly those dealing with the Middle East, went from sharing my stories and culture with my students to quickly teaching the basic required lesson and moving on.

This Research

Need for the study. The demographical shift and increase in diversity of the U.S. population is now more evident in our public schools (Maxwell, 2014). As reported by the Center for Public Education, trends in immigration indicate a shift in which soon no one racial or ethnic group will make up the majority (Crouch, 2012). As the diversity of the population increases, so does the achievement gap between minorities and whites; especially for Hispanics and African Americans. With nearly 52% of children projected to be non-Hispanic White, those under the age of 18 in the U.S. have nearly become a minority majority with numbers projected to show a continuous shift (Colby, 2014). As the U.S. transitions to a new era of changing demographics where the minority will soon become the majority, that shift in demographics is not mirrored in the teacher population

with the majority of educators in the U.S. being White females (Holland, 2014). The Carnegie Taskforce on Teaching as a Profession shared the importance of teacher race on students by stating:

Schools form children's opinions about the larger society and their own futures. The race and background of their teachers tells them something about authority and power... These messages influence children's attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their views of their own and others' intrinsic worth." (1986, p.79)

In the U.S., research on the effects of teacher ethnicity revealed ethnicity having an influence on the teacher's initial judgment of the student's academic potential.

According to a study completed by Dee (2005), "white and minority students (i.e., black, and Hispanic) are likely to be perceived more negatively by a teacher who does not share their racial/ethnic designation" (p. 10). On the other hand, minority students are likely to be considered inattentive by other race teachers.

In an article for the *Miami Herald*, paleontologist Ian Tattersall declared, "You cannot think of human beings as independent of culture and society" (Futterman, 2015). In regards to culture, Matthew Lynch (2016) asserted that a person's culture and upbringing has a profound effect on how they process information and see the world (2016). Futterman (2015) extended on Lynch's sentiment by saying:

Teachers cannot escape the fact that their communication "styles" reflect their cultural background. Much of what they say, the way they say it, and their relationship with students, parents and colleagues are deeply influenced by the way they have been socialized. (para. 15)

If individuals cannot be thought of as separate from culture and society and teachers' communication styles reflect their cultural background, would it be safe to say the classroom is influenced by the teacher's culture as well?

Growing up, I thought culture was only about religion and ethnicity, not knowing that culture extends to nations, social groups and institutions (Culture, n.d.). Students enter the classroom with cultural baggage that affects their learning styles and behaviors. Teachers do not enter the classroom as blank slates with no past or background; they enter with cultural baggage as well. Professional development and teacher preparation courses are geared toward student culture and multiculturalism but do not address awareness of the teacher's own culture and the influence it has in the classroom. Teachers are individuals with a background, affiliations, and identities outside of the classroom. Although much research has been conducted on minority students' culture and its influence on learning and the classroom, less research has been done on minority teachers' culture having an influence on teaching and the classroom.

Purpose and procedures. In this study, the role a minority teacher's culture plays in the classroom was explored. More specifically, the inquiry sought to understand: How do minority teachers' identify themselves and their culture? How does their cultural identity influence their teaching in regards to classroom curriculum, environment and relationships with students? With critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching practices involving the oppressed and minorities, how are critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching evidenced in their classrooms? The inquiry participants included three minority teachers, including this researcher. In addition to gaining insight into my own teaching, the study examined the storied lives

and teaching of two other minority teachers; one Hispanic teacher coming from a border town in Texas and the other, an African American woman teaching in Houston. Both had families that had lived in the U.S. for generations in contrast to mine, both held varying teaching styles, goals, and focus as their culture shaped their ideology, classroom, and relationships with students.

Significance of the Inquiry

Personal implications. Anyone that goes into teaching does so with the intent of being a “good” teacher. Preservice teachers are taught methods and strategies to implement in the classroom that will allow optimal learning to take place. Everyone involved in education will have a different idea of what factors go into being a “good” teacher. Many factors are common across a few lists: organization, love of kids, love of subject, work ethic, etc. (Strauss, 2011; Bassett, 2013). As a preservice teacher going through the certification process, I soaked in all the information I could on becoming an effective teacher that provided students a venue for success. Keeping in mind all the elements and qualities of a good teacher, I never recognized my ethnicity as a factor in being a good or effective teacher. I never thought it would influence my teaching.

In the teacher’s desire to use the power of diversity in the classroom for effective teaching, one must be aware of their own cultural and personal values, social beliefs and identities (Weiner, 1993). In his book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, Palmer wrote, “knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject” (2007, p.3). Scholars such as Geneva Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2009) explained that “teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding the context in which they

teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p.181). Echoing their sentiment, Gay and Kirkland (2003) stated, “to make teaching more relevant to diverse students, teachers need to have a thorough understanding of their own cultures and the cultures of different ethnic groups, as well as how this affects teaching and learning behaviors” (p.182).

Teacher journal reflections prompted participants to think about their own perspectives and to critically examine their identity and culture and how it affects the classroom. Reflecting on the teachers’ storied responses in journals and interviews enabled the identification of patterns of thought and teacher assumptions. On a personal level, by researching the influences culture had on the classroom, I hoped to put to rest insecurities and to find that the different background and experiences that I shared with students did not hinder my teaching but enhanced their learning.

Practical implications. A practical implication of this study was the acknowledgement of the power of reflection in teaching. John Dewey (1916/2004) emphasized the importance of reflection in the learning process by defining education as the “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience (p.74). Simply put, teachers educate themselves and learn not from experiences but by reflecting on experiences. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2009) also reinforced reflection as essential to the learning process and of becoming an agent of change in the world: “Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in

such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers” (p. 87).

Dewey (1933) believed the purpose of education is to not simply be the transmission of information but to learn the habit of reflection. For this type of education to be provided, teachers themselves must become active inquirers. The U.S. has only recently begun using reflection the way Dewey envisioned. Teacher preparation programs have “emphasized teachers’ behaviors and skill development apart from thinking about those behaviors” (Valli, 1997, p.69). Novice teachers are told about classroom management and practice instructional strategies but are never asked to explain why they would act a certain way or how they made their decisions. Instilling the habit of reflection in pre-service teachers allows teachers to “develop ways of thinking about their classroom, ways of carefully looking back on their actions, and ways of reflecting on their own knowledge and preparation” (Valli, 1997, p.72).

As defined by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, implicit bias is “the attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats, Capatosto, Wright, Contractor, 2016, p.14). A study on the intervention for long-term reduction of prejudice was based on the premise of implicit bias being a habit that can be broken (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). The first step to breaking the “habit” was awareness of implicit bias. Matthew Lynch (2011) contented that teachers who grow up immersed in the European-American culture can be entirely unaware of the realities of other cultures. In addition, he offered, “Most teachers greatly overestimate their knowledge about other cultures, which manifests itself in a lack of cultural sensitivity in classroom management and

pedagogical techniques” (para. 6). In discussing cultural bias and achieving a culturally responsive classroom, a major factor that is emphasized is for teachers to examine their own biases (Tyler, Stevens, and Uqdah, 2009). Having teachers participate in self-reflection to understand their own cultural biases can be beneficial and for many, becoming aware of themselves as cultural beings through self-reflection, can lead to a reduction in cultural bias. (American Psychological Association, 2002; Gay, 2010).

With the key players being teachers, our greatest weapon in combating ignorance and allowing immigrants and minorities to feel accepted is education. As teachers, we should educate ourselves through reflection and open the dialogue about race amongst each other before opening the dialogue with students. Teacher reflection on their ethnic culture influencing the classroom can provide information on the difficulties they encounter and what they do to allow opportunities for success in the classroom.

Social implications. With projections showing the comparative relation of minority student population continuing to grow, it is not matched with similar demographic representation amongst teachers (Egalite & Kisida, 2015). With nearly 82% of public school teachers being white and on average, Hispanic and Black students being two times more common than Hispanic and Black teachers, our educational system has what Egalite and Kisida term, a “diversity gap” (2015). Many experts believe the diversity gap may be a contributing factor to the growing issue of the achievement gap among white and minority students in the U.S. (2015). Lessening or eliminating this gap is a “critical component to promoting a broader social equality with respect to a variety of outcomes like educational attainment, and earnings” (Dee, 2005).

With numerous benefits, minority teachers in the classroom can help to lessen the achievement gap. Racially or ethnically diverse teachers have an impact on students' comfort level in the classroom, provide as a role model and act as liaisons, not only to the community but as cultural liaisons for the students (Tyler, Yzquierdo, Lopez-Reyna, & Saunders-Flippin, 2004). Research suggests minority teachers and of similar ethnicity increases achievement among minority students. What it does not tell us is *how* minority teacher's culture and ethnicity may influence the classroom atmosphere, the curriculum and relationships with students that promote student success.

Just the Beginning

Much research has been focused on the correlation of student ethnicity, success and methods to counteract the achievement gap (Haycock, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002). According to the Center for American Progress, "teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement for engaging students of similar backgrounds." (Bireda & Chait, 2011, p. 2). Could minority teachers be another missing piece of the educational puzzle? Through reflective journal writing and interviews, this inquiry provided insights into the teacher's perspective on the connection between culture and the classroom.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Living in the same area in which I teach, I always find it humorous when students see me outside the classroom and off campus. Looking at me wide-eyed and shocked, some will shy away and avoid me while others run up yelling my name. The immediate reaction from every student is a look of amazement as though they are seeing an animal out of its cage and in the wild. At times, they seem not to realize teachers are people too, with families, opinions, beliefs, and lives outside of the confined spaces in which we teach. Just as students do not come to class as a blank slate, “A teacher brings themselves—their life experiences, their histories, their cultures—into the classroom” (White, Zion, Kozleski & Fulton, 2005). Personality, experience and culture are part of who teachers are; part of their identity. It travels with them into the classroom where it influences their perception, relationship with students, and curriculum.

The theoretical framework of this inquiry is grounded in the literature on culture and identity. The literature review that follows first addresses topics that center on the teacher, providing overview of culture and moving on to a discussion on the concept of identity. To ask a person to describe and identify their culture would be to simplify multifaceted concepts and assume that each person is only associated with one cultural group when, in reality, people belong to multiple groups that operate within multiple cultures (Rosinski, 2003). As Carteret (2011) stated, “As humans, we develop our self-esteem and identity within a particular cultural context” (para. 3). Since one’s identity is shaped by culture (El Dib, 2013), it is important for researchers to understand how

participants identify themselves and the cultural groups with which they associate, providing insights into the influences culture may have in their classroom.

The focal point of the second half of the literature review are concepts associated with teaching and the curriculum. The discussion begins with Critical Pedagogy, an operational definition and what it encompasses. Being a minority in the U.S., one quickly understands one's status and position in society. As J. Milton Yinger (1970) shared, minority group individuals carry self-doubt and even self-hatred from the continuing historical mistreatment but they also challenge the validity of their low status and the justice of it. This is where critical pedagogy enters the classroom. Peter McLaren (2009) wrote, "Critical Pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (as cited in Darder & Torres, p. 72).

Critical Pedagogy lays the foundation for the final concept in the review of literature—culturally relevant pedagogy. Understanding the need for multiculturalism and the lack of minority representation in the curriculum, how do minority teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching within their classroom? As minorities, how do the teachers within this study exhibit critical pedagogy in the classroom?

Identity

While studying the country of Russia, students in some schools watch a PBS Nova video titled *Anastasia: Dead or Alive?* (Apsell, P. & Nott, J., 1995). The documentary was based on Anna Anderson's claims of being the Royal Duchess Anastasia Romanov and shared evidence for both sides of the argument. At one point,

Anna Anderson was interviewed, but her true identity was still unknown. She proceeded to tell the interviewer, “How can I tell you who I am? Can you tell me who you are? Can you prove to me who you are?” (Apsell, P. & Nott, J., 1995). Every year, this scene sparks discussion in my classroom. With passion, students argue that if she really wanted to prove who she was, she could. To counter argue, I ask my students, without identification, family or friends to support them, how would they prove who they really are? How would they be able to identify themselves?

What is “identity”? As defined by the *Oxford Dictionary*, identity is “the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness” (2014). The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines identity as “who someone is: the name of a person” (2014). In *Identifying identity: A semantic history*, Phillip Gleason (1983) observed the dictionary definitions representing an older sense of the word and suggested that the current idea of “identity” is a recent social construct that is more complicated than its simple dictionary definition. Although the term is used correctly in daily discourse amongst people, the concept of identity is as complex and vague as ever (Fearon, 1999).

When looking at definitions or brief descriptions of “identity” from social scientists, none resemble the standard dictionary definitions. Take for example, the few descriptions shared below.

1. Identity is “the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (Deng, 1995, p.1).

2. Identities are “relatively stable, roles specific understandings and expectations about self” (Wendt, 1992, p. 397).
3. “Identities are...prescriptive representations of political actors themselves and of their relationships to each other” (Kowert & Legro 1996, p. 453).
4. Identity “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins, 1996, p.4)

Everyone has a self-constructed definition of the term “identity” and although the above definitions range in diversity, all refer to a common concept (Fearon, 1999). Varying definitions provided by researchers and social scientists alike are geared toward their interests and needs. For purposes of this research, identity was best defined by Abrams and Hogg (1998) as “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others . . . is largely determined by the groups to which they feel they belong” (p. 4). This suggests that how teachers identify who they are, will lead to the various culture groups with which they identify.

Psychosocial identity. One of the first psychologists to take a definitive interest in the concept of identity was Erik Erikson. Erikson’s (as cited in Bourne, 1978) psychosocial stage theory was developed around the main element of ego identity. Ego identity is the sense of oneself as a distinct continuous entity and incorporates the psychoanalytic concept of “ego” and the previously existing concepts of the “self.” As proposed by Erikson, our ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and our daily interactions with others (Cherry, 2005). Aside from the ego identity, also referred to as “self,” there is a distinction of personal identity, with idiosyncrasies that

set us apart from the next person, and social identity or cultural identity, an accumulation of social roles a person might play.

In Erikson's (as cited in Cherry, 2005) psychosocial stage theory, each stage is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. Mastery of each stage leads to "ego strength" or failure leads to inadequacy. In each stage, asserted Erikson, a conflict emerges that allows potential for growth that centers on developing a psychosocial quality/virtue, or failing to develop the quality/virtue. Erikson's psychosocial stages of development laid the groundwork for future researchers and sociologists in regards to "identity."

Concept of self. The extant literature on the concept of identity makes the connection between identity and self even more apparent (Leary, M.R. & Tangney, J. P., 2011; Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J., 2003; Taylor, C., 1989). With such an interwoven connection, it is difficult to talk about identity without discussing "self."

Self, in the *Oxford Dictionary*, is "a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action" (self, n.d.). Huitt (2011) described self as "the conscious reflection of one's own being or identity, as an object separate from other or the environment" (para. 1). He explained that the two most common ways to view self are the cognitive or thinking (self-concept) and the affective or emotional (self-esteem). Fournier (2009) defined self-concept as the way in which one perceives oneself and which is derived from factors such as one's place or role in life, appearance, personal values and beliefs, and certain personality traits. Our self-concept is ever changing based on the individual's personal beliefs, feelings, and as new information is introduced. Huitt (2011) proposed, "Self-

concept is not innate, but is constructed and developed by the interaction with the environment and reflecting on that action” (para. 4). Carl Rogers suggested there are three different components of self-concept: self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self (1959).

The affective or emotional way of viewing self is self-esteem which alludes to how one feels about themselves or values himself (Huitt, 2011). Maslow (1987) included self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs and described two forms of self-esteem: the need for respect from others, and the need of respect for oneself, self-respect.

Everybody has a sense of self and the important ways they see themselves. Our sense of self includes those characteristics we feel are most important about ourselves, such as: roles, attributes, and behaviors (Ylvisaker, Hibbard & Feeney, 2006). In alignment with social identity theory, the self is made of two major components, personal identity which includes personality traits that make us unique, and social identity which includes groups we belong to (Cherry, 2005).

Personal identity. Who am I? Where did I begin? What happens to me after I die? These are familiar questions most people have asked about themselves. Personal identity deals with philosophical questions such as these (Olson, 2009). Hewitt (1997) described personal identity as

a sense of self built up over time as a person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are not thought of as those of a community but as the property of the person. Personal identity thus emphasizes a sense of individual autonomy rather than of communal involvement. (p.93)

Shoemaker (2014) further clarified, “It has to do with the nature of the persistence of persons through time and their awareness of such persistence” (para. 2).

Personal identity is analyzed through theories of physical and psychological continuity (Lacewing, n.d.). Both views agree there is something that it takes for us to persist and “our identity through time consists in or necessarily follows from something other than itself” (Olson, 2009, p. 11). The theory of physical continuity view is, I am the same person I am today as I was yesterday and will continue to be the same person because my body has not changed or has only changed incrementally. Whereas the theorists of psychological continuity say we are “bundles of mental states” (Olson, 2009, p. 20). Locke (as cited in Shoemaker, 2014) used the story of *The Prince and Pauper* to illustrate the psychological continuity theory. Memory and consciousness, he believed, determined a personal identity. If the Prince became the Pauper but held on to his own memories and consciousness, would not he still be the Prince and vice versa? In this example, the physical attributes of the characters changed but their mental states remained the same (Shoemaker, 2014). Although they seemed to be on opposite sides of the spectrum, Hitlin (2003) similarly puts personal identity at the core of the self instead of placing it on a continuum with it on one end, and social identity at the other.

Social identity. As a Polish Jew in Europe during World War II, Henri Tajfel (as cited in Hogg, 2006) was fueled by a passion to understand prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict. Much like Tolstoy and Karl Marx, Tajfel did not believe that “these large scale social phenomena could be satisfactorily explained in terms of personality or interpersonal interactions” (p.112). Although the challenge was figuring out how, Tajfel believed, social forces configured individual action.

According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (see also Stets, 2000). Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that groups give us a sense of belonging in the world in addition to a social identity; they give us a sense of pride and self-esteem. Through a process of social categorization (putting people into social groups), we divide the world into "us" known as the in-group versus "them" known as the out-group. Tajfel even proposed stereotyping being based on a normal cognitive process and our tendency to group things together. This leads to the exaggeration of the differences between groups and the similarity of things in the same group.

How do we evaluate others as "us" (the in-group) or "them" (the out-group)? Tajfel and Turner (1979) presented three mental processes that take place as we evaluate others as us or them: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The first is the self-categorization in which we categorize objects to understand them and identify them. Just as we categorize objects, we organize people into social categories to understand the social environment. Categorizing people into groups provides us with more information about the person. In a similar way, we can learn about ourselves by knowing which groups we belong to. By knowing which groups we identify with, we can adapt our behavior in accordance with the norms of the group.

In the second stage of social identification suggest by Tajfel and Turner (1979), we take on the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves with. We will begin to take on the norms and characteristics of the group. There will be an emotional significance to your identification with the group and with group membership, one's self-esteem will increase. The next stage is social comparison. Once we have

categorized and identified with a group, we begin to compare our group to others. To keep our self-esteem intact, our group needs to fair comparably to the other groups. If two groups are identified as rivals, they are forced to compete to maintain self-esteem. In line with Tajfel and Turner's social comparison stage is social comparison theory.

Social comparison theory. Roman philosopher Tacitus said, "To know thyself, compare thyself to others" (Moehlman, 1963, pg. 3). It is human nature to want to compare ourselves to others and see what others are doing or what they might have in comparison to ourselves. With its roots in psychology, this phenomenon, known as social comparison theory, first made its appearance in 1954. Festinger (1954) proposed that humans have a drive to evaluate their abilities and opinions. He cited the example of writing poetry; a person's evaluation on whether they can write poetry depends on what others' opinions are on his poetry writing abilities. We learn about our own abilities and attitudes by comparing ourselves with others.

Festinger (1954) hypothesized of a "unidirectional drive upward." Wood (1989) elaborated on the hypothesis by proposing there is a pressure in the Western world to continually improve ourselves, to be slightly better than those to which we compare ourselves. The unidirectional drive upward and the need to be better, even if by a sliver, slightly better than the rest, leads to competition and reform.

Teacher identity. "I contain multitudes" said Walt Whitman (1897), not in regards to multiple personalities but in reference to the different roles we see ourselves in (p. 78). We all identify with different identities and roles in our lives as the context of our surrounding environment changes. One role that identifies us is that of "teacher." What exactly is teacher identity?

Much like identity and self, teacher identity is constantly shifting and ever changing due to internal factors such as emotion within the individual (Klas & Slegers, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008) and external factors such as job and life experiences (Flores & Day, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). While researching teacher professional identity, Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) noted an absence of a true definition of the term and instead determined four features of teacher professional identity. Their survey of literature from 1988-2000 found:

- Professional identity to be an ongoing process and constantly evolving
- Professional characteristics are adopted by teachers in unique ways
- Within teacher professional identity are sub-identities which need to be balanced to avoid conflict
- Teacher professional identity consists of agency and the pursuit of professional development that aligns with the teacher's goals

Although a concise definition of identity or teacher identity is difficult to find, the notion that these concepts and terms are multifaceted is agreed upon (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Olsen (2008) described teacher identity as “dynamic, holistic interaction among multiple parts” (p. 25). He equated it to a room with many doors; each door representing a teacher's past present and future as linked, with a complex mix of the professional and personal. In the same context of internal and external factors influencing teacher identity, Marcelo (2009) identified four characteristics relevant in shaping teacher professional identity. The first is the constant flux of defining and redefining or interpreting and re-interpreting of experiences. Second, is the understanding that teacher

professional identity is not a “global character.” Teachers are not homogenous and their conduct depends on the environment and context or “local particularities” to which they respond. In relation to the second is the third characteristic of teacher professional identity, a result of sub-identities. Finally, teacher professional identity is important in making motivated and committed teachers (p. 9-20).

Establishing and understanding one’s teacher identity is important for a teacher to feel motivated and have a sense of agency. “Human beings are active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life and in shaping individual activities” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15). When a teacher realizes their identity, they feel empowered to reach goals and move ideas forward to obtain goals.

The importance of the implications of developing teacher identity in novice teachers was expressed by Olsen (2008) as well as Beauchamp and Thomas (2010). They looked toward teacher education programs to instill and develop teacher identity in pre-service teachers. Allowing pre-service teachers to discuss and establish their teacher professional identity early in their career will benefit them as they walk into their first year of teaching. As Thomas and Beauchamp (2010) explicated,

development of professional identity does not automatically come with experience, and that some form of deliberate action is necessary to ensure that new teachers begin their careers with the appropriate tools to negotiate the rocky waters of their first few years. (p.767)

Teacher, sister, Hispanic, Muslim—individuals have multiple identities as they shift and adjust in response to the context in which they are placed. To better understand how teachers’ culture influences the classroom, it is pertinent to first determine how

teachers identify themselves and the cultural groups with which they identify. For us to understand cultural groups, we must understand culture.

Culture

What exactly is “culture” and how do we define it? For some, to be “cultured” means to have an appreciation of good food, music, literature, and the arts. To biologists, culture refers to a colony of bacteria growing in artificial medium containing nutrients in a laboratory. Culture is something different to everyone with varying definitions; however, for behavioral scientists and anthropologists, culture is the full range of “learned human behavior patterns” (O’Neil, 2012, p. 3).

Eagleton (2000) began his book on culture by saying, “culture is said to be one of the two or three most complex words in the English language” (p.1). With its origins in Latin, the word “culture” has been derived from cultivation, the process of tilling and developing land (Baldwin, 2006 p.5; Eagleton, 2000). Although the term would not be represented in the British or American dictionary until the 1900’s, the modern meaning of the word culture was established in English by Tylor in 1871 (Kroeber, 1952). Tylor’s meaning of culture came from Gustav E. Klemm’s description of culture as “a state or condition, sometimes described as extra organic or super organic, in which all human societies share even their particular cultures may show very great qualitative differences” (p.14).

The definition of culture can be simplified as the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a group, there is also a vagueness about the term and a simultaneous encompassing of many descriptions. Eagleton suggested that the term ‘culture’ is too broad and too narrow to be useful (2000). As described by Rosato (as cited in Baldwin,

2006), “culture is flexible in its usage and defined in a number of different ways” (p. x) If we look only at the years between 1920 and 1950, at least one-hundred-and-fifty-seven definitions were presented on the term (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). As explained by Lustig and Koester (2006), culture is “a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (p.30). Maxwell (2001) viewed culture as

the sum of stories we tell ourselves about who we are and want to be, individually and collectively. Culture works also as the staging ground of these identity narratives and of our daily routines. Culture comprises and constitutes the places where we live; it is the built environment and peopled landscape (pp.1-2).

Giroux (1988), also viewing culture from a narrative perspective, defined culture as “a terrain of struggle” (p.97) as it refers to “the representation of lived experiences” (p.116). So many variations exist on the meaning and definition of culture that Baldwin (2005) devoted eighty-seven pages to the various definitions found in the literature. Harris (1983) defined culture as “socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (p.5). For this study, culture was defined in its most subjective terms as seen by Eagleton, “the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations and underlying assumption prevalent among people in a society” (Eagleton, 2000, p. 34; Harrison & Huntington, 2000, p. xv).

Culture as learned. When we speak of different cultural groups, Japanese, Indian, French, we are referring to their shared traditions, languages, and beliefs that set

them apart from another group. Those that share your culture do so because their family has the same culture. Culture is not innate but it is learned (O'Neil, 2012). Infants are not born with cultural traits but are genetically predisposed to rapidly learn cultural traits such as language. As stated by O'Neil, babies "[are] amazing learning machines... [they] can be placed with any family on earth and learn to accept their culture as their own" (p. 4). "Culture is learned and experienced through family, school, and in the workplace" (Wu, p.1). Like software for computers, Hofstede (2005), a Dutch social psychologist and former IBM employee, equated culture as the mental software for humans. Every person has patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that are learned. Geert would refer to these patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting as "mental programs" or "software of mind" also known as culture. Understanding the "mental programming" can provide insight into why people from different countries have conflict and misunderstandings.

If culture is learned, is it the basis of human conflict? As Knight-El (2008) put it, sociologists define culture as learned behavior, casting aside genetic coding and emphasizing environment as the greater influence in human development. He further explained that prejudices come from learned behavior which is the exact definition of culture. Our social programming (culture) can unconsciously and unintentionally lead to pre-judgment and bias. By looking at culture, we can learn more about our issues and conflicts amongst societies.

Cultural identity. In *Individual's Culture Identity in the Context of Dialogue of Cultures*, Sysoyev (2001) defined cultural identity as

an individual's realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behavior directed on his or her enrollment and acceptance into particular group, as well as certain characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual's group membership. (pp. 37-38)

Adler's (1998) ideas on cultural identity coincided with that of Hall (1990) as he recognized two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first is cultural identity of a society as defined by its majority group (Adler, 1998). Adler claimed that emphasis is placed on the group equivalent to national or social character which describes a set of traits that a given community share placing those commonalities above the individual's differences. The second concept revolves around the individual in relation to his or her culture. As reported by Fong (2004), cultural identity is a social construction of "group members who have a sense of belonging and who share traditions, heritage, language, and similar norms of appropriate behavior" (p. 6).

The locus of cultural identity can be national, regional, racially or ethnically based. Other dimensions of our cultural identities, as proposed by Johnson (as cited in Fong & Chuang, 2004), can be community based, race, ethnicity, spiritual identity, as well as gender, lifestyle choices, organizations, age, class, and/or group membership.

Chuang (as cited in Hall, 1990) expressed the idea that cultural identity, much like identity itself, is ever changing and is in constant flux. Our identities are dependent on our relationships and are under constant transformation. In different contexts and situations our identities change (Fong & Chuang, 2004; Hall, 1990). But how are our identities formed?

Fong and Chuang (2004) recounted Phinney's model on the three stages of cultural identity development. During the first stage, known as the unexamined cultural identity stage, young children do not question their cultural, ethnic, or racial identity. They rarely show interest in discovering their background and take their cultural values, norms, beliefs, and customs for granted. Eventually there will come a time when children are confronted with a cultural, ethnic, and/or racial conflict that causes confusion and creates difficulty. This begins their cultural identity search stage. Questioning their cultural identity can be the result of an overheard comment, personal event, billboard, magazine, or the internet. They become more aware of the differences between themselves and others and begin to search for cultural or ethnic groups they identify with. In this stage, the child is reflecting and evaluating themselves, others, and how they fit within various groups. Individual's beliefs and morals are being shaped.

Children may also encounter unfairness and/or discrimination that may perceive potential difficulties in obtaining goals. It is during this phase that the individual can experience an identity crisis that involves conflict between subjective identity (how they see themselves) and objective identity (how other people perceive them to belong to a distinct cultural, racial, or ethnic group). Children and teens are most susceptible to peer pressure and as a member of a small racial or ethnic group, the minority person will often desire to identify with the dominant cultural group. The final phase is cultural identity achievement where the individual has a solid understanding of their own cultural identity. They are clear, confident, understanding and accept their identity. In this phase, the individual does not question their cultural identity because of negative or stereotypical comments or discrimination.

Bicultural identity. An individual does not belong to one culture and one culture alone. Many researchers side with the notion of individuals identifying with more than one culture. This is no more apparent than with bi-racial individuals or even more so with immigrants. Biculturalism has been defined in multiple ways but most generally pertains to the proficiency and comfort of an individual in both their heritage culture and of the culture of the country or region in which the individual has settled (Schwarz & Unger, 2010). Biculturalism applies not only to immigrants from other countries but to second generation immigrants, as well as those living in ethnic enclaves where their heritage culture has been maintained throughout generations. It also applies to individuals “from visible minority groups, who may be identified as different from the majority group even if their families have been in the receiving society for multiple generations” (p. 26). Bicultural individuals can internalize two cultures that guide their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Hong, et al., 2000; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

Originally derived from acculturation literature, the primary focus of biculturalism is on cultural behaviors such as language, media preferences and choice of friends (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Using this criterion to determine biculturalism, individuals are considered bicultural if they speak both languages, watch/read media in both cultures, and have friends from both cultural backgrounds. Some researchers go a step further suggesting that true bicultural individuals synthesize and blend their heritage culture with the receiving culture. In this sense, an individual infuses both cultures into a personalized blend in which neither culture is reducible to heritage or receiving culture. Schwarz and Unger (2010) used the example of a Chinese American to depict a

bicultural individual. A bicultural American Chinese individual may eat a hamburger along with Chinese vegetables, they may speak “Chinglish” and blend in with both Chinese and American groups. More recently, there has been a call to expand the definition of acculturation to include cultural values, practices and identifications. Schwarz and Unger argued that a truly bicultural individual would intermix their two cultures in regards to their cultural values, practices, and identifications. Using the previous Chinese American individual as an example, they may blend traditional Chinese values (deference to authority and respect for parents) with that of American values (working hard to achieve personal success and recognition). Additionally, this individual might feel an allegiance to both the U.S. and China, feeling Chinese in comparison to the American kids and American in comparison with Chinese kids while still being able to effectively function in both groups.

How does biculturalism develop? Biculturalism can emerge from two factors, the first is a social-cultural context, and the second from intentional efforts by parents to socialize toward the heritage culture. Mistry and Wu (2010) assert that biculturalism is facilitated by environmental factors. If an individual is living in a community in which their heritage culture is integrated with the receiving culture and where comfort in both cultures is essential for daily life that is when biculturalism is likely to emerge. In essence if an environment is bicultural, individuals within that environment should also be bicultural. Over time, both cultures would blend to create a new culture with incorporated elements of the original cultures.

In a study of Hispanic young adults, Schwartz and Zamboanga (2008) found that the even in a bicultural environment, not everyone can be classified as bicultural. A

sizeable number of study participants rated themselves as assimilated, either more American than Hispanic or vice versa. Individuals who were the most bicultural, reported the highest levels of familial ethnic socialization or “the extent to which their parents teach their children about (or expose them to) language, symbols, and traditions from the family’s heritage culture” (p. 276). With somewhat lower familial ethnic socialization were individuals who were characterized as separated and those categorized as assimilated were reported among the lowest familial ethnic socialization. This suggested that families are not merely conduits for cultural influences but parents can actively decide how to acculturate individuals and their attempts “to socialize their children culturally can complement—or clash with—the effects of the larger cultural context” (p. 28).

Bicultural identity integration. At the time of Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) study on biculturalism, literature on acculturation failed to recognize that although an individual may desire to integrate both cultures and want to have ties to both, factors such as psychosocial pressures (i.e. personal experience with discrimination, racial/cultural make-up of one’s living community) as well as individual variables (i.e. linguistic proficiency, personal dispositions) may alter the outcomes of their efforts. After a review of the limited literature available on biculturalism at the time, Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, introduced the concept of Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) as a way of organizing the meanings and experiences associated with being bicultural. Individuals high on the BII tend to see their cultures as compatible. These individuals have successfully integrated the two cultures and view themselves as part of a combined “third” culture. On the other end of the spectrum, bicultural persons

low on the BII see both cultures in opposition of one another and have difficulty incorporating both into their everyday life or a cohesive sense of identity, often feeling as though they must choose one culture over the other.

Culture conflict. In 2004, France signed into law a controversial ban on Islamic head coverings in public schools. With an overwhelming 270-20 vote in the Senate and an equally large vote in the National Assembly, the law forbids religious apparels and signs that “conspicuously show” a student’s religious affiliation. CBS news reported, “Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses would also be banned but the law is aimed at removing head scarves in the classroom” (Cosgrove-Mather, 2004, para. 4). With five million Muslims in France at the time, the largest population of Muslims in Western Europe, Prime Minister Raffarin insisted the law was needed “to contain the spread of Muslim fundamentalism and to ensure the principles of secularism on which France is based remains intact” (para. 13).

At the Bay Street School in Canada, teachers were presented with an opportunity to take their students to Boyne River for an overnight educational field trip (Chan, 2006). Many students were unable to attend due to various reasons. A student named Sahra was not permitted to go. In fact, she did not bring up the field trip with her father knowing that he would refuse and it would only anger her parents. The teacher offered to speak to her father to allow her to go but Sahra refused. She had been on an overnight field trip two years prior and it was made clear that was the one and only exception. In the days prior to the departure for Boyne River, it became apparent that many of the South Asian girls were not permitted to attend.

In Islam, when a girl decides to wear the hijab it is a big decision. Miriam, also a student at Bay Street School, began wearing the hijab (Chan, 2006). She explained that her South Asian friends in her homeroom class had pressured her into wearing it because it was the holy month of Ramadan. Wearing the hijab is a source of pride for young girls and their families. An Islamic teacher at the school shared with the researcher that wearing the hijab was considered liberating, but the researcher as well as other coworkers did not understand how it could be liberating and continued to see it as a sign of a woman's oppression in the Islamic culture.

The three stories shared above are examples of cultural conflicts that bicultural individuals encounter in their daily lives. A study completed in Canada among second generation Asian Canadians by Stroink and Lalonde (2009) found that for some individuals, the conflict is much stronger than it is for others. The authors proposed that second generation Canadians are enculturated, as is the case with other immigrants, within two frameworks concurrently. Children often receive Western values and ideals from their peers, teachers, and media, and values and ideals tied to their heritage from their parents and other members of the heritage community. These two sets of cultural ideals and values have the potential to be contradictory and to the individual the heritage culture being taught at home is in opposition to the larger Canadian culture. Second generation members and other bicultural individuals may experience varying degrees of personal conflict as they try to identify themselves with the two groups and make peace with their differing norms and values.

Among Chinese immigrant students in the U.S., Sung (1985) found that children experiencing American culture at school and Chinese culture at home were conflicted in

several domains. They felt they had to choose between what was taught at home and what was accepted by American culture and society as a whole. As reported by Sung, the most commonly cited domains Chinese American children experienced conflicts with were aggression, sexual openness, and centrality of sports and education.

Cultural conflicts, feelings of alienation, wanting to fit in are apparent amongst many immigrants living in the U.S. As Ramirez (1991) noted, experiences of immigrants to the United States, feelings of differentness are in line with their offspring. Suarez, Flowers, Garwood, and Szarpocznik (1997) found an inverse relationship between biculturalism and the extent of loneliness and alienation reported. One source of loneliness and alienation is the change in value orientation due to acculturation. As mentioned previously, heritage values taught within the home counter the main culture of the host country.

As a child, you try hard to fit in. When you are young and belong to an immigrant family or minority group, fitting in becomes even more difficult. As teachers and adults, our struggles are two-fold. We still struggle to find our bicultural balance and, at times, still feel like an outsider. At the same time, we recognize these same feelings in some of our minority students. They try hard to blend in and not draw attention to their cultural differences. Growing older and gaining experience, we recognize the need to ensure that younger generations are not afraid of sharing their heritage. We hope to instill a pride in culture and their differences in our children. In the classroom, it is just as important to recognize varying cultures and ways of life. Students need to understand that people around the world live and think differently but it is the diversity in life that is to be appreciated. Recognizing the cultural groups and identifiers

that participants were associated with in this study helped to illuminate the tie between their culture and classroom in their daily teaching.

Critical Pedagogy

What is critical pedagogy? To begin to understand the concept of critical pedagogy, one can turn to several films that portrayed real-life teachers working urban schools with high needs, minority students. In each case, the teachers demonstrated critical pedagogy.

Freedom Writers (DeVito & LaGravenese, 2007) was a recreated documentary about Ms. Erin Gruwell's obstacles as she began teaching at Woodrow Wilson High School, located in Long Beach California. Her story began with the 1992 riots in Los Angeles and the division and tension of races she encountered in her classroom. Drugs, gangs, violence, and murders were what Ms. Gruwell's students encountered daily while living in L.A. Administration, staff and even her father did not understand her feelings of needing to work at this school or her desire to teach the students English and move them along to graduation. Her students were perceived by many as hopeless and future drop outs. Through unconventional methods, Erin built relationships, invested time and money in materials and had students understanding what it meant to be successful. The movie ended with her proudly reflecting on getting her students, who were once considered hopeless, to graduate, write, and even publish a book with writings of their own.

In *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer, Simpson & Smith, 1995) an ex-marine, Lou Anne Johnson, took a teaching position at an inner-city high school in the poor area of Belmont, California in 1989. Warned by the principal that her class would be the

“rejects from Hell,” Johnson walked into a classroom of students with severe social problems and no interest in education. As a White teacher, she needed to gain the trust of her mostly African American and Latino students. Through unconventional methods, Johnson showed her students that they were not tied to their social status or labels. She reached out to those students that needed her and instilled an interest in learning as they experienced success.

Stand and Deliver (Musca & Menendez, 1988) followed the true story of Jaime Escalante, an engineer who gave up his job to teach high school math at Garfield High School in Los Angeles. Garfield High School, on the verge of becoming decertified and shut down, was a predominantly Hispanic school with low expectations. Escalante challenged administrators and thoughts of hopelessness, and overcame threats and taunts in his efforts to focus on students’ education. Through innovative teaching methods, props, and humor, he was able to win over his once defiant and apathetic students and led them to success as they prepared for and passed the Advanced Placement calculus exam.

As teachers, the above scenarios are the success we hope/aim to achieve in the classroom. We want our students to learn and succeed, know their self-worth and want them to do great things with their lives. The movie summaries shared here show teachers who challenged authority and taught students to think critically as they questioned the status quo and the roles placed upon them by society; a portrait of critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy defined. Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and a social movement that is the result of combining education with critical theory (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Critical pedagogy is about connecting theory to practice,

justice, equality, and social change (Kincheloe, 2008). Learning about this philosophy of change and its origins takes us to the Frankfurt School.

In Frankfurt Germany, a group of scholars tied to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, developed the traditional foundations of critical theory (Darter, Baltodano & Torres, 2009). After the devastating effects of World War I on Germany, the school was founded with the aims of developing Marxist studies in Germany. Some of the prominent critical theorists at the start of the school were Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Eric Fromm (Corradetti, n.d.). The Frankfurt theorists began to focus their attention on the unjust world, nature of capitalism, and the domination that accompanied it. The political climate of Germany at the time was filled with chaos and struggles between democratic and communist parties. Not long after the theorists came together, Nazis threatened their establishment, as most of them were Jews with Marxist orientation. Upon fleeing Germany, the Frankfurt theorists made their way to Geneva before settling in the U.S.

Critical pedagogy and the teacher. Much like the teachers depicted in the Hollywood movies summarized earlier, teachers operating under critical pedagogy teach students to break free of classification and the status quo. The teacher sparks a flame within the students to be more than simply an idle bystander to their own world but to seize opportunities and become activists against oppression and society's norms. Robert Peterson (2009) provided an example to depict the difference between the traditional, progressive, and Freirian teacher. He demonstrated the different approaches to teaching through the teachers' responses to a child bringing a stray dog into the classroom. To the traditional teacher, the dog is an inconvenience and must be removed immediately. The

progressive teacher sees it as a teaching opportunity and may have students measure and weigh the animal, write about the dog or draw a picture of it before calling someone to find the dog's home. The Freirian teacher, Peterson said, does what the progressive teacher does but takes it further by asking questions regarding the dog to provoke thought and reflection, thereby taking the lesson beyond being "relevant" and "student centered."

Giroux (2009) viewed teachers as "transformative intellectuals and school as part of an ongoing struggle for democracy" (p. 440). Kincheloe (2008) also suggested that teachers be transformative, stating, "...teachers are viewed as learners—not as functionaries who follow top-down orders without question" (p. 18). By empowering teachers to become researchers and scholars, understanding the learning process in the classroom, the oppressive culture that was created and long been implemented is challenged.

Freire (2008) provided the attributes he believed make a progressive teacher (as cited in Darder, 2009, p. 567). These attributes are not innate but acquired through the teaching profession and come to the teacher gradually. They include:

- Humility: teachers need to recognize the truth by knowing that not one person knows everything but not everyone is ignorant. Humility is sometimes considered as lack of respect or cowardice, however Freire views humility as confidence, self-respect, and respect for others.
- Lovingness: Not only is he speaking of lovingness toward the student but to the teaching process as well. Without it, Freire says, teachers' work loses meaning. Freire uses poet Tiago de Melo's term "armed love" while speaking

of lovingness. It is the fighting love of those that are “convinced of the right and the duty to fight” (Freire, 2008, p. 209).

- **Courage:** it is the conquering of fears. Fear does not need to be hidden and it does not need to immobilize us.
- **Tolerance:** According to Freire, it is the virtue that “teaches us to live with the different.” (Freire, 2008, p. 210). It also teaches us to learn from and respect those that are different.
- **Decision makers:** making decisions is at the core of a democratic society. Teachers need to model decision making after being presented with a question or problem. To Freire, indecision reveals a lack of confidence (Freire, 2008, p. 211).

The Freirian critical teacher, as portrayed through the words of Shor (1993), is a thought-provoking educator who poses problems and encourages students to come up with their own questions. This allows students to ask questions instead of trying to find the “right” answer and “experience education as something they do, not as something done to them” (p. 25). Above all, as asserted by Freire, the educator must have faith in human beings, needs to love, and understand that the fundamental purpose of education is the liberation of people and not their domestication. These teachers will pose problems, encourage questioning, curiosity, and activism to gain knowledge about the world around them (Shor, 1993).

Critical pedagogy and the Student. The critical teacher has been described above, but how are students viewed in the realm of critical pedagogy? In conjunction with the teacher’s problem-posing method of educating, students should be invoked with

curiosity and seek knowledge through questioning. As mentioned by Kincheloe (2008) and Shor (1993), Freire felt “education was suffering from a narration sickness” (Freire, 2009 p. 71). The narrator (teacher) fills the listening objects (students) with narration and hollowed words that are detached from reality. Freire referred to this as the “banking concept” (p.72) of education, his most cited metaphor on education, which stands in contradiction to what Freire believed.

In the “banking concept,” education is paralleled to that of the banking system in which students are receptacles ready for deposits of information (Freire, 2009). Instead of inquiry, knowledge is considered a gift bestowed onto those that are considered to know nothing by those whom are considered knowledgeable. Although at times unknowingly, banking education perpetuates the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed, according to Freire. Students absorb information without posing questions and in turn become less able to develop critical consciousness. Suppression of creativity and inquiry within the learner is to the benefit of the oppressor as they can become more easily dominated.

Critical pedagogy and the curriculum. There has been long debate over curriculum development; what should be taught and how, as well as, who makes those decisions. Kincheloe (2008) stated that every dimension of schooling is politically contested spaces shaped by interest groups and invisible forces. Schools and the public can even be under the assumption that they operate schooling in the name of democracy and justice only to be totalitarian and oppressive.

More and more classroom decisions regarding content and curriculum are becoming bureaucratic and placed in the hands of politicians and “experts.” McNeil

(2009) voiced concern over decisions regarding teaching and learning being shifted away from communities and educational professionals and “into the hands of technical experts following a political agenda to reduce democratic governance of schooling” (p. 389). In the opinion of Giroux (2009), reforms at the state level are preventing teachers from shaping the conditions under which they work. Curricula is left to administrative experts or adopted from publishers with few contributions from the actual teachers who will be expected to implement the new programs.

In regards to the content of the curriculum, Shor, (1987) argued scientific “truths” are being presented as part of the lesson without historical context and little attention to its relevancy to the student. Students are expected to memorize mundane facts without regard to the interests or value of their perspective. Freire (1985) suggested illuminating reality for students instead of obscuring it with the standard curriculum. In Peterson’s (2009) bilingual class, he discussed the omission of information from textbooks and encyclopedia using the accomplishments of Cherokee Indians’ as an example. Most often, history books mention Sequoyah’s creation of the alphabet and the Trail of Tears but there is no mention of the bilingual newspaper or bilingual school system they had in place. Peterson further pointed out that, not only are textbooks detrimental due to the one sided “truth” that they present, but also because of the parts of history they omit.

Opponents of multicultural education argue against multiculturalists’ belief that knowledge is socially constructed and that there is “no overarching and agreed-upon sense of truth or right moral action” (Nelson, 2012, p.302). There are in fact multiple perspectives and, in turn, multiple truths. To ignore different perspectives for one that

promotes the ideals of the American culture would be to deny students the complete in-depth story.

Supporters of multicultural education, much like Freire and other critical pedagogues, see it as an avenue to teach the inequalities and imbalance of power amongst different cultures. They also see current lessons and text that are used in the classrooms today as “Eurocentric.” Multiculturalists are not asking to rid classrooms of the curriculum and replace it with stories and histories of “women, gays, African Americans, and other exploited disadvantaged people” (Nelson, 2012, p.294), but are merely trying to incorporate them into the current curriculum to provide a more complete view of the world to the student.

How to do minority teachers incorporate Critical Pedagogy within their classroom?

Multicultural Education

A month after the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York City, Lynne Cheney spoke before the Institute of Humanities and Culture in Dallas (Hartocollis, 2001). Mrs. Cheney spoke in response to Dr. Rizzo’s, Deputy Chancellor of Instruction in New York City schools, *Washington Post* statement regarding the need for multiculturalism. Dr. Rizzo stated, “Those people who said we do not need multiculturalism, that it's too touchy-feely, a pox on them. I think they've learned their lesson. We have to do more to teach habits of tolerance, knowledge and awareness of other cultures” (para. 2). In response, Cheney declared that by emphasizing multiculturalism now would imply that “it was our failure to understand Islam that led to so many deaths and so much destruction” (para. 3). She continued, saying that although

it was important to teach about world cultures, there should be more emphasis placed on American history.

Psychologists and sociologists such as John Dewey and W.E.B. DuBois developed the concept of cultural pluralism from which the ideology of multiculturalism later emerged (Oliver & Schlutsmeyer, 2006). The *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies* (Prasad, 2007) described multiculturalism as a concept that cannot easily be defined due to the term's ability to simultaneously reference a movement, a social policy, a theoretical position, and a descriptive condition (927). Political theorist and Labour member of the House of Lords Parekh (2010) asserted that multiculturalism is neither "a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor a philosophical school with a distinct theory of man's place in the world but as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life" (p. 238). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Song, 2014) viewed multiculturalism as a body of thought in political philosophy on the proper way to handle cultural and religious diversity. With no clear definition of the concept, Rosado (1996) provided an operational definition for multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences and encourages and enables their *continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society* (italics in original). (p.3)

Multiculturalism became policy in many western countries starting in the early 1970's as countries became more diverse with a mosaic of cultures. Multiculturalism as an official national policy began in Canada in 1971 and the Canadian government is

considered the instigator of multicultural ideology due to Canada's national emphasis on the social importance of immigration (Wayland, 1997). Australia followed in 1973 by adopting policy regarding multiculturalism, which is still in place today. Quickly after that, other nations in the European Union adopted multiculturalism as official policy as well. Although multiculturalism does not appear in federal policy in the U.S., it has gained attention due to the increased diversity of the country's population as immigration surged at the turn of the 19th century.

More than simply content integration, in an interview with the National Education Association (Tucker & Banks, 2008), Banks shared his five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, empowering school structure and social structure. Content integration is the infusion of various cultures, ethnicities, and groups into the curriculum. Knowledge construction helps kids understand and look at the assumptions of knowledge. In this dimension, teachers have students investigate and "determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline they're teaching" (Tucker & Banks, 2008). This will allow students to become more critical readers and thinkers. Banks' third dimension, equity pedagogy, refers to teachers changing their teaching methods and strategies to enable students from diverse ethnic and racial groups to achieve success. As maintained by Banks, adolescent prejudice is very real, which leads to his fourth dimension-prejudice reduction. Students come to school with their own prejudices about different racial groups. Educators should be more sensitive to this and use methods to help them develop more positive racial attitudes. The final dimension moves outside of the classroom to include the school's culture as a

whole—empowering school structures and social structures. This dimension aims to get rid of what Silberman called “mindlessness” (1970), which is the unconscious practice of inequality. Who participates in sports, the interaction of the staff, labeling, and the diversity among teachers can lead to a lack of empowerment within the school culture (Tucker, 2008).

Culturally relevant pedagogy. How did the teachers represented in *Stand and Deliver* (Musca & Menendez, 1988), *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer, Simpson & Smith, 1995), and *Freedom Writers* (DeVito & LaGravenese, 2007) achieve student success? Whether consciously or not, those teachers used culturally relevant pedagogy, a theory connected to the larger body of multicultural education. Although similar concepts such as “culturally responsive” (Erickson and Mohatt, 1982) were already being used, Ladson-Billings conceived and made popular the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995b) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy of opposition (1992) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (1995b, p. 160).

The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy proposes to do three things, “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who can demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 474). Ladson-Billings found academic success to be more than a teacher increasing a student’s self-esteem but tending to students’ academic needs as they develop their academic skills necessary to actively participate in a democratic society. Cultural competence demands students to maintain cultural integrity in addition to academic success. This requires teachers to incorporate students’

cultures into the classroom and lessons as a channel for learning. It is not enough for students to stay culturally grounded as they choose academic success. As Ladson-Billings (1995b) claimed, “students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162).

Professor and internationally known scholar in multicultural education, Geneva Gay (2000), identified six descriptive characteristics of culturally relevant teaching. First, culturally responsive teaching is validating and affirming. It makes learning encounters more relevant for students as it builds bridges between the home and classroom by acknowledging and legitimizing their cultural heritage of different ethnic backgrounds. Next, culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive and aims to teach the whole child. Along with improving academic achievement, this type of teaching is committed to maintaining identities of minority students, sustaining their connections with their ethnic community and developing a sense of community. It is also multidimensional as it “encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessment” (p. 33). Another characteristic of culturally responsive teaching, as it was identified by Gay, is that it is empowering. Empowerment allows students to become more successful learners and better human beings. Teachers set expectations for their students and commit to helping them feel successful. Next, culturally responsive teaching is transformative. It rejects conventional forms of traditional learning and uses minority students’ cultures and experiences as resource for teaching and learning. The last characteristic proposed by Gay (2000) is that culturally

responsive teaching is emancipatory. It liberates students from the constraints of mainstream canons of knowledge as it “lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority from conception of scholarly truth typically taught in schools” (p.38).

In the previously mentioned movie, *Stand and Deliver* (Musca & Menendez, 1988), Jaime Escalante, played by Edward James Olmos, became a teacher at James A. Garfield High School in eastern Los Angeles. The school’s population was mostly Hispanic students who came from working class families, exhibited social problems and were significantly below grade level academically. In teaching students about negative numbers, Escalante used what the students knew and correlated the adding and subtracting of negative numbers to that of digging and filling holes on the beach. He continued to tell his mostly Latino class that the concept of zero was not even known to the Greeks but was independently invented by their (the students’) ancestors, the Mayans. Jaime proceeded to tell them mathematics was in their blood and engaged his students by building their confidence and making the lesson culturally relevant to them. Many teachers want to be Jaime Escalante for their students. They want to engage, motivate while bridging the cultural gap. Culturally relevant teaching is the avenue for them to do so.

Putting it all together. Looking back on my years in school, there was a lack of multicultural education in the classroom. When Christmas rolled around, we all were taught how to draw Santa Claus, colored pictures of elves, and even made presents to give to our parents for Christmas. Although my family and I never found it offensive or insensitive, I did not realize the effects of the lack of teaching or recognizing other cultures in the classroom. As a child, I was questioned about why I did not celebrate

Christmas, why my lunches were different, why I did not eat peperoni pizza. At times, I was teased for being different than the others in the classroom and sometimes the questions of “why” were more taunting than stemming from curiosity.

Now as a teacher, I aim to instill an understanding amongst my students. The classroom should be a culture-safe environment in which there is open dialogue about race and culture as well as an understanding of our differences. As a novice teacher, I thought multicultural education dealt with cultural bias in regards to the curriculum and the teacher’s understanding of the ethnic diversity within their classroom. By teaching a course titled “World Cultures” and being a minority teacher, I was under the false pretense that I had an advantage in having a more multicultural classroom. Upon reading and reflecting on multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching, I found it goes much deeper than previously perceived and may not play such an important role in my teaching as I originally thought or hoped. I wondered about the concepts of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy as they related to the participating teachers in this study? Did the other two participants experience similar schooling with a lack of culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy? How were those two ideas demonstrated in their classroom now as teachers?

Each of us is an amalgamation of identities, some that are more prominent than others especially given certain social contexts. As previously mentioned, one of my main identifiers was that of teacher. The teachers portrayed in the Hollywood movies described here, required students to think critically, challenge society’s norms, while using student’s cultures as a path to get them to want to learn. What about the teacher’s culture? In school, although I was identified as teacher, my other identifiers did not

disappear as I entered the classroom and began teaching. “Experience, culture, and personality are just part of who teachers are, and they go wherever teachers go—including their classrooms” (White, Zion, Kozleski, & Fulton, 2005). With me, I brought my culture and experiences, the concepts and passion instilled in me through learning about critical pedagogy and the desire to create a multicultural classroom through the use of culturally relevant teaching.

As maintained by Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital “can be acquired, to a varying extent...in the absence of any inculcation and therefore quite unconsciously” (p.84). Ballantine and Spade (2011) declared, “Teachers also bring varying degrees of cultural capital to schools and classrooms” and in many cases, students will bring with them cultural capital that differs that of the teacher.

In the following chapter, the narratives of two minority teachers are shared alongside my own teacher story. Identity charts and reflections of all three participants are also examined, further exploring the influence a minority teachers’ cultures on curriculum, the environment, and student-teacher relationships in the classroom.

Chapter III

Methodology

What is in a Number?

I have always found airports a fascinating place; a place full of life, excitement, frustration, and story. My father worked for the airlines ever since I was five. Growing up, one of the perks of him working for the airlines was being able to fly at much cheaper rates. The downfall of this was that it meant being placed on a stand-by list waiting to see if there were seats available. Often, hours would go by as we waited flight after flight until there were empty seats available just for us. During these times of waiting, I would watch people go by and wonder who they were, where they were going, and what they were doing. I was curious to know the story behind the travelers that were hustling and bustling to and fro. Once on the plane, it was no different. Within a couple of hours, those sitting next to me quickly went from simply being seat number 32B to a complex person with a name and a story to share.

When I became a teacher, my interest in people and stories became even more apparent. My belief has always been that a child was more than a number. Every time state testing came around, I found it disappointing and saddening as students bubbled in answers that would categorize them into a statistic. There was so much more to a child than their score. There was a story to be told and, more importantly, a story to be shared and learned from. It was obvious to me that I would become a qualitative researcher; one that goes beyond the numbers to inquire into the person within. Hatch (2002) best justified the use of qualitative research in education, saying, “After all, educators would

not be in the business unless they were interested in people and making positive social contacts with them” (p.1).

What is Qualitative Research?

The U.S. educational system is falling behind that of other countries. Statistical evidence and trend data can tell us dropout rates are increasing, student scores are dropping, and there is difficulty in recruiting teachers but that information can tell us only a small portion of the story. Questions about why dropout rates are increasing, how some schools achieve success, or what reasons teachers give for leaving the profession after a short period provide for a more complete picture as they delve deeper, probing beyond the statistics. Unlike quantitative research which relies on experiments, numbers and statistics to answer questions, qualitative research is aimed at studying “humans in their natural settings to understand various aspects of their behavior” (Lichtman, 2013, p.5).

Qualitative research is as difficult to define as it is diverse. Definitions range from straightforward explanations to descriptive formulations to more product-oriented statements (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). As explicated by Polkinghorne (2005), “qualitative research is inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people’s lives” (p. 137). Used in fields such as psychology, anthropology, education, nursing and marketing, its methods are often used to answer “the *whys* and *hows* of human behavior, opinion, and experience” (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2012, p.1). *Qualitative* suggests an emphasis on quality of individuals and the processes and meanings that cannot be experimentally measured quantitatively (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

“It is about humans” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 17). With the purpose of qualitative research being to describe, understand, and interpret human phenomena, interaction, or discourse, qualitative researchers ask “why” questions and are interested in meaning and interpretations (Lichtman, 2013). Although more hesitant to provide one definition, Hatch (2002) synthesized a list of ten characteristics of qualitative research which includes the natural setting in which objects of study are real people in real settings, as well as wholeness and complexity, which provides enough detail so that the reader can be taken inside the world of the participant.

Creswell (2007) identified five qualitative approaches to inquiry: phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative. With its background discipline in humanities, the focus of narrative is to explore the life of an individual in which stories of experiences are retold by the researcher. When studying a single individual, narrative, ethnography, and case study research appear to be similar, however, data collection and analysis may differ considerably amongst these approaches. This qualitative study was classified as narrative research, in which the unique perspective and experiences exhibited by each teacher participant were considered.

Narrative Inquiry

First used in educational research by Clandinin and Connelly (1990), narrative inquiry is much more than a simple method in which researchers are “just telling stories.” “Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study which is appropriate to many social science fields” (1990, p.2). Clandinin and Connelly made it clear that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience (Clandinin, 2013). It is an approach to the study of human lives that honors and gives

credence to lived experience as an important source of knowledge. Clandinin and Connelly explained, “People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience.” (1994, p. 2).

Surrounding the idea of experience, the work of Clandinin and Connelly was inspired by Dewey’s views on experience and learning. “For Dewey, education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Studying experience is to study life.

Dewey’s criteria of experience—interaction and continuity—provided the groundwork for Clandinin and Connelly’s concept of the three-dimension inquiry space of temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquirers need to understand the temporality of events under study. People, places, and events are in constant transition, each with a past, present, and future. Moving *backward and forward*, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, addresses temporal issues by looking to both past and present experiences. The second dimension of sociality (interaction) inquires by focusing on the *inward* and *outward* social aspect of narratives. By *inward*, Clandinin and Connelly mean the internal conditions “such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (p. 50). While *outward* refers to the existential conditions or the environment. The third dimension of “place” explores the “specific places or sequences of places” the events under study occurred (p. 50). As a researcher works through the inquiry, it is important to remember these dimensions, or commonplaces, and how they shape our responses (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). Clandinin and Huber (2002)

explained that attending to experience through the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place is what separates narrative inquiry apart from other methodologies.

Importance of stories. Lockett (2007) adapted a story from 763 AD to share the importance of storytelling throughout history and its continued importance to our future. In his retelling of the story titled “The Gift of Stories—The Caliph of Bagdad,” the Caliph had a feast to celebrate the arrival of a new son and heir. Leaders and men of high rank from across the world would join, as was custom, and brought costly gifts for the Caliph and his new son. All but one wise sage brought fine gifts in honor of the new son. When it was Abi’s, the sage who came empty handed, turn to reveal his gift, the room went silent. Abi gave the Caliph the gift of stories to the future heir. The room laughed at such a non-tangible gift presented to the Caliph but Abi kept his word. From the time the young prince could understand words, he shared stories that were both true and fanciful; stories of science and nature, religions and the world. The young prince grew up to expand the borders across foreign lands and ruled with a wisdom not possessed by any other man.

Prior to any formal schooling, learning took place through experience and storytelling. Cave paintings found in Spain and France further attest to the storied nature of prehistoric human kind (Hatch, 2002). As stated by Lockett and the story above, knowledge and wisdom were passed on through the sharing of stories. Hundreds of years later, the “storied lives” we live (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2) are still providing us with wisdom and knowledge of how the world works, giving insight into our interactions with one another and the world around us. It is no wonder that in recent

years, narrative inquiry has gained more popularity as a methodology and in the realm of academic research.

Sharing stories and narrative inquiry have now taken on a new importance in the field of education and professional development. Life is made of experiences that are given meaning contextually and through reflection. An experience on its own is just a series of events. By retelling the experience, in turn, restorying, the narrator can reflect on the experience and learn from it. Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) described stories as a way of learning. Teachers naturally turn to storytelling to share their classroom experiences. This frequent and informal sharing of stories, they proposed, has led to the dismissal and demeaning of stories and narratives as knowledge of teaching.

Narrative inquiry is a way of knowing and is arguably the most popular approach to qualitative research in the field of education. Topics of inquiry are not preordained and there is no pre-set formula. It is an exploratory method that is expressed in a form we call stories. Stories have “assisted humans in making life experiences more meaningful, preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). Narrative inquiry in education has focused on teacher education and the ways teachers’ narratives have shaped and informed their practice (Bell, 2002). As I delved into the reflection of my own teaching practices and the influence my culture has on my teaching, I sought to gain more insight into this phenomenon by speaking with two other minority teachers. Were my experiences as a minority teacher shared by other minority teachers? The best way to conduct this research was through narrative inquiry and by telling the stories of these two teachers alongside my own.

Participants

Three teachers participated in this study: a Hispanic elementary school teacher, an African American middle school teacher, and me, an American Muslim middle school teacher. The inquiry began with a self-study to reflect on my teaching and cultural influences in the classroom. It was soon apparent that collecting narratives from other teachers of cultures differing from my own, would be beneficial to exploring the research questions. Two participants were chosen based on convenience. Both participants were teachers that had been teaching for over 5 years, were minorities, and were willing to share stories about themselves and to reflect on their teaching. They were also two teachers with whom I had a rapport, which facilitated establishing a comfortable interview environment.

Elena. Elena (pseudonym) was a 32-year-old Hispanic teacher who taught 2nd grade in a suburban elementary school. Originally from a Texas border town, Elena had the opportunity to attend a college in the southeast and returned to Houston upon her college graduation. For eight years, Elena taught at a Title I school in the same district. This was her first year “across the river” at a new elementary school located in an economically advantaged area.

As of the 2012-2013 school year, her elementary school reported 807 children enrolled. Of those students, 19.3% were African American, 23.3% Hispanic, and 49.4% White, along with a small American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander population. Only 10.3% of students were categorized as economically disadvantaged which were well below the district’s 33.9%. The demographics of the staff displayed a similar distribution of ethnicities among the 59 teachers employed at the school. In the 2012-

2013 school year, there were no African American teachers, 4.2% were Hispanic, and 93.7% were classified as White.

Dominique. Dominique (pseudonym) was a 30-year-old African American teacher who taught U.S. history in a Houston middle school with grades seven and eight. O'Hare Middle School (pseudonym) was a suburban school with approximate 1,200 students. As reported in the *Texas Tribune*, students performed below the state average in passing TAKS scores in 2010 and teachers had less experience than the state average. In 2010, 73.5% of students were economically disadvantaged, with 59.8% of the student population academically at risk. In comparison to the state's 16.9% limited English proficient students, 22.2% of O'Hare's students were classified as LEP.

In regards to demographics, 42.2% of the 1,200 students at O'Hare were Hispanic, with the second largest majority being African American (37.9%). The Asian/Pacific Islander student population at O'Hare Middle School was 14.3%, with the White population at 5.4%. Data on teacher demographics did not reflect the same ethnic breakdown, as the higher percentage of teachers were African American (54.2%), 29.6% were White, with a smaller percentage of Hispanic teachers (9.9%).

Atifa. At the time of this inquiry, I taught at the school in which I completed my student teaching. The school was located in Northeast Houston in the district in which I lived and where the middle school my brother attended was located. The district had a total student population of 35,825 with a demographic breakdown of 46% White, 30% Hispanic, and 17% African American. Teacher demographics reflected that of the students, with a total of 3,079 teachers comprised of 77% White, 11% Hispanic, and 8% African American. My campus, described by veteran teachers in the district as located

on “the other side of the river,” had more of a homogenous make-up than other schools. The total number of students on our campus during the 2012-2013 year was 924, with 76% being White, 15.7% Hispanic, and 2.5% African American. Out of the 65 teachers on our campus, 54 were White making up 94.6% of the teacher population, one was African American, one Hispanic, and one was Asian (TEA website). The one Asian making up 2% of the population was me.

Data Collection

“So much research is done on schooling in the U.S.; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers . . . whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling” (Seidman, 2006). Narrative inquiry methods employ extensive reflection about experience on the part of both participants and researchers (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This methodology is well-suited to provide insights into how a teacher’s cultural experiences influence teaching practices. This research was separated into the stories of three minority teachers. Through the narrative inquiry process triangulated data was drawn from teacher interviews, teacher reflections, researcher reflective journal writing, and textual artifacts such as lesson plans.

Journaling. For Pennebaker and Seagal (1999), constructing and sharing stories is a natural process that allows humans to understand themselves and their experiences. In this study, researcher journals were utilized to capture reflections on past and current teaching experiences. Ever since I was a little girl, I loved the idea of keeping a diary and writing down my daily events, emotions, questions, and woes. Although I had numerous diaries while growing up, it was hard for me to stick to it and to write daily. Looking back on those diaries, I found large gaps of time from one entry to the next. For

this reason, many experiences were reconstructed through “recalling” the past and relying on memory. As Chang (2008) claimed, “memory is not always a friend to autoethnography; it is sometimes a foe” (p. 72). At times, memory can be unpredictable and unreliable. Sometimes we remember bits and pieces of an experience, gloss over the details and blur memories together. Although reconstructing details of the past is challenging and the reliability of the product questioned, memory can trigger great emotion and tap into a wealth of information on self. As an autobiographer, there is a great advantage to having unlimited access to the knowledge of emotion, feelings, concerns, and thoughts surrounding an experience.

Using what Chang (2008) called an “autobiographical timeline,” I narrowed down my past (p. 73). Instead of free writing about my past and present in a journal format, I narrowed it down into more manageable pieces by creating a timeline. My timeline listed important events or experiences from my life in a chronological order. Although my timeline spanned a good majority of my life until now, I selected those experiences and memories that pertained specifically to those of being an American Muslim prior to and after teaching. Included were those experiences that have shaped my ideology and teaching practices in the classroom.

In addition to journaling my past, I maintained a researcher reflective journal of my current teaching which included various standards that deal with culture, religion, and ethnicity. Recently found were the oldest known journals dating back 4,500 years in a long lost Egyptian port city on the Red Sea. The journal, written on papyrus, is known as the diary of Merrer, an old Egyptian official. His diary spanned three months and accounted his involvement in the building of the Great Pyramid as he documented his

many journeys to the limestone quarry (Lorenzi, 2013). Synonymous with diary, a journal is a record of personal experiences, reflections, or ideas (Merriam-Webster). With the ability to review and reread earlier entries and reflections, one advantage of journal writing is clarification, making further insights possible (Hiemstra, 2001). Journal writing also “allows one to reflect, to dig deeper if you will, into the heart of the words, beliefs and behaviors” (Janesick, 1999, p.10).

The researcher reflective journal was maintained during this study to capture my thoughts on teaching and interactions with the students. For example, as part of the required curriculum for the second semester of the World Cultures course, I taught lessons about the three religions that stem from the Middle East. This topic sparked interesting dialogue between me and the students as they navigated their understanding of religion, new ideas and the beliefs of other people. Every day I documented the discourse that took place, whether it seemed significant to me or not, in hopes of providing a better understanding of my teaching, and relationship with the students and the curriculum. I documented the daily lessons and events that took place and added to that my feelings and perceptions on daily occurrences.

Interviews. Stemming from the Deweyan notion that life is education, narrative inquiry examines “lived experience—that is, in lives and how they were lived” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry. “It is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues” (Seidman, 2006, p.14). Bleakley (2005) described narrative inquiry as “stories as data and data as stories” (p.535). With the basis of narrative inquiry in the telling and

retelling of stories, interviews were conducted with the two participants to hear and use their stories as the main source of my data. As Seidman (2006) stated, the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to obtain answers or evaluate but to gain an understanding of the “lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9).

Although different variations of interviewing exist, for this study, in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing was used (Seidman, 2006). This method combines life-history interviewing taken from Bertaux (1981) and “focused in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology” (Seidman, 2006, p. 15) drawn from Alfred Schutz (1967). Following the three-interview model adapted from Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982), enabled the establishment of the context of the participants’ experience. Teacher backgrounds were obtained as well as their journeys to becoming teachers, their sense of ethnic culture and self-described identities (Seidman, 2006). Participants reconstructed their current experiences in the classroom making possible connections to previous stories and experiences. This process allowed participants to reflect on the meaning of their shared experiences.

The aim of this research was to study the influence of minority teacher’s culture on their classroom, including relationships with students and the curriculum. A series of three 90-minute participant interviews were conducted. The purpose in designing 90-minute interviews was to provide enough time so that participants did not feel rushed in telling their stories. It also allowed me time as the researcher to ask questions that stemmed from participants’ responses. Questions for interviews were open-ended with the intention of participants being able to freely share their experiences without having

to stick to a rigid format. Finally, interviews were set two weeks apart which allowed time to review the previous interview transcripts, and make sure the set of interview questions were pertinent to the next interview. It also provided time to gather information and to formulate questions for the final follow-up interview.

In his overview of qualitative interviews, Hopf (2004) identified two types: biographical and focused. The first interview of the three-part series in this study focused on participants' life histories and acted as a biographical interview. In the interview, participant experiences were placed in context by asking them to tell as much as they could about themselves in light of their ethnicity up to this present time. They shared what brought them to teaching, and described their teaching philosophy as well as their ethnicity. An unstructured or semi-structured biographical interview "emphasizes the placement of the individual within a nexus of social connections, historical events, and life experiences (the life history)" rather than providing isolated snapshots of the individual's present (Miller & Brewer, 2003). By asking participants to recall their earlier experiences with ethnicity, as well as having them share where they grew up, stories about family, and events in their life, they provided background and a context to their present experiences which led to the second interview.

Tied to biographical interviews is the semi-standardized narrative interview which was the basis of the second interview as a "free developed impromptu narrative, stimulated by an opening question" (Hopf, 2004, p.206). With this interview method, the invitation to narrate must be framed such that the researcher does not spoon feed the interviewee but helps with memory recall and allows participants to narrate freely. There should be no interruption by the researcher as the narrative is being generated by the

interviewee. Interview questions were framed to ask participants to “tell me more,” ask “how,” and “describe,” which served as prompts to initiate storytelling.

The second interview focused on the details of the “participants’ present lived experience” with culture and ethnicity in the classroom (Seidman, 2006, p.18). Participants were asked to reconstruct their experiences not using opinions but details on which their opinions may be formed. Teachers were also asked to talk about their experiences with culture in the classroom. What was a story from their teaching when they felt racial/ethnic tension? How had their ethnicity influenced their teaching and classroom? The aim was for them to share their experiences regarding culture and the role it played in their relationship with students. Questions were geared toward the influence their culture had on curriculum and struggles they may have encountered. Participants were asked to share their experiences without reflection, which was the premise of the third interview.

In the third interview, participants were asked to “reflect on the meaning of their experience” (Seidman, 2006, p.18). This interview also served as a follow-up to the previous two interviews, creating an opportunity for the researcher to clarify previously noted information, ask follow-up questions, and ask more in-depth questions (Hopf, 2004). Between the first interview and the follow-up, participants completed weekly reflections (reflections are explained below). This allowed for follow up questions regarding the previous interviews which had been transcribed, but also provided a forum to discuss the reflections that participants completed along the way. It was also an opportunity for the participant to reflect on the stories shared and the meaning they gave

to their stories, as well as to add other information not shared during the first two interviews.

Teacher Reflections. Lastly, participants completed weekly reflections on their practice and teacher-student interactions. Reflection is “an active process of exploration and discovery which often leads to very unexpected outcomes” (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 2013). With its roots dating back to ancient Greek philosophers, Socrates may have been the first to use reflection as a way of learning (Daudelin, 1996). Reflection is “a natural and familiar process” that takes place in our professional and personal lives; an act that can cause breakthroughs even while jogging, cleaning, or mowing the lawn (p. 298). Recognized as the key originator of reflection in the twentieth century (Hatton & Smith, 1995), Dewey (1933) portrayed the importance of reflection when he stated, we learn from reflecting on experience not merely experience alone. *In Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind*, the authors say, “Reflecting on experiences encourages insight and complex learning” (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

For the duration of the study, teachers were asked to reflect on culture and education as it pertains to them and their classroom. Reflections were an unstructured free flowing writing of their thoughts with a simple prompt to guide them. For the first prompt, teachers reflected on the concept of culture and what it meant. In the second prompt teachers wrote about which experiences related to culture that week impacted their teaching. Teachers constantly make decisions throughout the day and encounter various scenarios without much time to discuss the decisions that were made. Reflections were an unstructured free flowing writing of their thoughts and were a useful method to evaluate the day’s events and decisions. It allowed them time to

document events, scenarios, or concerns more quickly than waiting for the follow-up interview. It also provided an opportunity for teachers to write down anything they thought was pertinent but did not include during the original interview. As the weeks progressed, themes were identified that emerged from previous reflections or interviews.

Validity

In qualitative research, varying methods are used to determine validity. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined validity as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (p. 125).

Triangulation, member checking, and research reflexivity determined the validity of this research.

Triangulation in social research, references observing the research issue from at least two different points (Olsen, 2004). Initially understanding triangulation as a validation strategy, Denzin (1978) identified four different forms: triangulation of data, investigator triangulation, triangulation of theories, methodological triangulation.

Triangulation of data to validate this research was achieved by compiling participant interviews with my personal researcher narrative, in conjunction with participant reflections and researcher journal entries, and artifacts to corroborate the themes that emerged in the research.

After reviewing interviews and collected data, analysis was conducted to construct themes. In this process, data was interpreted initially from a researcher’s perspective. To ensure my themes and interpretations were correct, a member check was employed, strengthening the validation of the study. Member checks are “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 314). This

strategy of validation takes the data and interpretations back to the participants of the study to establish credibility of the information. This can be done through focus groups or allowing participants access to the raw data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

With any qualitative study, no matter the effort made to remain neutral, researchers bring with them bias and their preconceived notions. Particularly in a narrative study in which the researcher becomes close to the participants, it is difficult to distance oneself from the research without forming personal opinions and a developed relationship with the participant. The concept of reflexivity and its recognition is crucial as it is an underlying threat. Reflexivity is recognition of the researcher's ability to influence the social phenomenon being studied and bringing awareness to it in their research (Hatch, 2002). Pillow (2010) elucidated that reflexivity "not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced" (p. 178). As a researcher, needed to be aware that it was impossible to completely set aside my presuppositions and prior assumptions and to devote myself to the participant's view. In addition, being aware of the impossibility of bracketing my subjectivity allowed me to understand its influence on data collection and analysis within the research (Finlay, 1998). Finlay (1998) argued that a researcher's subjectivity should be exploited, whereas ignoring it could undermine the validity of the study.

One way of understanding a researcher's subjectivity through reflexivity is by keeping a journal of the dialogue taking place with the researcher in the social context of the study. Rather than suppressing and controlling the researcher values through method, the aim is to acknowledge those values. Ortlipp (2008) suggested keeping a self-

reflective journal as a strategy to facilitate reflexivity. For this reason, prior to beginning prior this research, I journaled my thoughts on methodology, changing analysis, and keep a trail of the study's progress.

Analysis

Although it was difficult to tell which direction the research would take in response to the information that participants would provide, Riessman's (2008) methodological approaches were used to analyze data. She identified four main methods of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual narrative. With much of the data consisting of interviews with participants, a thematic and structural analysis approach was used

- Thematic analysis: by keeping the participant's story intact, the focus is on the content. Looking across the three different stories that will be collected, I will identify common themes that emerge.
- Structural analysis: in addition to analyzing the content of the data, structural analysis will allow me to interpret the underlying meaning of communicative acts by paying attention to the details of speech and how the narrative was composed. This allows researchers to generate insight beyond simply what was said.

Prior to determining themes, interviews were coded using a clean transcript. Coding, as described by Richards and Morse (2007), is the first step to opening up meaning. "It leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" p. 137). Analytical coding, coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning, is a prime way of gathering categories and themes as well as

the data needed to explore them (Richards, 2009, p. 103). Codes were categorized, then analyzed, and overarching themes identified.

Conclusion

The story of three minority teachers and their cultural influences in the classroom are presented in the pages that follow. The aim was to provide insights into the different ways a teacher's culture influences the classroom in the context of curriculum, environment and student relationships. Utilizing narrative inquiry methods, specifically teacher participant interviews and reflections, and researcher reflective journaling, this study shed light on the experiences of minority teachers and the role their cultures play in the classroom.

Chapter IV

Findings

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how minority teachers' culture influences their classroom. The following research questions guided this study: (a) How do minority teachers identify themselves and their culture? (b) How does their cultural identity influence their teaching in regards to classroom curriculum, environment and relationships with students? (c) How are culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy evidenced in their classroom?

In the first interview, participants shared their background as they answered questions regarding their culture, identity, family and what brought them to teaching. Two additional interviews focused on participants' current experiences in the classroom, with coworkers and culturally responsive teaching. In addition to interviews, three reflections were collected in between each interview that were more specific to each participant and the information they shared during interviews. Research findings were based on analysis of participant interviews, identity charts, research reflective journaling and teacher reflections. Data was then analyzed using an inductive style coding and grounded analysis to identify major themes.

The findings presented in this chapter begin with participants' background, discussing the identity chart and sharing the personal story of each minority teacher, followed by a preliminary summary of the findings. The emergent themes are then taken up and sub-themes explored.

Background

Elena's identity. Elena completed her identity chart with major identifiers and branched off those into smaller categories (see Appendix C). As she talked through her chart, she began with the identifier of "student." Along with being a student in the literal sense, she also added that she was "a student of the world," constantly wanting to see things, traveling and experiencing life as a local. She also described herself as a lifelong learner. Being a homebody and recluse was next on her chart. Branching out from that was "no social media" and that she has a small group of friends. Elena identified herself as 3rd/4th-generation Hispanic and branched off as a border Hispanic as well. Her family had been living in the border town of El Paso beginning with her great parents. When asked about being a border Hispanic, she described it as being different "since the language or that clash of cultures [between American or English speaking with Mexican or Spanish speaking] has always been there." Her grandparents shared stories of how they would get in trouble if they spoke Spanish:

My grandparents, that's where it all stems from and almost all four of them. One was born in Mexico and the others were on the border but all of them especially in high school, which was as far as they got, did not feel comfortable nor was it very welcoming or inviting to speak Spanish. It was always seen as that's what could make them lesser than. So, my grandmother, I just remember her saying, "we got in trouble when we spoke Spanish" and said it in a way that really hurt her.

Elena then described herself as a teacher and a nerd. She continued describing herself as a reader and music lover in terms of being a "player" and "consumer." Elena frequently

attended musical shows from concerts to the symphony. She also played flute in the high school band. Finally, she identified herself in terms of family and being a sister, daughter, granddaughter, and cousin, and with those roles “more responsible.”

Elena’s story. Elena was born in Lubbock, Texas to parents who had attended Texas Tech. Her father, upon finishing his tour in the Navy, used the GI Bill to go to college as her mother began her master’s degree. Life in Lubbock was different. Elena recounted her time there playing outside with a group of kids of mixed races. Her parents often worked around the house, enjoyed block parties and two-stepping the night away. That changed when Elena was seven and the family decided to move back to their hometown of El Paso so that the children could get to know their grandparents better.

In El Paso, life brought many changes. They moved in with her grandparents and her parents became busy with work. There were no more block parties or completing hands-on projects like there were in Lubbock. All Elena could do was “play with the dirt because there was not very much grass.” Being back in their hometown, they were eating a lot more Hispanic foods that grandma was cooking as well. As she smiled, Elena recalled noticing a difference in weight as she looked back at pictures taken after they moved to El Paso.

Elena attended the elementary school where her mother taught. It was a Title I school, as were most schools in El Paso, that did not have a GT program and was not a cluster campus. She had another group of friends that were mixed in race and best friends that were Hispanic that she felt “safe” and comfortable being silly around. In fourth grade, things changed again; Elena switched schools. Foster Elementary School was closer to home and Elena “supposedly tested into the GT (Gifted and Talented)

program.” In her new school, she was with a special GT teacher for half of the day. She suddenly was with new kids and struggled; it was hard for her to feel like she understood what was going on or to mix with the kids in each of her classes. Elena was with all “these white kids” with whom she would eventually make friends. In regards to other students she said:

There were these other Hispanic kids but I guess, the hardcore, the real Hispanic kids were in the bilingual program and that was not seen as the group you wanted to be with. “The bilingual kids do not know English” type thing. Most of them did not; that’s part of why they were in bilingual to learn English. So, as a result, when you’re a little kid that means you do not know. You’re not smart because you do not know English, you can’t answer things that we can.

Going into middle school the students were aware that they would be fed in with elementary schools that were not as “awesome” and were poorer than Elena’s school (Foster Elementary). Although it was also a Title 1 school, they never thought Foster to be poor. Gang activity was prevalent as she began 6th grade but slowly died down as they got older and most of the children (white students) that were in the GT program at Foster continued through the GT program in middle school with few if any students from the other elementary school. This division between the Hispanic and white students continued through high school. Much like in elementary and middle school, most the White students were in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, in which Elena was placed.

The mentality in El Paso as described by Elena was that of “you gotta get out.” If you could do something more and get out of El Paso, then you had to do what you could. Graduating high school and attending a university outside of El Paso was “your first

ticket out.” The students she was placed with in the GT cluster so long ago, would soon become some of her closest friends and would fall in the top ten percent of her senior class. They would go on to attend top universities, with Elena attending Vanderbilt University.

Growing up in a minority majority town such as El Paso, Elena was never cognizant of her minority status until it came time to apply for college. What was apparent was the economic divide that was prevalent in El Paso, which she continued to notice among students while at Vanderbilt. At Vanderbilt, Elena encountered students who were third- or fourth-generation Vanderbilt students. There were students who were accepted based on who they knew and were rich enough to be frivolous with their money, which opened her eyes to another side of the socioeconomic spectrum.

As a daughter of a teacher, Elena was always exposed to the teaching profession. Originally, she set out to become a photographer but changed her mind upon learning of the requirements. She then set out on the path to become a teacher. Elena credited her career choice to her fourth-grade teacher. Struggling at her new school, her fourth-grade teacher decided to keep Elena after school for tutoring one day which would allow Elena to tutor younger students another day. Working with the younger students on projects and various activities made her think, “Yeah, I’m gonna be a teacher too.”

Dominique’s identity. Dominique completed two identity charts for me. One prior to the first interview and another before redoing the first interview. Many identifiers overlapped between the two charts. Beginning with the second chart, she first writes that she is a teacher. She says “[teaching] it’s as much a part of me and who I am as the clothes that I wear. I introduce myself as a teacher.” Next thing she wrote down

was “black woman” and underlined it. For her first interview Dominique walked in wearing a shirt that read:

Black Woman

\`blak.´wumen/n,

1: Beautiful, powerful, resilient female of

African decent with skin kissed by the sun

2: Not a female dog or garden tool.

In her first chart, while both identifiers were still underlined she wrote “black” and “woman” separately. Now joining them together seemed to appear more powerful to her.

As she continued talking through her chart she says, “I guess with being a black woman, I am a militant now.” She had just joined Black Lives Matter Houston with “#BLM” being something else she had identified with, and recalled how diverse the movement was. Based on the first meeting she attended, she says “we do have a lot of allies that are not black.” She continued to identify herself by the roles she has in life: daughter, aunt, older sibling. Dominique identifies herself as a Christian and driven. She is the first person in her family to graduate from college. An accomplishment her great grandmother got to see happen and credits it all to God. She wants to “do awesome things and be successful.” In her first chart, she wrote down being a history teacher. In her second, she separated the two and continued to share how much she loves history calling it “...more than just dead people...[history] is the biggest soap opera conspiracy theory; just foolishness and people do not appreciate it.” Other characteristics describing her were written on her first chart such as: strong willed, optimistic, kind,

friendly, lover of children, fighter, and underlined was Liberal. Dominique also wrote down the state of Georgia in her chart, which is where her story begins.

Dominique's story. Dominique was born in Augusta, Georgia, “home of the Masters and James Brown,” as she would say it. Being raised by her mother and great-grandmother, they spent most of their time living in her great-grandmother's house. Dominique described Georgia as the Deep South with confederate flags flying everywhere. She recalled:

Racism was real. [There are] many stories of being with my mom and watching her experience racism. Or the white woman that told me that I looked like the little colored girl from The Cosby Show. Which you know she was trying to be nice but mmmm . . . that's . . . really colored? Ok. They have KKK rallies all the time. *All* the time. I remember being a kid and watching her [mom] deal with things or seeing a confederate flag and knowing that was a place that we were not welcome. [At a young age] I did not really understand why, I just knew that white people did not want us here.

Growing up, Dominique's mother made her aware of Black history as much as she possibly could. She grew up reading a lot of biographies such as those of Maryann Anderson and Frederick Douglas, her idol. Conversations of racism never came up in the household when she was younger but sharing stories of experiencing racism did. Dominique heard stories from her great-grandmother about racism she experienced when she worked in a hotel. She also heard about how her great-grandfather played on the Chitlin' Circuit and that whenever he traveled, he would have to stay in the colored only hotels and enter through the back of clubs. It was not until Dominique was an adult

and shared her experiences with the family that conversations about racism began to take place.

When Dominique was eight, she moved with her mother and younger brother moved to Texas, but she still considers Georgia home. Although she now considered herself “officially a city girl,” she still held an attachment to Augusta saying, “A lot of foundation of who I am is from those first eight years in Augusta.” In Texas, Dominique went to school where there was a mix of White and African American students. Discussing her family’s move to Houston when she was in the fourth grade, she described it as a culture shock. She remembered her mother buying a Spanish book on tape that taught how to speak Spanish. Dominique recalled that no one in Augusta spoke Spanish but she knew that the little girl in her taped book knew Spanish. When she arrived in Spring Branch school district, everyone around her spoke Spanish and she thought, “There are people here that actually speak Spanish. There are people here that are from those Spanish countries that were in my books.” Now in this new city, there was a diverse group of people. Dominique’s favorite thing she learned when she arrived in Houston was that people were still coming to the U.S. from Africa. She thought that when the slave trade ended, so did the migration from Africa. The transition to the city was an adjustment but now she cannot imagine life any different.

Dominique remembered middle school being rough. She tried to assimilate anywhere she could to make friends. Not realizing she was playing both cultural sides, she would switch how she spoke around the African American kids and made sure she did not say anything that would “give them the side eye to make fun of me.” Then around the White kids, she made sure not to use a lot of slang. Dominique also shared

some of the same interests as them. Just trying to be herself, she was made fun of, would be called a White girl and even referred to herself as an Oreo (Black on the outside and White on the inside). Finally, in high school she had had enough. It was too much work and she was fed up. She was tired of playing both sides and decided “either you like me or you do not.”

Music played a major role in Dominique’s life. It is what allowed her to “go back and forth between the two worlds.” She hung out with the choir students at school, describing them as “cliquish in choir, which that just sounds so nerdy, but we were a pretty mixed group.” Dominique offered that her best friend was White but they shared the same interests. She added that their friendship remained to this day. Race was not an issue in their relationship until the occurrence of recent events surrounding police brutality.

Coming from a background of educators, teaching seemed to be an obvious career choice for Dominique, but fought the idea and was adamant about not being in the classroom. Growing up, her mother worked in a daycare and would eventually go on to own her own daycare. Once she was older, Dominique helped out at the daycare but hated it. She eventually started out as a music major in college. She wanted to sing at Carnegie Hall or the MET until she decided “that sucked” and grew bored. The mixture of racism and favoritism in the music program got her thinking about majoring in history. For fear she could only become a history teacher with her degree, Dominique majored in elementary education. “Now I’m a history teacher,” she laughs. Almost ten years later she is still teaching and still loving every moment of it.

My identity. As I created my chart, I purposely placed my identifiers that I saw as opposite across from each other, with characteristics in between the main things that identified who I am. I identified myself with the roles that I had in life—daughter, sister and friend. Across from “friend,” I placed “Muslim” since it felt as though we are not seen as friends but rather foes. I placed teacher across from student as I taught middle school during the day and was a student who was still learning by night. I also placed “American” across from “Pakistani.” I felt as though they were in competition with each other not only in my personal life but on a global scale as current events unfolded.

I placed characteristics that fit the main identifiers in between. Hard-working described my role as a teacher and daughter; caring described being a teacher and a friend. Social was placed in between friend and American because I felt more social with my American friends and that part of my culture. As a sister and as an American I needed patience. As an American, I needed to be patient with fellow Americans as they navigated through the hate in the world, country and media. I was goal-oriented, and as a student of social education and a Muslim, I was conscious of injustice. I was aware of what people do in the name of religion, righteousness or hate. As a daughter and a Pakistani I tried to be loyal; loyal to my parents and my Pakistani culture and rituals. Finally, the one that was the hardest to overcome but most obvious characteristic that I displayed was sensitivity. I placed sensitivity in between Pakistani and Muslim because those two identifiers triggered my sensitivity the most. When remarks were made about my country of birth, the religion of Islam or Muslim people, I was very sensitive. I took things that were said by the media or by people very personally.

My story. If you asked any immigrant about instances where they felt different, I was sure they would be able to recount numerous occasions, and for me it was no different. My past was littered with events, people, and situations that made me feel like a foreigner and like an outsider. My first memory of knowing that I was different was at the age of six. Living in Queens, I attended the lovely public school P.S. 148. By the time I was in first grade, I already dreaded when it was time for math. One day when the teacher announced it was time for math, realizing I was different, I confidently told her that it was against my religion to do any math. At the age of 6, I was quite unaware of how my religion differed from others or what “religion” was. Neither was I aware of the fact that Muslims contributed much to mathematics, including modern day algebra (Kadyrov, 2009). Who knew? Surely, I did not. Needless to say, my teacher did not believe my story and I was forced to add and subtract just like everyone else.

In fourth grade the teacher, wanting to get to know us better, gave us an assignment based on the idea of family crests. We each were given a paper crest divided into four or five different sections. Each section was designated for a specific piece of information about ourselves. I stood before the class and shared my coat of arms. By now I was living in Los Angeles and my peers were mainly a make-up of White and Hispanic children. Starting with my name, just about everything I had to share set me apart from everyone else. Sharing my coat of arms in front of the class, it was already a nerve wrecking experience, but as I shared my favorite food was haleem (a Pakistani stew with lentils and meat) blank stares from my peers intensified my nerves and fears. From that moment on, and at times subconsciously, I tried my best to blend in culturally, even if that meant sharing that my favorite food was pizza instead of what it really was.

High school rolled around but not without its incidences that made my insecurities flare up. My freshman year I wore henna on my hands for our Eid celebration. This was years prior to the popularity of henna tattoos, so my peers asked what was on my hands fearing that it might be “disease” related. It was not until my sophomore year that henna gained more attention as Gwen Stefani, singer for the popular 90’s band No Doubt, decorated herself with henna tattoos. While other girls my age were beginning to date, I focused on school work. While other girls began wearing bikinis to the beach, I sat back clothed in a cover-up.

As a child, I was never unsure of who I was or my role in the place I lived. I confidently played with other children, happily went to school, and enjoyed life in my adopted country. As I became older, I became more aware of my differences and how some of my ideologies, customs, and traditions clashed with that of the world outside my home. Then I went through life and was faced with instances that made me feel as though I was an outsider—from something as simple as teasing and name calling to not being able to go on dates or wear a bathing suit to the beach. These occurrences, no matter how small, made me question why I was different and brought awareness to those differences. No single occurrence or event made me more aware of my status as a foreigner or brought my insecurities to the forefront as did 9/11.

Prior to the horrible events of 9/11, many Americans had difficulty locating Pakistan on a world map, never having had a need to pay attention to the country, its people, or location. As shown in a 2006 National Geographic-Roper Survey of Geographic Literacy, Americans between the ages of 18-24 displayed a limited understanding of the world (Roper Public Affairs, 2006). The 2001 terrorist attacks

changed everything. The day Osama Bin Laden's conspirators hijacked jumbo jet airplanes, they also hijacked the religion of the Muslim people and gave Pakistan, as well as their neighboring countries, a bad name. Now, not only were people aware of its location but all eyes were on the country which seemed to ally with the Taliban and its Al-Qaeda friends.

As more eyes turned to Afghanistan's bordering country, information about the secret tribal groups around the border and northern part of the country were becoming clear. Osama Bin Laden was on the loose and the Pakistani government was suspected as conspiring with the number one most wanted terrorist in the world (Shinkman, 2012). Any talks of relations between the U.S. and Pakistan that existed prior to 9/11 were suddenly filled with tension (Tisdall 2011, Dawn.com). With the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, an ally and friend to the U.S., it seemed the country that could be detrimental to this strategic "war on terror" was long lost to the dark side. As the media stories on terrorists, sleeper cells and Jihad ran rampant, Muslims fell prey to stereotyping and I quickly realized I would be clumped with the enemy.

Growing up in Los Angeles, I never recognized the diversity of ethnicities my high school had to offer until I moved to the state of Texas. It was not long before I recognized the make-up of the new place I would call home. The fact that my family was the only one on my street with a darker complexion, hinted at my future experiences. Arriving to a new city and new state right after high school, I enrolled in a community college prior to attending the University of Houston. There I was in a city with a White population of 90%, with 53% of the population holding college degrees, and a median family income of \$84, 387. This stood in stark comparison to the 42% White population

of Bellflower, my former home. My family's move to Texas came merely a week prior to 9/11, an event which intensified feelings of being an outsider.

Upon moving to Texas, I began my first semester of college and unlike other students, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I credit my decision to become a teacher to my third-grade teacher. She wanted us to simply answer the question: what do you want to be when you grow up? To which my response was just as simple and sure—a teacher.

Preliminary Study Findings

Researching the influence of a minority teacher's culture on the classroom meant moving past my researcher preconceived notions on what the inquiry would uncover and focusing on discovering outcomes as they emerged. Outcomes that were much more substantial than I could have imagined. Using a semi-structured interview process allowed my participants to be at ease, led to open conversations and depth in responses, and moved beyond surface level inquiry into something deeper and more valuable. Other data analyzed included participant identity charts, teacher reflections and researcher reflective journals. Through coding and categorizing, four themes emerged from the data:

1. Minority teachers as role models
2. Teaching students more than just the curriculum
3. Cultivating a positive classroom community
4. Culturally responsive teaching

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine how minority teachers identified themselves and their culture, as well as how their culture influenced their classroom curricula, environment and relationships. Additionally, this research sought to uncover

how critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching were evidenced in their classrooms. Each emergent theme connected to and addressed the various aspects of the research questions. In the four sections that follow, the emergent themes are presented and explored. Although the themes are reported separately, there is a great deal of overlap among them. Participant responses, at times pertaining to more than one theme, appear where they most prominently reflect the theme.

Theme 1: Minority Teachers as Role Models

Growing up as a minority student can leave one feeling ostracized at times, feeling as though there is always something one does a little different than the majority. For many, the difficult task of navigating two cultures leaves one feeling what Dominique described as, “too Black for the White folks and too White for the Black folks.” Insecurities and little confidence in being who they were, led the participants to become the type of teacher evidenced in this study. They wanted to impress upon their students to accept who they were, complete with all their quirks, and to go forward in life confidently.

As shared earlier, participants identified themselves using different personality traits and associating themselves with various social groups. All three identified themselves as “teacher” along with a racial group but none directly referred to themselves as being a role model. Through their responses and shared stories of teaching, it was clear that role model was part of their identity in the classroom.

When asked about their backgrounds and current interactions in their classroom, two related ideas mentioned by all participants were the concept of beauty and being comfortable with how you look. From Barbie dolls to social media, girls are

inadvertently exposed to how women “should” look. It was long after Barbie was created that she was joined by an ethnic counterpart. One participant, Elena, commented on having what she called an “Elena doll.” It was a Black doll she said, “because the skin color was closer to my color than any of the other dolls that I could get.”

Elena. With Elena, the concept of beauty came from speaking of her grandmother asking about her and her sister not wearing make-up. Elena’s grandmother would “dress to the nines,” as she held a professional position as a secretary. Growing up and working in a time where it was not accepted to speak Spanish outside the home or to embrace your ethnic heritage, Elena’s grandmother tried to blend in to Anglican society by dyeing her hair blond, which was also her way of “keeping up with the Joneses.” Growing up bicultural, Elena questioned her own appearance when she was younger.

My hair was different. All of theirs was straight and thin; mine is thick and curly. All of them were like sticks FOREVER. They were so skinny. I was the only one, and granted I probably was a little overweight by the time I met them anyway but then I had the biggest chest out of all of them. I just felt so much more self-conscious about it. Yeah, they were all so tiny and just ate whatever they wanted and I was already watching what I ate and stuff. I felt like I was hairier too. Maybe they are just as hairy or more hairy than me. But since it’s the light blonde, you cannot see it, whereas it was sooo . . . I started shaving in fifth grade secretly because I hated the hair on my legs because you would see it so much easier than theirs. So, I did not like that.

With self-assurance and increased self-esteem coming with age, Elena wondered if she would have been more opinionated and confident at an early age if she learned to embrace her differences instead of comparing herself to others.

Even during this study, coming into a new school with a younger staff, Elena felt she stood out in her appearance and the way she dressed; she felt she was “much more unique looking.” She described her trade mark look as wearing crocs, not a lot of jewelry, with sometimes silly or thought provoking items such as her shirts. As for her hair, she did not straighten it. She kept it curly and “out there,” “either up or down and it’s kind of all over the place.” Elena was sillier than her counterparts at her present school, ready to dress up in costume and more willing than other teachers to make a fool out of herself. When asked what she hoped students to gain from her appearance and how she dressed, she hoped “that they can feel comfortable being themselves too. We’re not going to laugh at each other. We like seeing who you are and enjoy being part of that.”

Dominique. As discussion about beauty and natural hair happened to come up with Dominique, she shared her thoughts on beauty. “We are so tied to these Eurocentric values and that straight hair is professional, straight hair is valued as a sign of beauty,” she offered. She went on to share that her mother had put a perm in Dominique’s hair since she was twelve and she kept doing it ever since. It was not until recently, with resistance and questions from others, that Dominique began wearing her hair “natural.” Even within her own family, wearing her natural fro, is viewed with mixed emotions; her mother’s side of the family is quite supportive while her father’s side sees it as unprofessional.

I have had family members that'll tell me "you look prettier with straight hair." Black men that have said [chuckles], "you know, I like you better when your hair is straight" and you're like "really?" This is my hair and when I bring daughters into this world, that is going to be their hair cuz I'm not going to put perm on their just because I want them to fit into what White people have taught us is beautiful.

Surprisingly, Dominique said she would "get more compliments from White people than I do my people . . . I get a lot of backlash from Black people." Her comfort and increased appreciation of "blackness," much like the other two participants, also came with time as she got older. When asked if being a "proud Black woman" was something instilled at an early age, she responded with it being "something I grew into."

Dominique recognized the power of appearance as well, especially with her wearing her hair natural. She described it best by saying, "Even though you're not intentionally trying to send a message or make a statement, [you do and you should]."

She explained:

I used to think my natural hair was not professional but now I have an assistant principal that wears her natural hair, so it has made me more comfortable wearing my hair in corn rolls, flat twists, wearing my fro out and the kids love it. They love it! I had a student come up to me maybe about two years ago, it was not my kid and she was just like "Ms. Carpenter." I was like "Yeah, what's going on?" She said, "Thank you so much for wearing your hair like that. It's really pretty and it makes me feel like its ok for me to wear my hair like that too.

For Dominique, it was important for Black girls to see people they interact with, particularly professional educated Black women, with natural curls especially when they are “given images that they’re not pretty or that society is not going to accept them unless they look like this.” For her it was comforting to be surrounded by Black women who have natural hair and she knew the students felt the same.

Atifa. For me, the concept of beauty tied in with being and feeling different. I knew early on that I was different than most of the kids I went to school with. I was not as skinny, as blonde and not as light skinned as they were. Much like Elena, I too felt that I had more hair on my body than my friends, when their hair was actually much lighter and less noticeable. As a young kid, particularly a young girl, you do not want to be different. You grow up with Barbie and society ingraining in you its notion of beauty. Nobody in the media looked like I did and I, much like other ethnic girls, strived to be a type of beautiful that I was not, nor ever would be.

I found it interesting that the other two participants brought up natural hair as it was something that had been an issue with me and that I journaled about as well. With my hair being naturally wavy, I straightened it regularly. When I wore my hair natural, although I did not receive negative feedback, there is a look of surprise on the faces of those I encountered. As the other two teachers mentioned, embracing natural hair confidently as something beautiful became easier as I got older. Now, in the classroom I made it a point to compliment students that wore their hair natural in hopes they could be confident from a young age. I also made it a point to leave my hair natural on occasion. I wanted to show students that even though it may appear to some as messy and “unkempt” to have my hair in frizzy curls, as Dominique mentioned in her

interview, “it does not make me any less professional, beautiful or educated. It is simply how my hair grows out of my head.”

Being a role model was never more apparent to me than with my Southwest Asian students. I had Southwest Asian parents, mothers particularly, excited about me being their daughter’s teacher. They wanted their daughters to see a highly-educated woman that was similar to themselves. One parent in particular kept in contact with me regularly and would often say, “Can you tell my daughter that? She does not believe me but she’ll listen to you.” For my young Southwest Asian girls who were most often so quiet in class, I unknowingly became a role model; an example of confidence and what they could achieve.

Summary. Teachers take on many roles throughout the years. Aside from the role of educator, they will be parent, motivator, disciplinarian, supporter and whether they are aware of it or not, they will also become influential and inspiring. Due to their experiences as young minority woman, their current actions in the classroom in addition to recognizing the need to be an example for their students, the teachers in this study were role models.

Theme 2: Teaching Students More than the Curriculum

At various points in their preservice education, each participant was asked to share their teaching philosophy, for which, they all agreed, it was difficult to provide a complete and direct response. When asked to describe their teaching philosophies in their interview, it was still just as difficult to provide an answer now. They each described their philosophy as evolving; what once was their teaching philosophy had transformed into something different. One thing held true, in each teacher’s philosophy

there was less attention on themselves and their students' grades and more focus placed on teaching the whole child and not just the state standards.

In talking to the participants, it was easy to see that the curriculum was not the driving force that brought them to teaching. Rather, it was the love of children and the hope of making a change for the next generation. With each interview, the idea that participants wanted to teach more than the content became more prevalent. They wanted to teach the whole child by making students aware of the world around them and instilling in them the traits they needed to feel confident to make a positive impact in this world. This theme further divided into the subsections of social consciousness, agents of change and self-worth.

Social consciousness. Interviewees viewed teaching as a calling. It was more than a job or a career. To them, teaching was and is, more than facts and a transfer of information. It was making students aware of the world around them and opening their eyes to society's successes and pitfalls. Teaching was a way they could help shape the next generation in hopes that students would not carry on the mistakes of previous generations.

All three participants grew up in situations where poverty was visible. They knew that many went without while others went through life with excess. There was also a realization that not everyone was conscious of the social inequalities and injustice in the community, let alone the world, and they recognized the need for change.

Elena. Growing up in El Paso, Elena mentioned that everyone was aware of the socioeconomic divide. The white-collared families lived on the west side of town, which was always seen as more expensive and fancy, while the blue-collared families lived on

the east side. The east side, was where “they say the Mexicans live.” That was where more of the larger, nicer transportation bridges from Mexico were located. The little shanty towns were right on the freeway where passersby could see homes out of cardboard on one side and University of Texas El Paso on the other. There was even a community of people that lived without running water or electricity next to an Ozarka tower that was shut down. Elena said, “We certainly knew what colonias and that kind of stuff . . . real poverty could look like.” Bringing that into the classroom, Elena taught lessons on social inequality and oppression even at the second-grade level. Through Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., she made students understand the issues they faced in the past and those we continued to face.

Dominique. Raised by her mother, Dominique grew up in Georgia and moved to Houston at the age of eight. She identified with the students she taught, saying, “I was a child of poverty. My mom was on welfare. We moved whenever we were about to get evicted.” Often her mother would work late hours to make ends meet, leaving Dominique to make sure homework was done and her younger brother and sister were looked after.

With recent events in Ferguson and police brutality on every media outlet, it became very important to Dominique to not only make students aware of what was going on in their own country but for discussions to take place within the classroom. At the eighth-grade level, topics that were raised and discussions that took place were more adult than before. Dominique addressed student concerns about police brutality, slavery, the lack of minority representation in textbooks, gay rights, gangs and violence. When

asked if she shied away from difficult or controversial topics that were brought up, Dominique shared:

No, because if you feel safe enough in my classroom to bring that up, then I need to be strong enough to tackle that conversation with you. I knew teaching history and I knew going into the area that I was going into and I knew that being from the district that I teach in, I knew it was possible that I was gonna get some uncomfortable conversations but I really did not think it was going to be on the level that I have gotten. There have been times when I've said, "Ok, we gotta move on." especially when I first started and then I thought about it and I said, "you know what? No." because this is something that's going to grasp their attention in history then I gotta do it. I have no choice.

Domonique, now embraced difficult questions and controversial topics as teaching moments knowing there was more for her students to learn than the state mandated standards.

Atifa. Being an immigrant, I came to the classroom with my own perspective and experiences. I grew up in a converted basement apartment in Queens while my father worked at the newsstand in Grand Central Station. We did not have a lot growing up but we had what we needed. I was raised with an awareness that there were places around the world, Pakistan being the primary example, which experienced poverty. I was aware that my parents, like many immigrants, wanted a better life and future for their children. For this reason, they endured the struggles necessary to make that happen. For me, and other participants, it was important to develop social consciousness in students. Even though it was not part of the curriculum, it was important for us to discuss the issues that

were plaguing society and the injustices that were experienced, not just around the world but here at home as well, because once we bring these issues to light, we can begin making a change.

Creating agents of change. Tied to social consciousness is the idea of advocacy, the notion of not simply recognizing problems but striving to make a change.

Throughout the interviews, different examples emerged of how the teachers facilitated students' development of problem-solving skills. The problems they taught students to tackle ranged from disputes among friends to social injustice and issues on a societal level. Creating agents of change is embedding in children the notion that they can make a difference while recognizing it does not have to be done on a spectacular scale and they do not have to be adults to achieve it.

Elena. In Elena's classroom, problem-solving ranged from finding a solution for friends that were upset with each other to helping make the community better. Within the classroom setting, Elena talked children through their problems by identifying the issue and then finding a solution. She later had students take those simple problem-solving steps outside the school to recognize a need in the community and to find a solution. One year, students felt the school was littered with trash and wanted to clean up on and around campus. They decided to hold a campus clean-up on a Saturday. Elena helped the students come up with an action plan, make fliers, talk to people, ask companies to donate items or money to help with the clean-up and finally to participate on the actual clean-up day. Students developed an understanding of the problem-solving process and experienced success while realizing that helping the community and

each other was easier to do than originally thought. It meant taking one—one step, one person, one solution.

Dominique. Dominique shared a story from the beginning of the year about her school's campus-wide student planner. Within the pages of the planner were inspirational and motivational quotes for students to read. As students flipped through the planner for the new school year, a female student shouted out "Oh my God! I cannot believe this!" When Dominique asked what was going on, the student told everyone to turn to a certain page in the planner where there was a quote by Donald Trump. The student continued, saying, "This is unacceptable. How are you going to have something like this in a planner that caters to all the children that look like us [minority]? He's talking about getting rid of us and he's in our planner. What is that?" Dominique explained that the calendar was mass-produced and that she thought it was the same as the previous year. The student responded with, "No, because I read every single quote in the planner because I want to find some motivation and then I see *this*. This is not motivating me." Dominique took that opportunity to show her student how she could make a change. She instructed her to flip the planner over where the student saw the address of the publishing company. Dominique suggested she write to the company but to understand and be aware of bias. Dominique told the student to change her idea of motivation and to use her feelings of injustice as motivation to do something positive with the hope of bringing about change.

Atifa. While teaching World Cultures, it was easy to see the problems people around the world encountered. It was harder to see what could be done to change it. In that sense, my students succumbed to the idea that they would not be able to do much or

make a change. One year my students were rattled by the events taking place in Uganda and the story of the Invisible Children. After allowing them to brainstorm, they decided to raise money by raffling off candy. Within one month, my sixth graders raised close to \$500 dollars that they then sent to a school in Uganda. With the help of another teacher, we were in touch with a young girl in Uganda to whom the money was sent. She sent letters describing her life in Uganda and thanking them for the donation. My students were excited and surprised that they could take action to help what seemed to be a dire situation and could make a change. After that, brainstorming ideas to solve problems became a regular part of our day.

Increasing self-esteem. Beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school, students can be bogged down by comments, experiences, and others' expectations of them which can chip away at their self-esteem. After categorizing the data, another commonality shared were stories about building up students' self-worth and letting them know they were no less than anybody else.

Elena. In her interview, Elena referred to Serena Williams and the confidence she has shown through her career. Critiqued for her masculine frame, Serena Williams held the attitude that even though she had a more muscular built, she was going to look cute on the court and no one was going to bring her down. Elena wondered how her own attitude might be different now as an adult had she had Williams' confidence and embraced her appearance and quirks at a younger age. Now in the classroom as a teacher, she was more conscious of her students' self-esteem and confidence. This ranged from appearance, as discussed earlier with the concept of beauty, to a child's academic ability.

One story Elena shared was of a student she had two years previously who had severe eczema. The student's skin was very cracked and dry, marked with scars from where the eczema had really flared up. The little girl knew that her skin was different and that she would have different skin no matter what she did. The girl was very open about it as well, at times showing others the rough patches of skin to prevent them from scratching themselves for fear they would end up with scars too. Everyone that was in her grade level that knew her, was aware the girl had eczema and never made it an issue. Elena never understood exactly how the skin condition affected the little girl, but kept eyes and ears open, listening to the different conversations that took place in the classroom to make sure nothing negative was said to the girl, making sure she still felt comfortable and confident while at school. Elena shared that in the current school-year, a counselor went into classrooms to talk to what were most likely new students who were not familiar with girl about name calling, a situation Elena tried hard to ensure did not happen in her class.

Academically, Elena also made certain that students recognized their self-worth and did not label themselves as "dumb" or "stupid." One of her students came in the beginning of last year knowing no English. While learning English, he began to lose his Spanish but still could not read or write in English. He began doing extra work with Elena. There was additional homework, tutoring and pull-out sessions to the point where the young boy was becoming frustrated and questioning why he had to do more work than the other students. Elena continuously expressed to him that he was trying to catch up to the other kids and that it was not about him being dumb or that he could not do it. She stressed that he had arrived at a later time than the others and therefore had to

complete three years of work that he missed in a short amount of time. She continued to do her best to build his confidence in his work, reminding him of the goal they were aiming to achieve.

Dominique. Much of the same was evidenced in Dominique's classroom as she taught students to value themselves and view success in their own terms. She shared, Every student deserves a quality education. It does not matter where you came from, what you're going through, you're entitled to that. It is my job as an educator to figure out how I can get across to you to show that you are worth it because I feel like by the time I get them in middle school, they've been torn down, broken apart, and told they're not worth it that they've just given up. So, for me, it is my job to show you not to give up. We're going to celebrate that 50 just as much as that 100 because that child has come up from a 10. So, we're going to celebrate that; that they have a chance at whatever they want to be. If they never have another teacher tell them that they're worth it, if they never have anyone else in their life that makes them feel like they're valued, for me, it's my job to do that.

Atifa. Like the other two participants, I too made sure to celebrate student successes, ensured they did not feel like a failure or gave up. I was very conscious of what was being said to each student by their peers. From my own past experiences, I understood how one comment could make a child uncomfortable and insecure. My goal in the classroom was to build up the confidence of each student, not just academically but as whole persons. I wanted them to hold their heads high and believe in themselves. It meant taking time to have conversations with the class and individual students to aide

in their success. I recalled incidents where students were made fun of because of their culture and/or religion. Having experienced the same when I was younger, it hit a nerve. I knew all too well that it was hard to ignore such comments being made. For this reason, I still used my experiences to help students overcome their current struggles.

Summary. For all participants, teaching was more than teaching a subject. It was about reaching and serving the whole child. It was about helping students to develop intellectually and emotionally, and enabling them with skills needed to navigate through life.

Theme 3: Cultivating a Positive Classroom Community

As participants discussed their identity charts, the importance of relationships, not just in their life but as identifiers for who they were (i.e. sister, daughter, and friend) became apparent. The value of relationships transcended into their professional life, as teachers involved in the study shared various stories demonstrating their ability to establish rapport with their students, leading to a positive classroom community. Each with their own style of teaching were able to establish a caring environment where students felt safe sharing and discussing sensitive topics.

Elena. It was apparent from Elena's teaching philosophy that she put effort into building relationships with her students and establishing a classroom community. Throughout her teaching career, her teaching philosophy evolved and shifted to the students, "keeping in mind how they can be worthwhile and they can be valued" in the classroom. She shared as much about herself as she could with students and taught them how she expected them to treat others. With the students being in second grade, Elena

emphasized problem-solving and taught students how they could still be kind while solving problems with others, looking at situations and approaching them differently.

Elena was very conscious of her students' interactions with each other and expected them to work together on different levels for activities. She utilized small groups, partners, and larger groups during activities and even had students share individually in class. To help ease tension and create a comfortable atmosphere, she held Friday morning dance parties where she went around the room to give every single child a hug or a compliment. Students also were allowed time to share something good that was going on in their lives. She allowed the space and opportunity for students to share their feelings and discuss when those feelings were hurt. Students were even expected to learn how to agree and disagree with each other in an appropriate manner. From referring to each other as "friend," to dance parties and compliment cards, Elena set the expectation of collaboration and community in her classroom.

Dominique. Dominique did not remember what her individual teachers taught her but she did however remember how they treated her and how their actions made her feel. That was something she kept with her as she went into her own classroom. Dominique showed that she genuinely cared for her students by taking an interest in their lives and who they were as individuals. Students often invited her to watch their games which she enjoyed attending so she could see her students in a different context. She established a rapport with her students by "keeping it real" and not hiding the truth from students. She shared with her students her personal story of where and how she grew up. She also shared her philosophy on teaching and how she was not a textbook teacher. To

Dominique, teaching history was more than dates and dead people, it was about the stories of the people who had lived.

Codeswitching also allowed her to reach students and make herself more relatable. By periodically switching back and forth between the terminologies the students understood (slang and everyday language) and academic vocabulary, she made the content relevant to them while increasing their comfort level with her. Students easily understood what she meant when she said that “the struggle was real at Valley Forge” or that “Andrew Jackson was salty.” Dominique knew her students and recognized the need for putting history in a context the students would understand while using terms with which they were familiar.

Due to the nature of current events and being a US History class, topics such as gay rights, immigration, police brutality and elections came up in Dominique’s class and, as stated earlier, she did not shy away from them. “If you feel safe enough in my classroom to bring that up, then I need to be strong enough to tackle that conversation with you,” she stated. One major discussion tied to recent elections centered on a concern over the fate of the minority students in her classroom, particularly her Hispanic students. While discussing Andrew Jackson’s policies, specifically the Trail of Tears and how, even though the Supreme Court ruled it Indian Territory, Jackson said the White man is greater. Dominique’s students quickly made the connection to President Donald Trump (Republican presidential candidate at the time). “So, is that what it’s going to look like if Trump gets elected? He’s going to ask us to go back home?” her students asked. Dominique let them know that there were checks and balances in place and that it would not be as easy to send millions of people out of the country as Jackson

did with the Indians. No matter what she said though, it seemed students could not get the thought out of their heads. When asked if there was a particular racial group that was more vocal than the others, she said, “They were *all* up in arms about it.” Dominique seized the moment as a teaching opportunity. Although she and the students were debating whether Jackson was a hero or a villain, students brought in current events, as long as they related to and kept the focus on Jackson. In the end, Dominique said her students were still scared. They were scared about what the future holds for the country and themselves but felt safe and comfortable enough to openly discuss their concerns with her and the rest of the class because of the feeling of community she established.

Atifa. What I told my students the first week of school was, “We will be stuck with each other 5 days out of the week for the next 9 months so we might as well like each other now. It’ll definitely make the time go by pleasantly and without issue.” With a curriculum that explored different religions and cultures, I needed to establish a classroom atmosphere of understanding. Students needed to understand that they would not always agree with each other and would have differences but that they could still get along and work together in a respectable manner.

Taking an interest in the students’ lives outside of my classroom, like I did inside my classroom, was just as important to building community. I made sure students knew that I was there for them not only academically but as a person. I attended games or performances they participated in. I had even been invited to bar mitzvahs, ethnic festivals, and churches. To allow students an opportunity to share more about themselves, I conducted “check-ins” where students wrote about what was going on in their lives at the time. Those that had nothing to share began by writing about their

favorite food, show or movie which also gave me insights into who they were as a person. It was important for students to know that they were more than a grade, score or statistic to me, a common sentiment among the other two teachers as well.

Elena, Dominique, and Atifa. The physical look of the classroom also made the class comforting to students. Elena had a student of the week bulletin board and student work displayed on the walls which promoted student ownership of the classroom. On the walls of Dominique's class were not only posters referencing the curriculum or history but student cards were on the wall as well; cards on which students were to write down what they wanted her to know about them. Having something personal of each student on the wall allowed them to feel as though it was their classroom too. In my classroom, I had a wall of pictures on which students posted photos of themselves throughout the year. I was often told that my classroom was relaxing with a eucalyptus-spearmint candle burning, lamps and purple painted walls that welcomed students as they walk in. For the three participants, the classroom was a place in which they wanted students to feel welcomed and safe.

Theme 4: Culturally Responsive Teaching

In thirteen years of being a student in public education in the U.S., I could count on one hand the number of minority teachers I had in school. Out of those few, I never encountered a teacher of Southwest Asian ancestry. Of course, I had caring teachers along the way but not one who brought my culture into the classroom, let alone someone who truly understood the struggles of an immigrant child from Pakistan. The same was true for participants Dominique and Elena. Being a minority as a child was difficult, and as an adult it continued to bring hardships. On the other hand, as a teacher, being

minority provided an advantage in the classroom. Along this line of thought was the most prominent theme that emerged among the three participants: culturally responsive teaching.

Awareness and understanding of what it is to be a minority. Being bicultural can be a mix of any two cultures with which one identifies. Ethnically speaking, it is likely to mean having a culture at home that is most likely different than the mainstream culture in which one lives. When you grows up with a subculture, you frequently question why you are required do certain things and others do not. Then as a young adult, there is often a tendency to “play both sides” or to create a third culture by merging the two cultures together. Although a bicultural identity was more pronounced with Dominique and myself, cultural differences between Elena’s home and that of her friends were still apparent.

Elena. Being a fourth-generation Hispanic living in El Paso, the mainstream culture of the town was blended into Elena’s family culture. However, many aspects still differed. One that stood out to her as we spoke was going to church. Her grandmother’s expectation was to attend church every Sunday dressed up. On the other hand, with her mother, dress became less and less formal. Attending church, however, remained an expectation, as was participating in CCD or Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes. Elena did not like going to her church since she had no friends there and questioned why she needed to be in attendance. Religiously, her parents had everything blessed, they had a crucifix up in the house and would put up a palm on Palm Sunday, things her friends did not do. Another difference that she spoke of was having to attend more family events. Often she was unable to hang out with friends because her family was headed to

grandma's or their cousins' house. Elena mentioned that the one other Hispanic boy in their group "had a lot of family but he did not do a lot of that."

The level of affection displayed by Elena's family also differed from that of her friends. In her house, it was customary to receive a kiss goodnight by her mom. Her friends, whose family were not as affectionate, found it strange when her mother kissed them on the cheek goodnight as well. The affectionate aspect of the Hispanic culture carried over to her classroom where she greeted her Hispanic students with not only a hug but a kiss on the cheek.

Dominique. As discussed earlier, Dominique referred to herself as an "Oreo," somebody who was black on the outside but had mannerisms and "acted" white on the inside. Playing both sides, so to speak, was something with which Dominique was familiar. She was conscious of how she acted differently around her White friends versus Black friends to ensure she would be accepted by both groups. This was something she noticed in her Asian students. Dominique explained that her school had a small Asian population with the rest of the school's population split between half Hispanic and half African American. Most of the Asian students had grown up in the surrounding neighborhood and "[were] able to float back and forth between what it means to be Asian and how you have to carry yourself, then what it means to be able to function in the school." Finding it "weird" to watch the students' transition among groups made Dominique recognize these students as a younger version of herself. She had to know how to function in different settings based on the culture of the students she was around. Asked if she believed "playing sides" was more specific to minority groups, she replied, "Definitely." Dominique elaborated:

Seeing my Asian students, you know, when they're all together, they're "Asian" and they listen to k-pop and share stories about things their parents do to them as far as discipline. Most of them have discipline stories or that they have to go to cultural school this weekend. But then when they get out and they go to their normal classes where they're mixed in, just having to, I guess, assimilate and make sure they do not lose their culture.

Atifa. With my campus being majority White, there were not many large pockets of other races. Even though they were a small group, African American students were the next largest demographic group. I observed them staying together often and when they branched out to other groups, I sometimes noticed a change in the way they spoke and the references they made. The students that stood out to me the most were the Southwest Asian students. Some of my students attended the same mosque as I did and it was very interesting to see them assimilate in different contexts. They abided by mainstream norms in hopes of blending in while at school and then outside of school they attended mosque and followed the Islamic culture. Watching my students brought me back to when I was in school and the struggle of making sure I fit in with mainstream culture while keeping my ethnic culture at home.

I once had twin students in my class who I suspected to be from Pakistan but through all our conversations in class about my heritage, they never brought it up. When it was brought to my attention that they were in fact from Pakistan, I had a conversation with them while we participated in a 6th grade field day event. I mentioned they never shared they were from Pakistan and one student responded, "Eh, yeah, we do not share that information much." I did not react the way I should have by telling them they

should not be afraid to share their heritage. I knew I was afraid too at their age; afraid of being different, scrutinized and ostracized. Truth is, there were moments even as an adult when I was scared to share my heritage because of some of the same reasons as before.

Summary. As minorities, the participants were more aware of the struggles and everyday life challenges our minority students went through. It allowed us to bond and build a better relationship with our students. Students knew that we understood. Elena used Spanish words in the classroom and shared culture traits such as hugging and kisses on the cheek with her Hispanic students. Dominique discussed hair, the events unfolding in our country and the impact such events made on the African American community. Finally, being a minority teacher allowed me to share concerns of being Muslim in today's world while letting students know there was someone who understood the struggle of finding cultural balance when you live in a place where your two cultures clash.

Providing opportunities to succeed. In discussing whether schools were set up to help minority students be successful, participant responses were similar. Dominique and Elena both felt some schools, so as those in which they taught, did a good job of helping minority students be successful.. They considered the contributing factor to be that minority students needed to be provided opportunities to succeed.

Elena. In Elena's last school, a Title 1 school the focus seemed to be more on the present, on how to get the students passing now. Parent involvement was also different. Parents were supportive, could get their children to school on time, and made arrangements for them to stay after school, but that was the extent of their involvement.

At her new school, which was more racially diverse but located in a more affluent area, she found parents to be supportive in more ways. They were involved in everyday situations that occurred in the classroom, whether it was providing needed supplies or contacting the teacher if their child was upset because of an incident that took place earlier in the day. Students at her current school were provided the support system they needed to be successful, not just for now, but for the future.

Unlike her previous school, the culture of Elena's current school was thinking long term. Students were involved in more activities, allowing the opportunity for students to try different things and to be more explorative. The school focused on putting students to success just for this grade level, elementary, middle, or even high school, but looking toward the path to college. This was something Elena felt she did not receive when she was in school. She did not receive help from the school in finding or filling out information on scholarships, financial aid or even her college applications. She had to figure it out on her own with assistance from a friend whose parents were high school teachers. Knowing how to do certain things like this and thinking long-term from an early age was something she felt many minority students did not have an insight into. For example, one of Elena's students shared that her sister made the Dean's list. Elena congratulated her sister with excitement, telling her what that meant and how she would be able to receive more scholarship money. With the little girl expressing surprised by what it meant to be on the Dean's list and the talks of scholarship money, it was apparent that those conversations were not taking place at home.

Dominique. Although she felt her school catered very heavily to Black students with other students being left out, Dominique asserted that schools overall were

“absolutely not” set up to help minority students succeed. To Dominique, most teachers taught in a way that was very outdated and did not account for desegregation. In general, she contended that there was no culturally responsive teaching being practiced. She stated, “We do not think about minority children and some of these social issues that they deal with just being minority and people are not being understanding of that.” At the same time, Dominique offered, the school district was finally understanding that they no longer served only Becky and Joe, but in addition served Terrell, Julio and Haseem now too.

Understanding minority students and providing opportunities to succeed was apparent in Dominique’s classroom. In the teacher’s lounge, she heard “*these*” kids one too many times in referencing African American students and other minorities. To Dominique, it was disappointing because she was one of “these” kids.

I was a student sitting in these desks right down the street at the other middle school. Many nights, I did not know if I was going to come home and I was going to be told to pack up my stuff because we were leaving or I was not going to have any lights. I never knew. There would be times when I could not do my homework. There were times where I had to take care of my younger sister because she would get off the bus and I had to make sure she ate and she did her homework before I could even touch mine. So, you do not know what their lives are like once they leave this building.

It was past experiences like this that allowed her to understand where her current students were coming from. She did not assign homework knowing that many might not be able to complete it due to family issues. She did not want to fail students for

circumstances that were out of their control. She wanted to ensure that her children got the best chance at success. These were the opportunities that minority students were missing.

Summary. Along with providing students the opportunities to succeed, all three participants mentioned having high expectations for their students. Having students coming from certain circumstances which put them at a possible disadvantage, these teachers realized that they could not change students' personal situations. Instead, they determined to hold their students to the same expectations as everyone else or higher because they saw the students' potentials, despite those circumstances. Elena had a student who was living with foster parents and was only permitted to see her mother once a month. On the days she returned from seeing her mother, the young girl could not stop crying. Observing this behavior, Elena shared that she understood it was rough at home but was determined for them to keep moving toward their goal. She told the little girl, "I know sweetie. It is sad and it is hard. Let's just keep going." Elena explained that she responded in this way, not to discount the child's feelings but to ensure that she did not give up and that she recognized that there is someone there for her.

Validating and empowering students. The idea of validating and empowering students came across as one of the most important and powerful sub-themes of culturally relevant teaching among the three participants. Teacher participants mentioned celebrating and appreciating differences among children by taking an interest in who they were as individuals and ensuring differences were appreciated and embraced to empower students.

Elena. What came through most in interviews was Elena taking an interest in and learning who their students were as whole beings. Teaching the second grade, Elena wanted to learn about students from the first day of school. Her efforts in this vein not only helped her to understand her students more but also provided information that guided her teaching toward achieving academic success. In her reflection on culture she wrote, “I am very aware in particular of how unique and individual my students are and what value that brings into my classroom in terms of learning-academically, linguistically, emotionally, socially, etc.” She shared that they take time to get to know each other, their families, interests and special characteristics. One way she accomplished this was through “Student of the Week.”

Elena’s Student of the Week activity gave each student a whole week to present about themselves. The classroom had an entire bulletin board where students put together pictures and information about themselves. On the first day, students shared their name and the items they put up on the board such as pictures or information about themselves. Students got to see photos of their friends and families. Some students brought in pictures of their first Holy Communion or Baptism while other students brought in pictures of themselves and their families celebrating the Chinese New Year. One student who was Asian brought a family picture which consisted of not only brothers, sisters, mom and dad, but also grandma and grandpa who lived with them too. During the study, Elena had two mixed-race students whose Student of the Week displays showed the students their African American mother and their White father. Seeing their friends’ photos of mixed-race families exposed students to the different make up of what family was or could look like.

In addition to pictures, students completed sentence strips that shared what their favorite book, their special thing, why they were special, their favorite aspect about themselves, what they loved, their favorite television show, what they wanted to do when they grow up, etc. Students were also permitted to share anything that was not on the board or specifically asked for in the activity outline. Another day of the Student of the Week activity, students were asked to bring in and to share their favorite toy. On occasion, Elena found students discovered common interests as they shared their favorite toy or collections. Finally, over the next couple of days, students answered questions from their classmates. Prior to her first Student of the Week, Elena modeled her expectations by completing a board for Teacher of the Week. While getting to know the teacher, this allowed students to see what they would later share and how they would present as well.

Elena focused on making sure what makes a child different was seen positively, appreciated, and embraced, not just by their peers but the students themselves.

I look to find what they find special or what they think is unique and special about them and draw that out. I try to do that in the way we talk about things with myself. So, I tell them, “Oh look, I have big crazy curly hair and I should not feel weird about that.” Or I should at least show them, even if I do, that I do not in front of them. [In reference to Serena Williams] The way she kind of owns what she does and she’s not gonna apologize for it. I think that’s what I would like them to feel comfortable doing too. Until they can change it themselves, just kind of learn to deal with it and be like “yeah, so?.”

Through subtle questions, Elena got to know her kids and celebrated what made them unique. One little girl dressed like a tomboy in soccer shorts, a jersey and knee-high socks every day and never wore anything else. Surprisingly enough, the other students never questioned the little girl as to why she wore that every day but other teachers did. That was when Elena stepped in and simply replied, “That’s who she is. She loves that stuff.”

Elena was very aware of making sure her students were not self-conscious about looks. She shared a story about one of her students who had a large mole on the side of her face. While drawing a picture of themselves, the little girl added the mole to the drawing. Wanting to make sure the girl’s difference was seen as something special, Elena said “I love how you put your mole on your face. That’s a great detail. That’s important because that shows I know exactly who that is.” She wanted to let students know that even if it was something people saw, paid attention to or noticed, it was not something anyone should be nervous or scared about. “It’s just something that makes you *you* and being able to be okay with it.”

Dominique. Being in a school district representing so many different cultures, Dominique wanted her students to understand that she respected them and was always ready to celebrate with them. Dominique took an interest in who her students were and, much like Elena, learned about them beginning on day one. On the first day of school she had her students answer three questions on an index card: 1) What’s something you think I need to know about you as a student that will help me as a teacher, serve you better? 2) What would you like to see out of my class and from me as your teacher? 3) What do you like/hate about history? Sometimes students wrote down simple things

such as they really liked baseball and other times they wrote really personal things. Dominique periodically read the cards throughout the year as a check on herself to see if she was doing what the students needed her to do to be successful.

Learning about her students and taking an interest in who they were continued throughout the year. She asked them questions about their heritage, cultural traditions and life events taking place outside of school. “I want to know my kids and their cultures” she said. She had students who attended Vietnamese school on the weekends and talked to her about how much they disliked it. She also had students that participated in dragon performances for the Chinese New Year. Dominique attended Quinceañera celebrations for some of her Hispanic students and attended different churches with some of her African American students. When she had a Muslim student come in with henna on her hands, she made it a point to ask questions to learn more about her culture. Dominique loved that her students had different cultures because to her, that was what made them individuals. She let them crack jokes about their culture and have fun with it, letting them embrace it, and see that culture was part of who they were.

Atifa. Being a Muslim in American schools left me feeling like I did not quite belong. In my classroom, I made it a point to learn about my students, where their families came from and to empower them to be themselves. Teaching World Cultures, it was easy to bring their different heritages into the classroom. We started out by creating a “selfie” that displayed students’ cultures, their interests and what made them unique. When we studied the part of the world from which their family came or students they had visited, we took time to share what knowledge, pictures, and artifacts students brought to class. The biggest thing for me was recognizing where they were from and

taking an interest. Sometimes that was all it took to build a relationship and have them invested in my class.

During my third year of teaching, I went down the attendance sheet on the first day of school and saw a student by the name of Ibrahim. In Arabic, the name was pronounced differently than the Christian/American pronunciation. Due to lack of time, I had told the students to simply say “here” and that I would learn the proper pronunciation of their names the following day. I remember saying, “Is it Abraham or Ibrahim? My instinct is to pronounce it in Arabic.” The student simply said, “Here,” and we moved on. As sixth graders, the students were new to the idea of middle school and basically terrified their first day. I tried my best to ease everybody’s nerves and it was not until after class that I realized I had already made a connection with the student. While most sixth graders scurried off to their next class fearful of being late, Ibrahim came up to me with a huge smile on his face and asked if I knew Arabic. I told him I was from Pakistan and that I knew how to read Arabic because of the Koran but was not able to speak the language. He continued to smile and said he was from Egypt. I told him he would be able to share about his culture and religion when we studied the Middle East. With a nod of excitement, he said he would see me the next day and ran off. It was not until that moment that I realized that I had something different to offer my students, especially my Middle Eastern, immigrant, Muslim or even just minority students. The chances of them having had a minority teacher, let alone an immigrant teacher, was scarce in this area. I could be someone to appreciate their differences, someone they can connect to and celebrate their culture with.

Multicultural education. As students, the three participants did not grow up with multicultural education in school. Even though Elena grew up in a minority majority city, the curriculum was Eurocentric with a focus on rote learning. Dominique grew up learning more about Black history at home and from books she read versus what she learned in school. While in school, I never shared about myself and teachers did not attempt to get to know me. Although I was Muslim, I was expected to participate in the Christmas play, make Christmas presents, and hunt for Easter eggs. Now as teachers, the three participants evidenced conscious efforts to provide a multicultural education.

Elena. Growing up, Elena's mom gave her books with side notes scribbled inside for her to read; something her mom continued to do for her. Elena understood the importance of history and multicultural education and was a proponent of history through literacy; using books to teach what she might not have time to during the regular day. When asked if this was automatically built into the curriculum, she said it was not. The TEKS or Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills were presented with suggested books but did not vary as much as Elena liked. She incorporated books with different types of characters and cultures that would be appealing to both girls and boys. She included books such as *Something Beautiful*, where the main character found what was beautiful where she lived or *One Green Apple* where the main character wore a hijab. Elena also used activist books written for kids in her classroom. With each book, students discussed the story, discovered and appreciated the differences of the characters and related it to themselves.

Dominique. Aside from taking an interest in her students' lives outside of the classroom, Dominique's biggest task with the curriculum was to provide the students an opportunity to form their own opinions, recognize that they would all feel different about history, and realize that there was no right or wrong. She wanted to make sure her "students have an opinion and it's not just the opinion of a textbook." When asked how much she taught out of the textbook, her answer was simple, she did not. Dominique utilized a lot of primary sources in her teaching, providing students a chance to read different accounts of events and topics that were covered in the curriculum. When it came to teaching history, Dominique was very straightforward with her students. While talking about slavery, Hispanic and Asian students asked where people of their race were during that period. Dominique told them that each of their cultures would make an appearance in history. When students commented, "It's not pretty for any of us, is it?" she responded with the truthful answer of "Not really, no." Where the curriculum and textbook left off was where Dominique filled in the gaps with resources and class discussion.

Atifa. As mentioned earlier, teaching World Cultures lends its way to multicultural education but I always wanted more. For this reason, incorporated students' cultures and choices into our lessons. We used resources other than the textbook to allow for varying ideas, stories and viewpoints, knowing that history was not one sided. Something I tried to get across to my students from day one was that history was a story with not one truth. There were always different versions of the truth and even though I tried to provide as much information as I could, there was more to the story than what is presented in class.

Cultural sensitivity. Whether it be unknowingly or not, participants reported there being a lack of cultural sensitivity among staff members.

Elena. The lack of cultural sensitivity was more obvious with some than others at Elena's school. Elena was the type of teacher who wanted as much diversity in her classroom as possible. She loved looking at the roster in the beginning of the year and seeing which kids would walk in the door the first day. Reflecting on students that other teachers would consider troublesome or different, Elena said, "I want those kids. I like those kids." There was a student in first grade from India who wore a turban on his head, since he was of the Sikh faith. Excitedly, Elena wondered if she would have him in class.

So, I kind of wanted that little boy this year. [smiles excitedly] I want the little Sikh boy because it's so obvious. He's already taller than the others as it is but then his little wrap comes up so high. Before school started, I got my roster. I had a name on my roster that I could not pronounce and I think is his name but I did not know the little Sikh boy's name. I'm sure if he's wearing his wrap, I doubt that he would have changed his name to fit in more like American names. I was like, "maybe this is him." When we were all in a group and we were figuring out who had who, I said "I have this kid." [showed names to teammates] I did not know how to say his name. "I hope it's the Sikh kid." One of the other teachers goes "Sikh? What does that mean?" I said "Oh it's a type of religion. That's where the men wear, I think it could be called a turban but I'm not sure or if that's for another religion or not so I'm gonna just make sure I call it a wrap." The other teacher said, "Oh that one kid that wears a towel on his head?" [Elena

laughs and shakes her head at me] The other teacher goes, “I think I have the kid with the towel.” I said “He’s Sikh, yes but you should call it a wrap or if it’s a turban, that’s appropriate. Let me just look it up to make sure. They [Google] said turban so ok you can call him the boy with the turban. Do not say towel.”

As Elena shared that she should not refer to the wrap as a towel and proceeded to tell her how the certain way the turban was wrapped meant different things, the other teacher simply passed it off, appearing to not care to learn more about the culture of her future student.

Dominique. Dominique shared a story about a White coworker who once said, “I do not see race. I had a Black nanny growing up,” as though that fact counteracted the things she said and things she did in her classroom. Dominique described how, with good intentions, the coworker showed her students documentaries such as the one on Emmett Till (14-year-old African American boy lynched in 1955 after being falsely accused of flirting with a White woman) because, as she explained it, “They need to know this.” Reflecting on her coworkers’ teaching, Dominique considered that her coworkers’ wanting to show the video in class did not consider the fact that the Black Lives Matter movement was at its height with police brutality on the news daily. Although Till’s story was important, explained Dominique, her coworker did not take into account the school’s demographics and current events, or that it might hit home for her students, possibly causing a stir of emotions.

One day a student came into Dominique’s class and shared that the same teacher mentioned before told her that her hair looked nappy. When Dominique went to the teacher and told her not to say that to any Black person ever again, she responded with,

“I did not mean it in a bad way. I meant it like it looked like he had not combed it.”

After hearing numerous stories about how her coworker broke students down and told them they were not intelligent enough, Dominique shared, “It’s like yeah, I’m telling you the struggle of your people and I’m showing you all of these documentaries on how Hispanics and Blacks were mistreated and I have a Black nanny so I’m okay but I’m still not going to treat you as an equal.” The truth was, in Dominique’s opinion, the coworker did not think anything of it and was oblivious of her insensitivity to her students.

Atifa. My school was located in a predominantly White, Christian area and the staff reflected the same demographics. I did not see many teachers take an interest in students’ cultures as much as I did, perhaps due to my past experiences. I also had conversations with teachers who would say they did not see race or color in the classroom; their students were all children that they loved. Although it seemed like the right thing to say and a positive approach, it seemed to me that teacher should have seen race and color in the classroom and embracing students for who they really were.

For in-service week, a few other teachers and I were asked to lead professional development sessions. Based on my interest, a slightly changing demographic, and noticing a need as shared previously, I suggested that I lead a session on culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education. The table of teachers, all White, looked at me in silence. As much as I would have liked to think that we progressed to be able to discuss matters of race and ethnicity in the classroom, it still seemed to be taboo; something teachers still feared to discuss. By the looks on everyone’s faces, it was clear that I needed a new topic. When I changed the subject of my session, there was fewer looks of confusion and much more praise and acceptance of the new idea.

Summary

In *Against Common Sense*, Kumashiro (2015) shared, “A teacher who challenged stereotypes of Muslims as crazed terrorists got accused of trying to convert students to Islam and was promptly fired” (p. 66). Although this social injustice sounds unreal and extreme, it shines a light on the reality of xenophobia that has crept its way into the minds of our citizens. It was also something that I was experiencing. Maybe my feelings of insecurities were a simple correlation of the times. Terrorist and Muslims are seen as synonymous to some and the enemy for many. Was this something different ethnicities faced at different points in history? Curious to determine if other minority teachers felt similar to me, this research sought to uncover:

1. how teachers identified themselves and their culture;
2. how teachers’ cultural identities influenced their classroom curriculum, environment and relationships with students; and
3. how critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching were evidenced in the classroom.

With data collected from interviews, journaling and reflections, four themes emerged, each addressing the research questions in a different way:

- Minority teachers as role models
- Teachers teaching more than the curriculum
- Building community in the classroom
- Culturally responsive teaching

The research process began with a negative outlook on being a minority teacher. In journaling and listening to the stories of the other participants, the benefits of being a

minority teacher and the positive impact it has on their classrooms was evident. It also became apparent that it was not only a teacher's ethnic culture that influenced their classrooms and teaching but their culture in general. The minority teachers in this study had a way of relating to their students that made them feel welcomed and appreciated. At a young age, all three struggled with self-esteem and the notion of beauty. As teachers, they were sure to instill the idea of individuality and the uniqueness of beauty in their young students in hopes of building self-esteem. Their later-found confidence led them to be role models for their students showing students that they were minority demographically but nothing about them was minor.

If we are taught that a child's culture and background can influence their learning, it would be naïve of us to think that a teacher's background and culture does not influence teaching. Ballantine and Spade (2009) wrote,

Teachers also bring varying degrees of cultural capital to schools and classrooms. However, in some cases the students they teach may bring a different cultural capital to the classroom, cultural capital that is either higher or lower in the hierarchy of power and wealth. (p. 15)

Minority teachers can act as cultural translators and help bridge the cultural gap that exists between students and teachers. The following chapter discusses the implications of the study's findings and shares recommendations on how to use the information from this study to benefit students and narrow the cultural gap.

Chapter V

Implications

Introduction

My personal story began across the world in Pakistan and my researcher story was the same. I had something different to offer in my research—an insight into another world. What I did not realize at the onset of this inquiry was that what I had to offer did not require a study in a foreign country but something much closer to home. It entailed revealing my distinct experience, unique perspective on growing up Muslim in America and being a minority teacher in a field dominated by the majority. While teaching World Cultures, I exposed students to new worlds and diverse religions, and shared a different take on life. This opened the door for backlash from parents concerned about the state mandated curriculum I taught, as though they imagined I had a secret agenda of my own. The negative responses began to creep into my classroom as they affected my teaching. Consequently, I started to share less and keep lessons on religions short with the intention of not over stepping my boundaries. I began to avoid conversations about my race and religion with the goal of avoiding negativity. Accusations of trying to convert children to Islam overshadowed my love of teaching the multi-faceted curriculum. It was that mindset that brought me to the research questions in this study. I reflected on being in the classroom and changing the way I taught due to my ethnicity. Were these my own insecurities coming to a head or was there truth behind ethnic culture having an influence on teachers and their classrooms? Were other minority teachers experiencing similar issues? I wondered if I would find that others were much

like me and that they too experienced negativity from the outside due to their ethnicity or culture which then resulted in a change in the way they taught.

This research delved into the narratives of minority teachers, myself included, and how they navigated culture in the classroom. The research questions asked were: How do minority teachers identify themselves and their culture? How does their cultural identity influence their teaching in regards to classroom curriculum, environment and relationships? How are critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching evidenced in their classrooms?

In this inquiry, the stories of three minority teachers in Houston were shared. Through interviews and reflections, common themes were identified across the three narratives, revealing findings that surprised this researcher/participant. Aspects previously considered specific to this researcher were actually more universal amongst minority women than before realized. The most personal significance from the research was the realization that being a minority teacher would allow for negative experiences but if chosen by minority teachers such as me, it could lead to something more positive and monumental for their students.

Summary of Findings

Knowing my knowledge would be broken down and reconstructed time and time again as new information arose, I did not set out to find definitive answers. Rather I sought clarity and insight into my own teaching as I explored the teaching of other minority teachers. What I discovered was that when it comes to a teacher's ethnic culture having an influence in the classroom, it was not just ethnicity but culture in general that influenced them and their classrooms. Their past experiences, how they

identified themselves, their beliefs and customs, and the roles they had in life, all contributed to the teachers they were and are today.

The study began by having teachers complete a graphic organizer with characteristics that identified them as a person. As they explained and spoke through each identifier, it was becoming clearer how they saw themselves and what traits they identified with more. Continuing with interviews, revealed their backgrounds, their classrooms, and the teachers they were and hope to become. Through dialogue and discussion, it was apparent that minority teachers had something different to offer students and provided more than they themselves even recognized.

Implications for Practice

This research focused on what others had left out. Looking closely at the diversity and multiculturalism among students is the topic of numerous books and articles. What this study set out to explore was the other cultural factor in the room that had not been discussed as much—the teacher. This inquiry provided implications for both the practice and research communities. As I sifted through the data to resolve the research questions, I found that a teacher's culture, did in fact have an influence on the classroom, specifically on relationships and curriculum. Through the themes that emerged, I also became cognizant of the positive aspects of being a minority teacher where I had once viewed it as a hindrance and disadvantage. The stories of these three minority teachers and insights they provided, opens the dialogue for what can and should be taking place among teachers and in our schools in regards to culture. In the following pages, implications of the study begin with the importance of having minority

teachers in the classroom, then move into the ability of minority teachers to be culturally responsive teachers and end with the power of reflection in the teaching practice.

Benefits of minority teachers in the classroom. Recent events in our nation's history have accumulated into racial tensions that emulate the Civil Rights Movement as individuals call for justice and equality. The shooting of unarmed African-American Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by a White police officer in 2014 was the shot heard around the country with protests taking place nationwide. Leading to the Black Lives Matter movement, these current events brought attention to the need for greater minority representation in not only the police force but also in school boards, the teaching profession and other positions of authority (Egalite & Kisida, 2015). Racial representation in the classroom has become of particular interest to policymakers and parents alike. "Many believe that minority teachers are best situated to counter negative stereotypes and to serve as role models, mentors, or cultural-translators" (Egalite & Kisida, 2015, p. 1). The teachers within this study demonstrated their ability to be role models, mentors and cultural translators.

Being minority themselves, the teachers in this inquiry appeared to be more aware of their students' situations and more understanding of students' feelings and concerns compared to some of their counterparts. Going through many of the same experiences and emotions as their students allowed the teachers to connect with students and to help them navigate through those experiences, not only providing guidance but becoming role models. Growing up with images of women and friends that did not always look like her, Elena learned to appreciate her differences but at a later age in life.

She tried to instill in her students at an early age, confidence and appreciation for who they were.

Dominique was no different. Growing up with a single mom working two jobs, she was left to take care of her younger siblings which, at times, prevented her from completing her homework. Now as a teacher, she was able to reach out to her students and do what she could to ensure their success in her class. Knowing her students might not be able to complete homework due to circumstances outside of their control, by not assigning homework, the possibility of students not turning it in and failing was eliminated.

In an article written for *Educational Leadership*, Mary Futrell (1999) said, It is essential for *all* teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and training to successfully teach diverse student populations. But it is equally important for *all* students to have the opportunity to be taught by teachers who reflect their diversity. (1999, p.30)

As I listened to the stories and responses from participants and journaled about my own experiences, Mary's sentiment became more apparent to me. Minority teachers have something different to offer, as evidenced in participants' natural ability to relate to and advocate for minority students.

Through further analysis it became apparent that each teacher brought their own experiences and background which enabled them to relate to different students. With most our teachers being Caucasian, it can be difficult for them to understand the experiences and issues associated with being a minority, especially being a minority student within our school system. Barb Thomas (1984) purposed that the role of the

teacher is not just to provide information but to be involved in the classroom by providing students the power to express their own “lived experiences.” Based on my personal experiences as a minority student, I became very conscious of racial or religious comments that are made within the classroom. Conscious of how it might affect students, it was my goal to ensure everyone felt safe and comfortable in my classroom and to ensure every student felt heard and appreciated. As minority teachers, we act as mentors, become role models, and allow students into our world as we share our experiences. This is not to say that White teachers cannot establish relationships with minority students, however, students find relatability to the minority status of minority teachers as it makes them different and makes them stand out from the mainstream.

Whether they were aware of their actions or not, minority teachers served as advocates for their minority students. Advocating for students was portrayed differently amongst the three participants. Elena welcomed cultural diversity and wanted students of different cultures and backgrounds in her class where she could bring to light their differences and turn them into something students valued and celebrated about each other, creating a safe environment for learning. Dominique advocated for her middle schoolers by building up their confidence and believing in them when other teachers might have passed them off. She stood up for “these kids” that may have automatically be written off as lazy, “dumb,” or thugs, knowing that there was a story behind each student, their actions and their behavior.

As for me, I found it was necessary to build awareness among teachers and administration on cultural and religious differences and how the smallest actions could

make a student feel uncomfortable or different than the mainstream. Needing to have an emergency assembly for our students, the only venue available was the nearby church which no one disputed. There was concern that there would be parent push back to which there was none, but my principal did not take into consideration how the students of religious minority at our school might feel. They were teased and ridiculed, which is often the case in middle school, but should not have been placed in situations that laid a clear path for making them stand out among the majority.

All students benefit from minority teachers. They are offered a different perspective and are exposed to other cultures while learning how to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Minority teachers serve as role models for all students but more specifically the minority population and become someone with whom students can relate. Based on a study completed with New York middle schoolers, Cherng and Halpin (2016) summarized that,

On average, all student groups have more positive ratings of minority teachers, including White students and Asian American students, suggests that minority teachers can translate their experiences and identities to form rapport with students that do not share the same race or ethnicity. (p. 46)

In a study done by New York University professors with over 50,000 students across 200 different schools, students gave better scores to their Latino and Black teachers in the areas of their ability to challenge and care for them (Klein, 2016). It is beneficial for minority students to see minorities in positions of authority and in positions in which they can serve as role models to young adults. With the changing demographics of students, the culture gap between student and teacher continues to grow. The need to

diversify the teaching field is obvious, but the benefits of having minority teachers in the classroom are now becoming more and more apparent. Minority teachers have a way of reaching out to kids and understanding their struggles. They are more inclined to naturally be culturally responsive teachers and to recognize the need to make students feel welcome; which is exactly what came to light in participants' interviews in this study.

Being culturally responsive teachers. In *The Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 2009), culturally responsive teaching was described as a pedagogy in which the importance of including student culture in all aspects of learning is recognized. Although unclear whether minority teachers are naturally inclined to be culturally responsive teachers, the participants within this study appeared to be aware of culturally responsive pedagogy and its implementation in the classroom. From the lessons that were described by each teacher to the interactions they had with students, participants seemed to naturally incorporate their students' lives and heritages into the classroom. Aside from the curriculum, the teachers seemed to take a genuine interest in getting to know their students and their cultures. From Elena's student of the week to Dominique attending cultural festivals, they built relationships with their students. They demonstrated interest in each student as a whole person and not just a child needing to be taught a state mandated curriculum.

Being aware of their students' cultures and bringing it into the classroom was not the only way participants were culturally responsive. Recognizing the curriculum could not be taught from one perspective, the teachers in this study provided additional resources to supplement the state and school mandated text and standards. Dominique

recognized the varying truths in history and provided readings that offer a different perspective on historical events, knowing her students came from varying backgrounds. Similarly, Dominique, Elena engaged students by reading books that offered a variety of characters from all walks of life with the hopes that her second graders would relate to a character or understand that we all have different backgrounds and there was a whole other world to see outside her four walls.

Attached to culturally responsive teaching is the idea of cultural sensitivity. With the increase in globalization, trainings and workshops on cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness have become the new 'must' for major corporations and businesses (Sifter, 2013). It should be no different in education. Interviewing the other two teachers, it became evident that some of their counterparts did not practice culturally responsive teaching, nor were some of them culturally sensitive to the diverse students in their classrooms. Dominique shared a story about hearing teachers speak of "these" kids and the lack of culturally responsive teaching being practiced. She said, "I personally feel like, we do not think about minority children and some of these social issues that they deal with just being minority. And people are not being understanding of that." In the third interview, Dominique further explained,

I've heard some things that my kids have come back and told me that other teachers have said and it may not be so much as racist but racially insensitive.

Like my coworker that told my boy that he had nappy hair and bless her heart, she was like, well, my nanny was black.

Dominique not only recognized cultural insensitivity among other teachers but within herself as well. She shared,

I said this in class and as soon as I said it, I thought ‘shit,’ but I’m getting kids signed up for their textbooks, and the kids were like ‘which textbook is it?’ I’m like ‘it’s the one with the dead White people on its cover.’

Reflecting on the situation afterwards caused Dominique to recognize her own insensitivity to the White students in her class by the innocent reply.

Cultural sensitivity is an awareness of not just minority cultures but all cultures other than your own. Like Dominique, I was sensitive to the minority students in the classroom, seemingly more so than other teachers on campus. At the same time, I also recognized my need to be more sensitive to the White mainstream children in my classroom as well. Elena appeared to be more culturally aware than her coworkers as she retold the story of a child’s turban being referred to as a “towel” by another team member. Being aware of the diversity among their student population and being sensitive to their needs and feelings seemed innate to the participants. When asked if workshops or training on culturally responsive teaching were available, Elena and I reported that our school district did not offer any. Dominique responded, describing the training in her district as being “a joke.” Training on culturally responsive teaching was lacking and even non-existent in some cases once teachers were in the field. How about in teacher preparatory programs? Often, discussions on race, diversity and multiculturalism are sprinkled here and there throughout a preservice teacher’s coursework but “teachers continue to exit their teacher preparation programs not prepared to effectively teach all students” (Hayes & Juarez, 2012, p. 3). As shared by Geneva Gay (2000), for teachers to successfully teach *all* students, not just those in the

mainstream, it is important for teachers to have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively implement culturally responsive pedagogy.

Power of reflection. Reflection is serious thought or consideration. As teachers, we often reflect on lessons and what we could have done differently or how we might change it for the next year. However, not much time in schools is dedicated to reflection. In general, it is not built into our daily teaching life and does not include much of the actions outside of the curriculum such as how to make the classroom more culturally responsive. When asked about the interview process and reflecting on her teaching, Dominique said:

It's made me think more about making sure I stay aware of the culture of my students and that I reflect on that in my classroom and that I'm open with my students about my culture and how I feel about it and just have them see me as human and as a black female teacher. Hoping my students understand that and making sure I understand what I'm doing and why I'm doing it stays at the forefront of anything. They deserve it. Just being able to sit back and think about some of the things that have happened in the classroom and how I reacted to them or how I did not react to them.

Elena had similar sentiments when it came to reflection. She related, “[the process] has made me think more of why do I do this and keep that in mind.” For me, as researcher and teacher/participant, the entire dissertation process involved reflection. More specifically, reflection on culture in the classroom brought to light personal and professional insecurities, revealed what I was doing in the classroom and, most importantly, what I should be doing in the classroom.

Recognizing personal bias and understanding one's own culture and identity among participants was realized through reflection. In the *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) wrote,

Reflection as a key means by which teachers can become more in tune with their sense of self and with a deep understanding of how this self fits into a larger context . . . reflection is a factor in shaping identity. (p. 182)

Teachers naturally reflect daily, whether it be on the day's events, lessons or students. However, conscious reflection to help a teacher understand and grow, although necessary, is more difficult to come upon.

As important as reflection is, the ability for it to create better teachers and teaching opportunities has escaped many in the education field. For them, there is little value placed on reflective thinking in teaching, especially when it is reflecting on ideas such as personal bias, culture, and our interactions with students. Reflection should be built into the field as commonly as is lesson planning. This will benefit teachers in understanding themselves and their interactions with students, and allow them to move past merely teaching students to reaching them. Liston and Zeichner described teaching as "work that entails both thinking and feeling; those who can reflectively think and feel will find their work more rewarding and their efforts more successful" (2013, p. xii).

Recommendation

How do we ensure teachers recognize what they bring to the classroom, are culturally responsive and use reflective practices as part of their profession? Teacher preparation programs are the key. As stated before, throughout my preservice education I took classes on multicultural education. These courses taught preservice teachers to be

aware of the diversity of their students, understand the behaviors of children from varying cultures and how to incorporate multiculturalism in the classroom to accommodate all students. Preservice were also taught to keep their biases out of the classroom, making it seem as though they were clean slates with no prior experiences or bias. In my teacher preparation, it was never once brought to my attention that my personal experiences, background, culture, or even more obvious, my race would be a factor in my teaching. I was never taught to address how *my* culture and identity would play a role and influence my future classroom.

In “The Heart of a Teacher,” Parker Palmer (1997) wrote, “knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject . . . *good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*” (italics in original) (p.15-16). It is seldom asked of teachers—even in their preservice years—who they are and how that will influence the classroom. The focus remains primarily on the students’ cultures and the effects culture may have on their learning. As educators, we are typically asked questions about why we want to be teachers, what kind of teacher we want to be and what is our teaching philosophy. The additional questions that should be routinely asked are who are we and *who* do we want to become as teachers. Having participants in this study complete and talk through an identity chart, showed the groups with which they identified, as well as the important roles and traits that made them who they were. This not only provided information for the research, it also gave each person deeper insights into how they saw themselves, and the connection that personal view of ‘self’ had to their current classroom and the way they taught.

The manifestation of a teacher's cultural identity in the classroom was addressed by The National Institute for Urban School Improvement by stating, "many choices that teachers make are determined more from their cultural background than from individual beliefs" (White, Zion, Kozleski & Fulton, 2005, p.2). The authors added, "Teachers continually express their culture; the danger is being unaware of that expression." Built into preservice classes that provide students the knowledge to be culturally relevant teachers should be courses or activities that allow educators opportunities to reflect on their background and to identify their roles within family, friends and society to make themselves more culturally self-aware.

Something as simple as the identity chart participants completed, provided a better understanding of the participant not just for me as the researcher but for the participants themselves. It allowed for reflection and enabled each teacher to become self-aware and to develop a better understanding of how they saw themselves. It was not only what was identified on the chart that gave insight but also what was left off that revealed a new awareness for each person. On my identity chart, I did not identify myself as immigrant but added "American" as an identifier. Immigrant, now, has a negative connotation tied to it, whereas "American" made me feel more mainstream. When talking through the word "American," I always felt the need to identify as such to ensure I was like everyone else. In reality, immigrant was more how I felt to be seen as and perceived to be others. I had a need to make sure people knew I was an American and like them. In contrast, the other two participants did not write American on their chart. That one identifier provided me with more insight into my teaching than anything else had before. This led to a new understanding that my hesitation of teaching World

Cultures the way it should be taught stemmed from my insecurities of being an immigrant. This understanding only came about through figuring out who I was and what identified me.

There is a continuing trend of teachers entering the classroom unprepared “to effectively teach African American and other students of color” (Blanchett, 2006, p. 27). Some teachers have taken a “colorblind” approach to teaching where they see everyone as the same or have subconscious bias emerge in the classroom (Toldson, 2012). Hayes and Juarez (2012) recommended “teacher education programs . . . understand they cannot practice true colorblindness; in fact, color blindness is not an appropriate ideal for social justice” (p. 10). Teacher preparation courses should incorporate the idea of learning who we are as individuals before we begin to learn about ourselves as teachers, our students and how to teach them. Creating more culturally responsive teachers begins with the teacher’s own culture and establishing the teacher’s identity as early as their teacher preparation courses. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2009) sees understanding one’s own culture as the first step to becoming a more culturally sensitive teacher. Before teachers can look deeper into their students’ culture, it is necessary to first knock down one’s own personal bias . . . something which should be occurring in preservice classrooms across the country (Lynch, 2016).

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to this study, one of which was the number of participants. By restricting my study to two participants (three including myself), the data is specific to the teachers that were interviewed providing a snapshot of what it is to be a minority teacher. However, fewer participants allowed for more time to be spent

with each participant. This enabled more detailed information to be obtained which led to a deeper understanding of who the participants were and how culture influenced their classrooms.

Another limitation to the study was that participants were chosen of convenient sampling. Both participants were educators with whom I had previously built a rapport with and had grown to know fairly well. Although considered a limitation, in narrative inquiry relationships are essential to the meaning making process. By having already established a relationship with participants prior to the study I was able to view data with a wider lens as I had more of an understanding of each participants' background and identity. As a researcher and participant myself, walking alongside participants enabled me to be immersed in the research as I explored the same questions allowing potential for a deeper scope of understanding of the participants experience in the research process.

As previously stated, the small nature of this study was not intended to produce findings that could be generalized to a wider population. Due to the personal nature of narrative inquiry, results can be difficult to generalize as everyone's experiences differ as does the meaning they give to their experience. The findings do, however, provide exemplars with which readers and other educators may potentially identify, thus demonstrating the trustworthiness of the study.

Future Studies and Conclusion

What began out of simple curiosity and insecurity, turned into an awakening followed by more questions. For this study, participants were three minority teachers, including me—Atifa—teacher and researcher. The research sought to determine how

teachers' cultures influenced the classroom when it came to curriculum, environment and relationship with students. By conducting this study, I found that I had a lot to offer as a minority teacher. I also evidenced culturally responsive teaching in the classroom, or a lack there of, and recognized the power of reflection.

For future research, I would first like to interview other Muslim teachers. After recognizing that my timidity of being minority was not shared by other participants, I am curious to know if this sentiment is echoed by other Muslim teachers, particularly considering the changing times and current events. Adding White, majority teachers to the study would provide a better understanding of their perspective on culture in the classroom and give insights into how culture is exhibited in their classroom.

Stepping away from teachers to focus on students' perspectives of their teachers, race and the classroom would be another avenue of interest. From the teacher's perspective, this study made evident some of the things teachers do to build relationships with students. This study evoked questions about student perspectives on the related issues. What are students' ideas and concerns about culture and race in school? Do they think about their teacher's culture and race? What do they think about their relationships with their teachers and the way teachers establish those relationships? These are a few questions that may drive future research.

As a qualitative researcher, I knew not to expect concrete answers to my inquiries but rather to anticipate that the research would lead to more questions and stories. What I did not expect to find was my own teaching and cultural identity in the process. I wanted to gain insight into my insecurities in hopes that my concerns were more universal. I wanted to share the tale of three cultures and how they influence the

teacher's classroom. What I found opened me up to the beauty of diversity among teachers.

This inquiry was founded amidst negativity pessimism. Many will claim in their final section of their dissertation that was not an ending but just the beginning. For me, concluding this study and dissertation is an ending. For me, it put an end to thinking we (teachers) are surface level teachers with no substance. It changed by thinking, helping me to understand that we come to the classroom with a background and experience from which students can benefit. For me, the inquiry also put an end to my insecurities. Finally, it put an end to seeing the negativity of being a minority teacher and recognizing the powerful benefits of a resource that often goes unnoticed. Alongside answers to the research questions, I found a renewed optimism and hope for our schools and students. What I found was my lost spark for teaching and inspiring change in my students.

This study was not conducted with the intention of being generalized or duplicated on a greater scale. This study was a sharing of stories with the hope that others would relate to them, find the positives in the research and use that knowledge going forward to better their own teaching experience while enriching the lives of those they teach. After ten years of teaching, I opened a door to another aspect of my teaching. As I continue forward, I encourage those that have read this research to look within, reflect, and not only identify who they are but use the insight to make their own cultural connections in the classroom.

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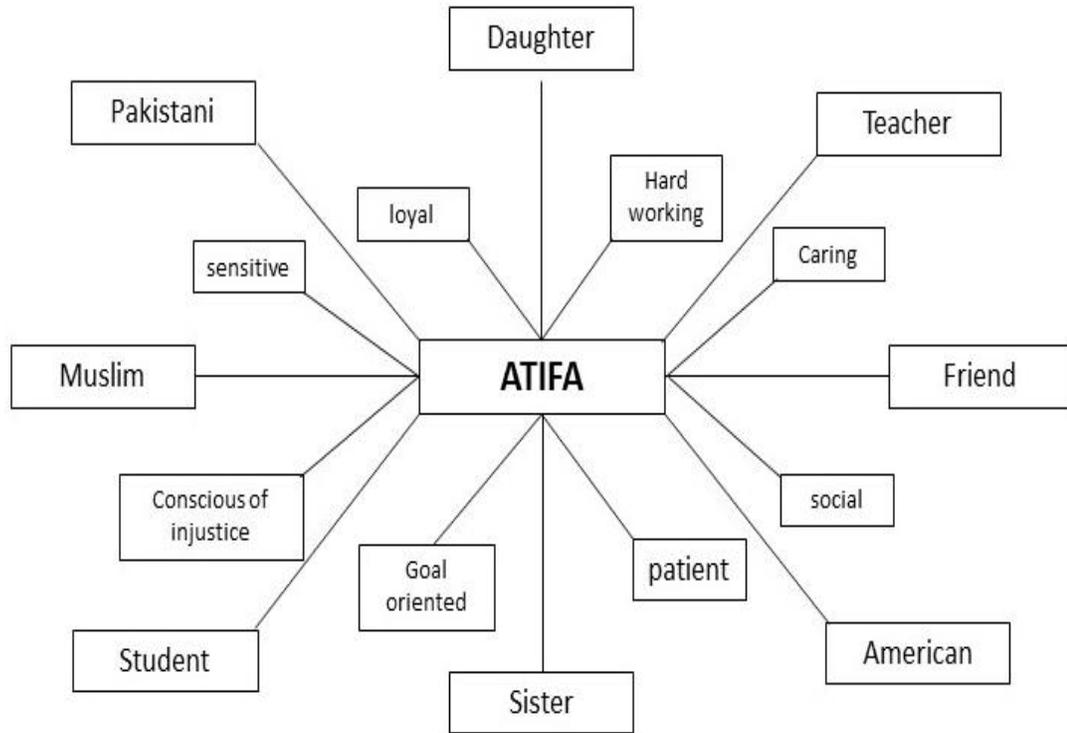
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Appendix A

My Identity Chart

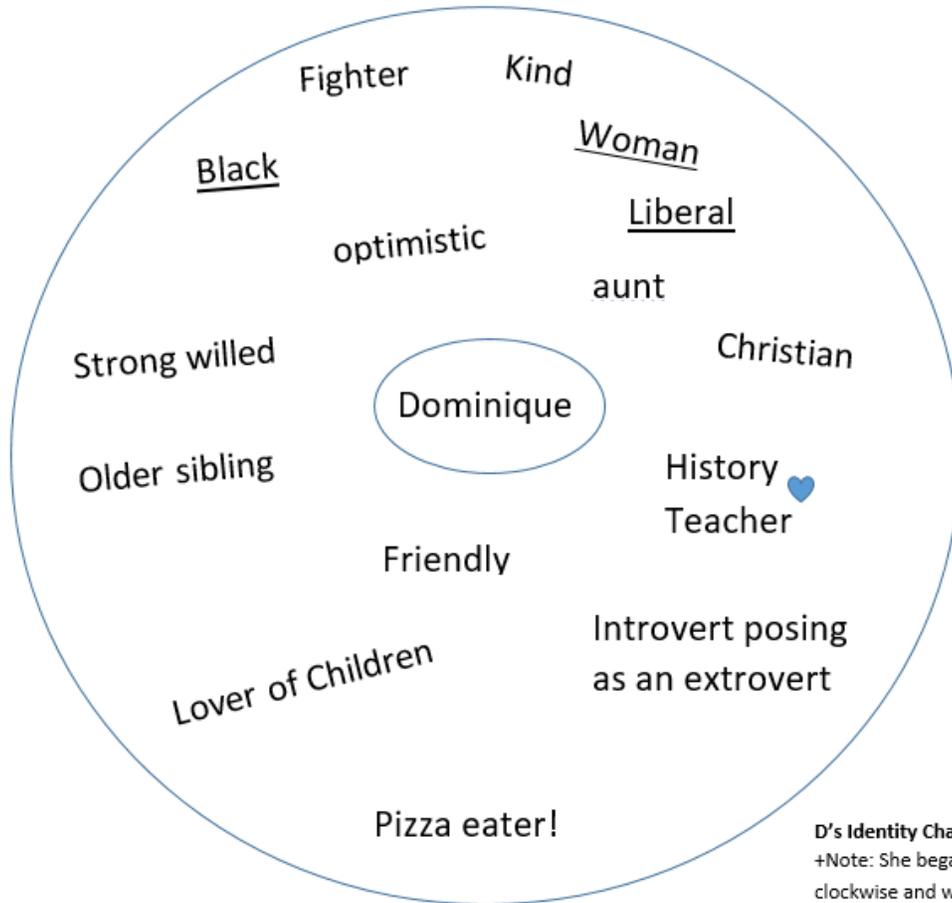
My Identity Chart



Appendix B

Dominique's Identity Chart

Dominique's Identity Chart

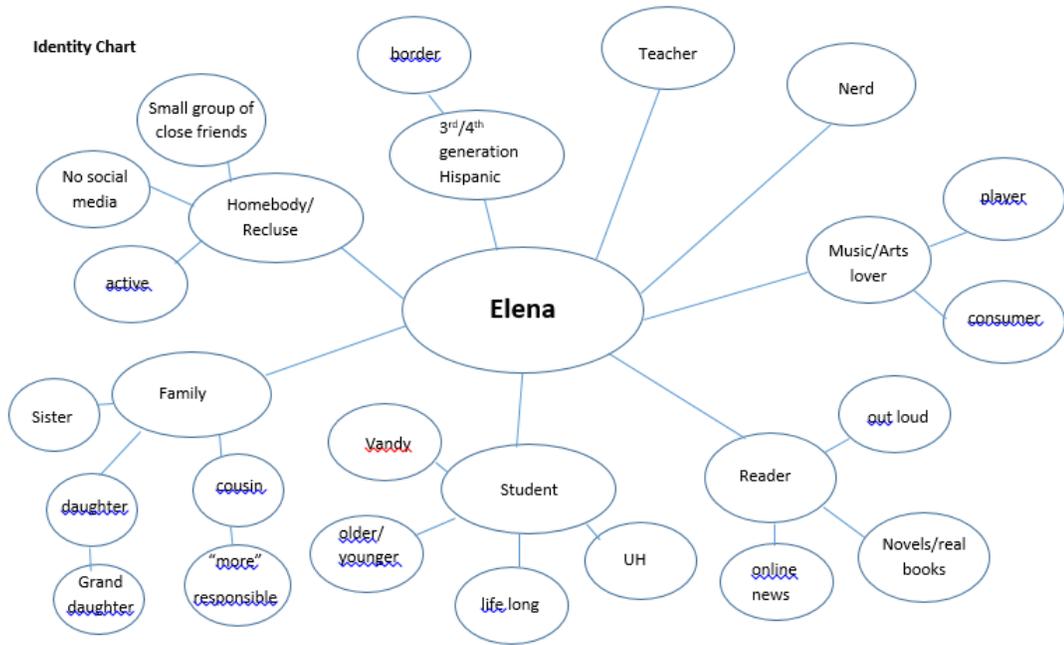


D's Identity Chart
+Note: She began with "Black", worked clockwise and went back to underline words.

Appendix C

Elena's Identity Chart

Elena's Identity Chart



Appendix D

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development

Erikson's Stages Psychosocial Stages of Development

Trust vs. mistrust: As the infant learns of the uncertain world around him, they learn to trust by relying on their caregiver for stability and consistency. Success in this stage leads to hope, whereas lack of consistency or harsh care leads to mistrust.

Autonomy vs. shame and doubt: In this stage, the child is learning to their many skills and abilities while asserting their newly found independence through mobility. Success in this stage leads to will versus becoming overly dependent if overly controlled and lack self-esteem.

Initiative vs. Guilt: through planning activities and play, the child develops the ability to make decisions and lead others. Success in this stage leads to the virtue of purpose.

Industry vs. Inferiority: with greater interaction with their peers in this stage, children's acceptance and ability to demonstrate certain competencies becomes a source of self-esteem. Success in this stage leads to competence but if the skill is not developed, it will lead to a sense of inferiority.

Identity vs. confusion: As children transition to adulthood the individual becomes more independent and wanting to fit into society becomes more important. During this stage, the child will begin to learn their roles in society and reevaluate their identity. According to *The Developing Child*, at the end of this stage there should be "a reintegrated sense of self, of what one might want to do or be, and of one's appropriate sex role" (Bee, 1992). Success in this stage leads to fidelity and the ability "to commit one's self to others on the basis of accepting others even there may be ideological differences" (McLeod, 2008). Failure to establish one's role in society leads to confusion or identity crisis as the individual is unsure of their place in society and experiment with different lifestyles.

Intimacy vs. isolation: In this stage we begin sharing ourselves with others and establishing long term relationships with those outside of our family. Success in this stage leads to commitment, safety, and care in a relationship and acquisition of the virtue of love. Avoiding commitment and intimacy can lead to loneliness, isolation, and at times, depression.

Generativity vs. stagnation: we step back and begin looking at the bigger picture and give back to society by raising children and becoming active in the community. Success in this stage provides the virtue of care. If we fail to achieve these qualities, we become stagnate and become feeling unproductive.

Ego integrity vs. despair: During this phase which occurs around retirement, a person reflects upon their accomplishments and is able to develop integrity. If we do not see ourselves as productive upon our reflection, that leads to despair. Success in this stage leads to the final virtue of wisdom.

Appendix E

Data Collection Chart

Data Collection Chart				
Method	Topic	Time Required	Duration	Participants
Initial interview	Biographical- focus on my participant's life history and provide background as well as context to their present experiences.	90 minutes	Once	Two other participants
Second interview	Narrative- focus on my participant's present experience with culture and ethnicity in the classroom.	90 minutes	Once (2 weeks after initial interview)	Two other participants
Final interview	Follow-up- allows participants to reflect on the meaning of experiences; ask questions and clarification.	90 minutes	Once (2 weeks after second interview)	Two other participants
Reflections	Teachers reflect on experiences related to ethnicity during the week that impacted their teaching.	Varies (approx.. 10-15 minutes)	Weekly for four weeks	All participants (myself included)
Journaling	Log my daily experiences with culture and ethnicity as they pertain the classroom, lesson plans, and relationship with students.	Varies (approx. 15-20 minutes)	Every day	myself

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself: Where did you grow up? Who raised you? Where are your parents from?
- What brought you to teaching? When did you become aware that you wanted to become a teacher?
- How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
- How do you identify yourself? In what ways would you identify yourself?
- Define the culture(s) you identify with.
- In what ways do you or do you not use cultural pedagogy?
- How would you describe your relationship with your students?
- What kind of struggles, if any, do you encounter with your curriculum?
- How would you describe your ethnic culture?
- Describe how your ethnic culture helps or hinders you in the classroom?
- How has your ethnic culture influenced or not influenced your teaching or in your classroom?
- Can you think of a story from your teaching when you felt racial tension as a teacher?
- Tell me when you became aware of personal bias?
- Tell me about your results of the personal bias quiz from the Teach Tolerance website. What did you think?

Appendix G
IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

May 12, 2016

Atifa
Manzoor
c/o Dr.
Cameron
White
Dean, Education

Dear Atifa Manzoor,

The University of Houston's Institutional Review Board, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "The Tale of Three Cultures: Identifying Influences of Teacher Ethnicity in the Classroom" on January 15, 2016, according to federal regulations and institutional policies and procedures.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately fulfill the requested contingencies, and your project is now **APPROVED**.

- **Approval Date:** May 12, 2016
- **Expiration Date:** May 11, 2017

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

To ensure that no lapse in approval or ongoing research occurs, please ensure that your protocol is resubmitted in RAMP for renewal by the deadline for the **April 2017** CPHS meeting. Deadlines for submission are located on the CPHS website.

During the course of the research, the following must also be submitted to the CPHS:

- Any proposed changes to the approved protocol, prior to initiation; AND
- Any unanticipated events (including adverse events, injuries, or outcomes) involving possible risk to subjects or others, within 10 working days.

If you have any questions, please contact Samoya Copeland at (713) 743-9534.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Lorraine Reitzel, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document, if one is approved for use. All research data, including signed consent documents, must be retained according to the University of Houston Data Retention Policy (found on the CPHS website) as well as requirements of the FDA and external sponsor(s), if applicable. Faculty sponsors are responsible for retaining data for student projects on the UH campus for the required period of record retention.

Protocol Number: 16229-01

Full Review: Expedited Review: X

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.