

NEW TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS OF COLOR

by

Akilah Walker Willery

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in Professional Leadership Specializing in Social Education and Social Justice

Chair of Committee: Dr. Cameron White

Committee Member: Dr. Laveria Hutchison

Committee Member: Dr. Jane Cooper

Committee Member: Dr. Michaelann Kelley

University of Houston

September 2020

Copyright 2020, Akilah Walker Willery

Dedication

In this space, at this moment and always, I give thanks for the unconditional love and support from husband, who has always had more faith in me than I have in myself. “You are still my favorite”. I hope this work stands as an example to my two sons, that honor, hard work and commitment will help you reach any goal in life. Stay humble and true to yourselves, and remember that you stand on the shoulders of giants that came before you. I owe a lifetime of gratitude to my parents, my sister and extended family for their love, and for every prayer they said on my behalf. I hope I am worthy of the support they each continue to give me.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Drs. Cameron White, Laveria Hutchison, Jane Cooper and Michaela Kelley, who served on my committee and entertained my endless frantic questions. You patiently offered stern guidance throughout this process and I appreciate every lesson learned along the way. I gained a great deal of knowledge and wisdom from each of you. My promise is to pay it forward to future candidates that choose to embark on this same journey.

Thank you to every friend, colleague or random stranger that offered a word of encouragement and made me believe I could really achieve this big audacious goal. If you ever smiled at me and said “you’ve got this”, I took it personally and believed you. None of this would have been possible without the Friday night study dates with my divas, who never wavered from their positivity and support, and lifted up the ladies standing next to them. You each deserve all the great things coming your way.

I never dreamed I would go this far, but I also know this is not the end. My goals continue to evolve, but reaching this big one has made me believe they are all possible. If there is any little Black girl that sees my journey and accomplishments as inspiration for her own journey, then it was all worth it.

“She needed a hero, so that’s what she became”. ~Unknown

Abstract

Background: This study gathers insight into what professional development new teachers believe they need to implement culturally responsive practices in their classroom practices. **Purpose:** This study asks the question, what are new teachers' perspectives of their professional development needs for implementing culturally responsive classroom practices? The study is set in a large urban school district in southeast Texas, where the student discipline rates are not in proportion with the ethnic data. **Methods:** The qualitative narrative case study design shares the perspectives of three teachers, selected through convenience and purposive snowball sampling from the researcher's social network. These educators are new to teaching, with up to three years of experience. Two of the participants are White and not from Texas. One participant is LatinX and grew up in the school district in where the study takes place. They each had no prior experience working in an urban high-poverty school district with students of color. The researcher used a latent approach to perform a thematic data analysis. Data collected included the researcher's journal notes written during the recruitment process and after each interview, two one-hour long semi-structured interviews with each teacher, and one 10-minute follow up interview for member checking. All the interviews were conducted through videoconferencing. Each interview was recorded and the video was uploaded into transcription software to be analyzed deductively, with the researcher looking for similarity in the patterns for each interview question response. **Results:** The findings revealed that these new teachers believe they need support in learning how to build relationships with their students of color, as well as understanding the social and emotional learning needs of both their students and themselves. The findings also

showed that new teachers need this support regardless of whether they grew up in socioeconomic environments similar to their students or not. The teachers demonstrated that even in an era when heightened racial discussions are taking place, they feel a level of discomfort, and still prefer specific guidance, for how to approach culturally responsive teaching practices. They prefer professional development that may include role simulations, book studies, and regular group discussions with other new teacher peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. **Conclusion:** New teachers will need a great amount of specific support when implementing culturally responsive teaching. New teachers will benefit from guidance on how to begin relationship building, while not causing harm to their students. Whether teachers are originally from affluent or high-poverty communities, they will require high levels of support to become more comfortable working with students of color.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Personal Narrative.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Theoretical Framework for the Study	10
Purpose of the Study	10
Context of the Study	12
Definition of Terms.....	13
Significance of the Problem.....	13
Educational Value of the Study	15
Summary	17
Chapter 2.....	19
A Review of the Literature	19
Urban Education	21
Public Education in Post Racial America	27
Bias and Perceptions	28
Teacher Preparedness and Student Achievement	30
Teacher Bias and Discipline	31
Overcoming Bias in the Classroom	33

Conclusion	37
Chapter 3	38
Research Design.....	38
Methodological Framework.....	38
Positionality	40
Context of the Study	41
Participants.....	43
Sampling Design	44
Data Collection	46
Instruments.....	47
Data Analysis	49
Triangulation and Trustworthiness	50
Summary	51
Chapter 4	53
Hope.....	55
Anna.....	58
Mary.....	60
Parallel Themes That Emerged	62
Summary	84
Chapter 5	86

Discussion	86
Overview of the Study	87
Triangulation and Trustworthiness	88
Future Research	90
Recommendations	91
References	93
Appendix A	99
Appendix B	101
Appendix C	102
Appendix D	105
Appendix E	111

List of Tables

Table 1	54
---------------	----

Chapter 1

Introduction

The goal of this qualitative narrative study is to explore the professional development needs from the perspective of new teachers new to Texas, and working with students of color in high-poverty urban communities. The researcher defines new teachers as those that are within one to three years of teaching experience. This study features new teachers that received their teacher preparation through either traditional colleges of education programs or alternative certification programs. These new teachers have been recruited from colleges and universities located in the Midwestern region of the U.S, as well within the community where the study was conducted. The teacher participants of this study are White females from Middle-class Midwestern backgrounds, and one LatinX female from a high-poverty background. Their cumulative life experiences up to this study will show they had limited experience with building relationships with people of color, in particular Black people, and prior to becoming teachers. This sets the context for exploring their needs and allowing them to reflect on what professional development supports they feel could help them better relate to and building relationships with their students of color from high-poverty urban communities.

Personal Narrative

My job is to help teachers get better at their jobs. However, one area where my district's teachers were not doing well was in relating to their Black students. Student achievement and reading levels are low for Black students, while discipline referrals and overrepresentation in Special Education programs are too high. Add to this that the majority of the teachers in the district are White females, with a significant amount of

new teachers being from White Middle-class backgrounds in the Midwestern regions of the US. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) points out, non-Black teachers might not “consciously deprive or punish Black children on the basis of their race, but at the same time they are not unconscious of the ways in which some children are privileged and others are disadvantaged in the classroom” (p. 35).

In the summer of 2019, I assumed a role as the leader of the newly formed professional learning department. This team would be charged with researching and providing for the professional development needs of all instructional staff in the district. One aspect of this assignment was to gather evidence-based best practices and develop professional learning that would strengthen classroom instruction. Another part of the assignment was to create a system that would document all professional development efforts and follow through on support measures, so teachers were supported beyond the initial training sessions, and truly transformed their classroom practices.

The practice of teachers engaging in professional development is primarily for improving instruction through the continuous examination of students’ learning (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers attend professional development to become better teachers. This is done through careful study of curriculum resources and instructional strategies to deliver content effectively to students. Participating in professional development is a commonly accepted practice for educators as part of continuous improvement supporting the craft of teaching. Traditional and non-traditional teacher certification programs prepare teachers as much as they can through theoretical study. These certification programs prepare teachers to enter teaching as a profession. Professional development

programs allow for job-embedded training and support to help existing teachers improve their practice.

I recognized that teacher preparation in my district was lacking some essential elements, such as a culturally responsive teaching and a deeper understanding of the ethnic and cultural make ups of the schools. In the past, the teachers were welcomed into the district with a full day of pageantry and celebration at our district's annual new teacher induction academy. This day included a rather elaborate opening program featuring theatrical performances from the district's student dance company and a motivational keynote address by the superintendent. Then the attendees would attend rotating sessions that superficially touched on instructional strategies, digital resources and classroom management. They would also have a chance to eat lunch with their new principal and other new staff members from their campus. Within several post-event surveys from the new teachers that would attend the event, the reviews were lackluster. Many would say they enjoyed the celebratory nature of the event, but would add they did not really learn much that would help prepare for their entry as new teachers to the district. Some of what was missing had a lot to do with culture, identity and race (Durkin & Rothman, 2006). A large number of new teachers recruited to teach in this district reflect the demographics of the larger teaching pool in other education communities across the country.

They are mostly White women from Middle-class backgrounds and are more likely to have been recruited from a Midwestern colleges of education. Many have never worked with or had any personal relationships with people of color. This is vital because developing strong relationships with their students would be key to becoming successful

teachers (Durkin & Rothman, 2006)). Without some structure of support in the form of professional development, these newly recruited teachers will be gone from the district, and possibly the teaching profession, within three years (Sullivan, 2017). The pool of teaching candidates is shrinking (Henke, 2013). Public perception is of an education system that is broken and failing students of color. It is necessary to wrap an additional layer of preparation and support around teachers before they get frustrated within a system they willingly chose to join. This teacher support could be one of the first steps toward addressing some current achievement gaps with students of color.

As a Black woman and veteran educator, I felt drawn to research this topic. As the researcher, I personally debated if I was too emotional or biased to seek out the perspectives of non-Black professionals objectively. Throughout the months of this study, racial tensions and debates were sparked in ways that were new and raw to many Americans. The concepts of White privilege and systemic racism were brought to the forefront. The police shootings of unarmed Black people, along with the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers sparked massive protests around the globe. The Black Lives Matter group was beginning to be seen as a legitimate activist organization, although it had once been characterized as spreading polarizing messages. This was all added to a political climate that I have personally never witnessed reach such a volatile level in my lifetime.

Opening this conversation and attempting to curb my emotions for a research study that put so much at stake for me was a true risk. However, I took the leap and began to see it differently. I yearned to join the Black Lives Matter protests within my own city (blmhouston.com, n.d.). Tears threatened to flow when I shared this need with

my spouse, and he told me he did not support me joining ranks with the thousands of protesters and foot soldiers we watched on cable news networks. Instead, he expressed concern for my safety because he too felt that race relations and frustrations were reaching an undeniably dangerous level. Our safe suburban lifestyle did not provide me with any experience for how to conduct myself if I chose to join a movement grounded in political and social unrest.

As I came to the realization that I might not be able to physically participate in the protests, I decided that I could be part of the change, but in an area where I was indeed experienced. In my own career as a school district administrator, I recognized an area where I could help explore solutions to a problem that had gone unresolved for far too many years. The Black students in my own school district needed a change. Black students were a minority in my school district, but they made up the overwhelming majority of students referred for disciplinary reasons. Black boys were the subpopulation most disproportionately represented in each category of alarm. They were overrepresented with discipline referrals, referrals to Special Education and intervention programs, while being underrepresented in academic achievements. Overall, we were failing our Black students. The Texas Tribune releases school district demographic data annually and their report showed that roughly 58% of Texas teachers were White females (Murphy & Daniel, 2019). These two groups at opposite ends of the ethnic and gender spectrums come together every day in every classroom in my district. I wanted to know if there was something we were missing in preparing our non-Black teachers to successfully address the needs of our Black students. This is how I became focused on this topic for this research study. This is how I would contribute to seeking solutions for a

small part of some societal ills, by researching how non-Black teachers can be prepared to better serve Black students and all students of color in general.

Studies such as the Rowan University Urban Teacher Academy aims to prepare preservice teachers not just for work in the classroom, but specifically for working in urban high-poverty schools. In comparison to traditional teacher preparation programs, the Rowan University program takes into account that “while teacher education programs may produce teachers who are committed to educational equity, programs often do not fully understand or embrace the differences in urban schools, thus causing a tendency to place culture, ethnicity, or race as an afterthought—albeit one with good intentions.” (White, Brown, Graham Viator, Byrne, Ricchezza, 2016, p. 3). This program in particular at least acknowledges that preparing teachers for working in urban high-poverty schools should involve “looking more closely at who the teachers are in the classrooms and what their own perceptions are as educators. Educators can then begin to understand who the urban student is, and the environment where the student is being raised” (White, et al., 2016, p. 20).

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is closing the achievement gap between students of color in high-poverty schools and White students in more affluent schools with access to quality resources. These resources might include access to more course options, up to date technology and teachers that have degrees in the content area they teach (Henke, 2013). In order to begin to address this issue, teachers that work with students of color in high-poverty communities need to be fully prepared to work and build relationships with these students. This can begin with more professional development on culturally

responsive teaching practices. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), U.S. schools are relatively segregated. Middle-class affluent schools are catering to White suburban students, and urban economically struggling schools are catering to Black and Brown, or LatinX, students. Some studies have found that low-income urban schools are harder to staff (Heinke, 2013).

There will be exceptions to the scenarios, but student achievement in the schools will be higher where there are more financial resources and support (del Brey, 2018). Student achievement will be lower in schools where the students come from lower socioeconomic communities with limited support systems. It would be easy to let the observation end there and accept that students from struggling communities are doomed to continue life as they know it. It could be assumed that many of the negative circumstances of the children in these low performing schools are self-inflicted and due to poor life choices or behavioral problems. However, the consideration of social and racial issues might question whether the students of these low performing schools ever had fair access and equal opportunities, which a strong education can affect. Lack of access to quality resources, teacher under preparedness, and cultural bias may lead to shortchanging these students out of a quality education (Durkin & Rothman, 2006). Teachers also cannot adopt a mindset of reducing the significance of a student's experiences outside the classroom and expect them to leave them behind when "they cross the threshold of the schoolhouse door" (Reeves, 2010, pg. 60). The researcher was aware that personal bias is inherent in this type of research in one's own working environment (Merriam, 1998). It was the act of doing data analysis for several campuses that it was noticed campuses that had low achievement scores for Black students and high

numbers of Black students being referred for discipline issues. Although this data will not be included in this study, it influenced the researcher's decision to pursue this area of study. It highlighted an area of need that the district should address because there appears to be a disconnect with how our teachers are relating to their Black students.

The researcher was aware that personal bias is inherent in this type of research in one's own working environment (Merriam, 1998). It was the act of doing data analysis for several campuses that it was noticed campuses that had low achievement scores for Black students and high numbers of Black students being referred for discipline issues. Although this data will not be included in this study, it influenced the researcher's decision to pursue this area of study. It highlighted an area of need that the district should address because there appears to be a disconnect with how our teachers are relating to their Black students.

According to Christine Sleeter (2016):

Teacher education programs in countries where minoritized students experience systematic and persistent racial discrimination face tension between (1) producing teachers equipped to reverse discrimination in classrooms and schools, especially those attended by minoritized students, and (2) helping everyone considering teaching to develop their knowledge of how they can address racial discrimination, even if most teacher candidates take only baby steps. (p.1065).

A portion of the student population was being pushed out of classrooms where they receive direct instruction, into offices and in-school suspension rooms where they do not receive direct instruction. With the loss of direct instruction, there is a correlation to lower academic achievement of Black students. Many of these referrals were for minor

infractions such as not having a pen or pencil for class, tardiness or talking without permission.

As a subgroup, Black boys continue to fall below expected achievement levels in multiple domains according to Texas school accountability ratings. Principals in my district ask for ways to deal with the problem of teachers giving discipline referrals to Black boys for minor infractions that build up over time and lead to more serious discipline problems. With Black boys being a relatively small part of the student population at most of our schools, it is concerning when they are disproportionately receiving the majority of discipline referrals for minor infractions. Pedro Noguera (2008) states that black males are perceived to be “a threat that must be policed, controlled or maintained.” (p.xi). Noguera (2008) goes on to explain further.

In many schools in the United States, educators have grown so accustomed to seeing Black male students drop out, fail and get punished that their plight is barely regarded as a cause for alarm. In fact, it could be argued that the problems confronting Black males are so pervasive and commonplace that they have been normalized. (p. xviii).

This study gains insight from teachers regarding their needs for implementing culturally responsive practices to better relate and understand their students of color. Because the average U.S. teacher is a White female over the age of 40, there could be cultural disconnects that needs probing. In 2017, about 80 percent of U.S. teachers were White, making up 9 out of 10 teachers in primary schools (Loewus, 2017). This study explores teachers’ perceptions of their ability to effectively work with students of

color, as well as recognize if their own racial bias influences their perception of their students.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The themes that emerged from this research include culturally responsive teaching, critical race theory, professional development, urban education, and teacher preparation. Culturally responsive teaching practices is at the very center of the study. To get to a point where teachers are able to change their behaviors in relation to their students of color, they will explore critical race theory, as so much about the mainstream American value system is rooted in whiteness ideals. This study includes several references to whiteness, systemic racism, urban education and high-poverty communities. These concepts will be central to understanding the complete dynamics of working with students of color and the historical context of the surrounding community, as well as the systemically racist origins that created the socioeconomic status of those communities. Cochran-Smith stated that “when teachers have a true sense of the systemic inequities their students face and their own evolving dispositions, they may be more likely to develop an ethic of caring” (as cited Annamma, 2015, p.293). The professional development of existing teachers and the teacher preparation of incoming novice teachers is also central to this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gather insight into what new teachers believe they need to implement culturally responsive practices in their classroom practices. Two of these teachers have the common profile of being new educators that are recruited from predominantly White Middle-class Midwestern regions. One of the teachers grew up in

the high-poverty community where she now teaches. There is also be consideration for new teachers that entered profession after receiving preparation from alternative certification programs, as that can also be a critical issue (Darling-Hammond, Barnett Berry, L., Thoreson, A., 2001). State officials in New Jersey and Texas report that nearly one-fourth of new teachers enter the field through alternative certification (Cohen-Vogel, L and Hyland, H., 2007). They generally have had limited prior experience working in urban high-poverty districts with students of color. As a professional development professional, the researcher will gain valuable information about what these teachers believe are their training needs as they try to build relationships with their students of color through culturally responsive teaching practices. The teachers will need to first understand their own identity and how that compares to the identities of their students. This means they will need to understand the concept of whiteness and come to terms with their own implicit biases.

An additional area of concern is whether access to professional development that aids these teachers in building relationships with their students could possibly prevent them from leaving their job assignments in schools of high-poverty students in urban communities. In the district where this study takes place, many of these new teachers will work in this high-poverty urban district long enough to gain their initial experience. Still, they may transfer to other schools in more affluent communities after a few years (Sullivan, 2017). One question to ask is whether those same teachers would be inclined to remain teaching in a high-poverty district with students of color if they were better equipped with culturally responsive teaching practices.

Research Question:

To what extent would teacher efficacy be affected if culturally responsive practices were shared with them early enough in their teaching career to counter some of the anticipated struggles they might face?

Context of the Study

The school district where this study was conducted is located in a large urban city in southeast Texas. The school district serves over 67,000 students and spans 111 square miles, bordering a major airport, with interstate highways crisscrossing through its region. The student ethnic demographics are Hispanic or LatinX 73.3%, African American or Black 22.7%, White 1.9%, Asian 1.1%, and Multiracial .07% (Murphy & Daniel, 2019). The student population is 87.3% economically disadvantaged, which according to the Texas Education Agency means these students are from households that meet income requirements eligible for free or reduced lunch according to the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. As of the 2019-2020 school year, there are 4,503 teachers actively working in the district.

What makes the ethnic breakdown so significant is that the student discipline data is not in proportion with the ethnic data. The number Black or African American students with two or more behavior referrals is double the amount of discipline referrals of all other students combined. This is in spite of the fact that Black students only make up less than 23% of the total student population (Murphy & Daniel, 2019). The achievement reading levels of Black students is significantly lower than other groups of students in the district. If a student is out of class for disciplinary reasons, they are not receiving the same amount of direct instruction as students that are in the class. Being

out of class for discipline issues and not receiving the same amount of instruction could have a significant impact on these students' academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

Culturally responsive teaching- teaching that centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference (Gay, 2018)

Critical race theory- a collection of critical stances against the existing legal order from a race-based point of view (Brooks, 1994)

Professional learning or Professional development- an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards (as cited in LearningForward.org)

Urban education- in education circles, the term urban has become coded to connect any “explicit reference to students’ lower socioeconomic status, as well as their race by substituting the construct urban students and schools” (Buendía, 2010, p. 2)

Significance of the Problem

The significance of this study is to gain feedback on what teachers believe are their most pressing needs, in regards to professional development that will assist them in building relationships with their students of color, through culturally responsive practices. The field of research is full of what teachers’ needs might be. However, the goal of this study is to hear from the teachers themselves. The school district in this study is located in Houston, Texas. Still, the district spends significant effort recruiting teachers from

colleges and universities across the Midwest and northeast regions of the United States. As a result, many of the district's new teachers are new to Houston and to the demographics of the surrounding urban community. It would be understandable if these newly recruited teachers from predominantly White Middle-class backgrounds felt some culture shock upon arrival to the district.

The researcher's goal, as a practitioner, is to gain insight into what these teachers believe they need in the form of professional development support to better understand and relate to their students of color and their surrounding communities. Education organizations seeking to make sustainable improvements must "harness the power of the individual" (Reeves, 2010. Pg. 87). The question to be answered is what the teachers believe are their biggest needs when it comes to working with students of color. What needs to be known is about the support needs of new teachers that are not from Texas or the Houston area. According to the district's Human Resources website (2019), there were 37 active university partnerships between the school district and colleges of education across the country. Of the 37 partnerships, 20 of them were with colleges and universities in regions of the country with an ethnic White majority. These states included Utah, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Indiana. In conversation with one of the recruiting directors in the district's human resources department, it is a common practice to hire most of the student teachers that complete their programs of study within the district (Ramon*, personal communication, 2020).

Because so many of this school district's new teachers are recruited from predominantly White populated regions, it is necessary to know what is needed to help them successfully transition and relate to their students of color who are from

communities unlike their own. There needed to be intention with assisting new teachers to understand that their social and emotional behaviors will have just as much impact on their students as their pedagogical practices (Stronge, 2018). The key to this is understanding this information from them before the professional learning team builds any new teacher training to address their most pressing concerns. The researcher will use this insight from the new teachers in the district to inform the professional development team of what they believe they need in terms of support and understanding. This redesigned study would better help the researcher as a practitioner in the field.

This research will be a qualitative case study. The intent is to gain insight from three new teachers in this district, with between one and three years of teaching experience. It will be a multi-site study because the teachers will each be recruited from different schools with higher populations of Black and LatinX students. The district itself spans 111 square miles and is informally divided into three regions with distinct racial characteristics. There is the eastern region, which has a higher LatinX population. There is the western region, which has a higher Black or African American population. There is also the northern region, which also has a higher African American population, but has a slightly higher socioeconomic status.

Educational Value of the Study

This study will add to the existing body of knowledge by offering insight on what new teachers believe they need to learn from their perspectives. This district will be taking the opinions of teachers with one to three years of experience working in this high-poverty area with students of color, and designing a professional learning series to address their most pressing concerns. The researcher had several conversations with

Ramon, the human resources director that were responsible for organizing new teacher events and support in recent years. According to his information, the annual attrition rate results in an average of 500-700 teachers being recruited into the district each year (Ramon*, personal communication, March 2020). If a more robust professional learning series could affect the teacher attrition rate in this district, it would be a positive development in several ways. Developing a professional learning program for the district will focus on culturally responsive teaching and social justice themes, as well as holding students of color to high curriculum expectations that value their students' cultural background (Whipp, 2013). First, there would be a growing pool of teachers with a foundational knowledge of culturally responsive practices to better address the needs of students of color. Second, the investment of time and money getting these teachers better prepared to work with high-poverty students of color could have a positive impact on the human resources revolving door efforts to recruit and train large numbers of new teachers each year. As stated previously, the district where this study was conducted has a disproportionate number of discipline referrals for its Black students compared to its other student populations. The number of discipline referrals for Black students is double that of all other students combined. If the teachers create these behavioral and discipline referrals, it would be imperative to investigate from the teachers' perspective why this phenomenon is occurring. Knowing why these teachers are creating more discipline referrals for Black students is the heart of this study. Helping these teachers articulate their needs to improve this situation is the researcher's hopeful outcome of this study.

Where I begin to diverge with the existing body of literature on culturally responsive professional development is the presumption that training teachers with

culturally responsive practices will solve the problems facing urban education. Teachers must understand culturally responsive teaching for their classroom practices. Still, they must also be prepared and willing to seek change in societal policies that marginalize students by race and social class (Whipp, 2013). Studies such as the Rowan University Urban Teacher Academy, which aims to prepare preservice teachers not just for work in the classroom, but specifically for working in urban high-poverty schools (White, Brown, Graham Viator, Byrne, Ricchezza, 2016). . In comparison to traditional teacher preparation programs, the Rowan University takes into account that “while teacher education programs may produce teachers who are committed to educational equity, programs often do not fully understand or embrace the differences in urban schools, thus causing a tendency to place culture, ethnicity, or race as an afterthought—albeit one with good intentions.” (White et al., 2016, p. 3). This program in particular, at least acknowledges that preparing teachers for working in urban high-poverty schools should involve “looking more closely at who the teachers are in the classrooms and what their own perceptions are as educators. Educators can then begin to understand who the urban student is, and the environment where the student is being raised” (White, et al., 2016, p. 20).

Summary

The goal of this study is to gain insight from new teachers in an urban high-poverty district. The teachers were recruited from outside of the Houston, Texas area. The teachers will share their perspectives regarding their professional development needs for implementing culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. By getting this information directly from the teachers’ perspective, the researcher, as a practitioner will

be able to use this information to direct the district's professional development team to design learning opportunities to address those teachers' needs. The goal is not create training that new teachers will be forced to passively sit through like animals are "trained", but to instead involve them in their own development (Reeves, 2010). The findings from this study could influence the district's initiative for better preparing new teachers for working with students of color from high-poverty communities. By providing more intentionally designed professional development for culturally responsive teaching, it may positively influence the discipline and suspension rates for Black students. It may also affect teacher efficacy and overall retention rates if teachers feel more prepared and empowered to better relate to their students of color.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

When considering the state of K12 education, there are multiple areas to consider that may paint a picture of crisis. For starters, schools are relatively segregated. Middle-class schools to affluent schools are catering to White suburban students, and urban economically struggling schools are catering to Black and brown students. There will be exceptions to the scenarios, but student achievement in these schools will be higher where there are more financial resources and supports. One Stanford University study documented that “two-thirds of black students attended schools that were 90% to 100% black and 80% of white students attended schools that were 90% to 100% white” (Reardon, 2016, p. 35). Student achievement will be lower in schools where the students come from lower socioeconomic communities with limited support systems. Both white and black students’ academic achievement was higher in predominantly white schools than in predominantly minority schools (Reardon, 2016).

Access to more resources affects the quality of the education students receive. More affluent schools with abundant resources can create more learning opportunities from those resources that schools in poor communities cannot (Reardon, 2016). It would be easy to let the observation end there and accept that students from struggling communities are doomed to continue life as they know it. It could be assumed that many of the children’s negative circumstances in these low performing schools are self-inflicted and due to poor life choices or behavioral problems. However, considering social and racial issues might bring into question whether the students of these low performing schools ever had fair access and equal opportunities, which a strong

education can affect. Lack of access to quality resources, teacher under-preparedness, and cultural bias may lead to shortchanging these students out of a quality education. Students in high-poverty schools are shortchanged by the resource they need the most, which is high-quality teachers. Instead, these already marginalized students because they are more likely to be taught by novice teachers who are not certified in their content area they actually teach (Peske and Haycock, n.d.).

However, I would like to question whether racism plays a role in affecting student achievement in these schools. By racism, I am referencing both overt and covert forms of discrimination. This includes large intentional and less obvious microaggressions aimed at students of color. The outdated notion of teachers being colorblind when working with Black students can only remedy the most “blatant forms of discrimination” and do little to help teachers evolve their understanding of students current dispositions (Annamma, 2015, p. 293). I argue that, too few teachers have an adequate critical knowledge of how conventional teaching and learning practices reflect historically White European American cultural values and traditions (Gay, 2018).

Ladson-Billings (2014) hoped her work would create legions of new teachers that would have “an appreciation of their students’ assets to their work in urban classrooms” of Black students (p. 74). These new generations of teachers would focus on students’ academic and personal success as individuals instead of as a collective (Anon, 2019). Instead, ignorance has allowed some teachers to believe that all students can be taught the same without considering their cultural backgrounds and ethnic identity. Whether they are conscious of it or not, teachers are not immune to being shaped and influenced by their culture and experiences. Culture influences how we think, behave, teach and learn

(Gay, 2018). Although suburban White parents say they select schools for their children based on test scores, a school's racial makeup also plays a role in their decision-making (Jones & Shapiro, 2003). Even when the test scores are high, schools are still labeled as bad if mostly students of color populate them (Anon, 2019). Social justice author Robin DiAngelo (2018) states that describing schools in racially coded terms like "urban" and "low test scores" are code words that mean "nonwhite" and are considered less desirable (DiAngelo, pg. 67). In her book, *White Fragility* (2018), Columbia University's Amy Stuart Wells is quoted as saying:

In a post racial era, we don't have to say it's about race or the color of the kids in the building. We can concentrate poverty and kids of color and then fail to provide the resources to support and sustain those schools, and then we can see a school full of black kids and say, 'Oh, look at their test scores.' It is all very tidy now, this whole system. (pg. 67).

Urban Education

In consideration of understanding the current state of urban education, it is essential to distinguish between terminology that has been used interchangeably to describe urban education, whether that use was correct or not. Merriam-Webster defines "urban" as relating to or being a characteristic of a city. In education circles, the term urban has become coded to connect any "explicit reference to students' lower socioeconomic status, as well as their race by substituting the construct urban students and schools" (Buendía, 2010, p. 2). In layman's education terms, "urban" is used to reference the conditions and environments of poor students of color.

The antithesis of the term urban would be suburban, which Merriam-Webster defines as a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city. In simpler terms, as opposed to urban, suburban might be used in education terms as a descriptor of Middle-class or affluent majority White communities. Other terminology is used synonymously to reference urban neighborhoods in a negative or dangerous light. Edward Buendia (2010) states that such metaphoric language has reduced urban communities to “cultural pathologies manifesting as laziness, familial dysfunctionality, incivility and self-induced cycles of perpetual downward mobility” (p. 2).

The segregated status of American schools is not an accident. Black students populating poor urban schools and White students attending more affluent suburban schools are all a direct result of the historic practice of redlining. After the first World War, banks engaged in practices of red-lining neighborhoods, which was denying loans to Black families for housing in suburban Middle-class neighborhoods, and instead only approving loans for Blacks for housing in less affluent urban neighborhoods (Buendia, 2010). White suburban families lobbied their state representatives to structure school funding to favor their community schools to protect their homes and financial investments. The same consideration was not given to urban high-poverty schools (Anyon, 2014). The underfunded quality of the educational experience in high-poverty urban schools is something that would not be tolerated in more affluent suburban communities. The local education agency featured in this study includes Black students that are primarily from the Acres Homes community in Houston, Texas. Acres Homes was once the largest unincorporated Black community in the southern region of the United States, developing around the time of World War I (Kleiner, & J., D., 2010).

Yet, the presumed separate but not equal conditions of American schools continued into the modern era. It is too often assumed that schools serve all students equally, but actually what schools do reinforce the status quo of keeping a dominant group ahead of all other marginalized groups (Irvine, 1990). Education did not cause the disparities between affluent Whites and poor Blacks, and it cannot correct it all by itself. Educational institutions cannot keep doing business as usual and hope that all ills will be corrected. As Milner (1972) stated, “it is not whether the sons are better educated than fathers, but whether the sons of poorly educated fathers have less education, wealth, and status than the sons of educated fathers” (p. 43).

However, the gentrification of urban neighborhoods is bringing new attention to the plight of urban schools. Billingham (2014) states “for gentrified and gentrifying neighborhoods in major cities, the availability of a high-quality elementary school” has become a focus for younger Middle-class residents moving into urban areas (p. 686). These single or childless residents may one day become parents searching for quality schools for their future children, and they will work to demand or preserve quality urban neighborhood schools. The Middle-class residents might claim to want their children to attend diverse urban schools, but may have limits on how much diversity they will find acceptable (Billingham, 2014).

Although suburban White parents say they select schools for their children based on test scores, the racial makeup of a school also plays a role in their decision-making (Jones & Shapiro, 2003). Social justice author Robin DiAngelo states that describing schools in racially coded terms like “urban” and “low test scores” are code words that mean “nonwhite” and are considered less desirable (DiAngelo, 2018, pg. 67). Even in

the modern age, racial stereotypes still prevail, with Blacks being “stigmatized as innately inferior” and assumed to excel in athletics over academics (Harpalani, 2005, p.1). The prevalence of these stereotypes does impact on Black students, causing them to develop a need to develop positive identities to counter the ongoing negative images being formed about them.

Schools in the U.S. have failed poor Black students, but the solutions of how to improve the black student experience is not the done by education alone. Black students are the product of the complex experiences of Black America (Irvine, 1990). Economic deprivation and limited opportunities enforced by systemic institutional racism have led to limited economic success through generations of Black America. Public education in the U.S. has been normed around White northern European culture (Anon, 2019). Cobb (2012) points out the White savior narrative in Hollywood movies like “Dangerous Minds” and “Freedom Writers”, which characterize dedicated White teachers who “transcend constraints of poverty, neighborhood violence and school dysfunction to transform their ghetto students” into high achieving inspired individuals (p.1). This fictional characterization may serve as an inspiration to some, but it continues to perpetuate the deeply entrenched belief that a racist and biased system can be overturned by a few well-intentioned individuals standing up to the uncaring and lazy (Cobb, 2012).

The Urban Review (2012) published another study, following not White, but Black preservice teachers specifically from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that were aiming to teach in high-poverty urban schools. The idea was to train them within an immersion course that placed them in urban high-poverty schools to “frame their understanding of perspectives on urban education” (Mawhinney, Mulero,

Perez, 2012, p. 612). The preservice teachers were matched with a mentor teacher, whom they would observe and eventually present lessons with. They would also be paired with high school students that were interested in a possible teaching career. The preservice teachers would mentor the high school students in a program that allowed the high school students to mentor elementary students within the same community.

The preliminary research for this study concluded that Black teachers tended to be more committed to working urban schools than White teachers. However, the study failed to conclude if the immersion experience made the preservice teachers more or less likely to eventually work in urban areas with students from high-poverty backgrounds. Overall, the preservice teachers had favorable teaching experiences with the students, but had less favorable opinions about those students' parents. The study did not examine what led the preservice teachers to develop negative opinions about the parents, but it was suggested that this development warranted future studies.

Although again, I question whether knowing who they are as an educator and who their students are as individuals is going far enough to make an impact. Christopher Emdin (2017) explains how attention to urban education has been morphed into what he calls cultural agnosia, or "a symptom of a cultural version of a medical condition":

In urban education, it is important to note that cultural agnosia is rampant and triggered by a deficit lens of viewing urban young people of color. Furthermore, urban education has taken on a problematic characteristic from society writ large and the ways that people with privilege who are not from urban communities interact with those who are. Outsiders are celebrated for taking an interest in urban issues despite the negative impacts their presence and their perspectives

have on urban students. As this happens, the voices of those who are from the communities are consistently silenced in order to make space for those who have power (p. 483).

Emdin describes with cultural agnosia what some may refer to in colloquial terms as white savior activity. This is when the presence of White privileged outsiders is celebrated for taking an interest in perceived problematic urban issues, and the “voices of those who are from the communities are silenced in order to make space for those who have power.” (Emdin, 2017, p. 483). However, I am in agreement with his perspective that the real change will happen when urban education makes the additional step to build bridges to the surrounding communities in which these schools are located. The necessary connections would involve understanding the communities’ culture and values, and inform academia regarding norms viewed by outsiders as inferior. This would allow for active cultural exchanges instead of one-way imperialistic approaches to save underprivileged urban students of color. The teaching and learning should be shared both ways. Outside White educators should not see cultural expressions that are non-traditional as deficiencies or anti-school, “but rather as assets to support teaching and learning” and “different cultural contexts” from their own. (Emdin, 2017, p. 484).

For White privileged educators to be successful in working with students in high-poverty urban schools, they must take the additional steps to engage with the community that raised the students. They must engage in bridge-building that actively learns both about the children and the community beyond the children. They must be able to let go of any sense of superiority that views the community as inferior, but instead work to learn

about the culture and norms that may be new and different from the environment they are from.

Public Education in Post Racial America

The separate but unequal conditions of U.S. public schools is not new. Still, it also might not be talked about openly in this post-racial era when we avoid talking about racial differences (Tatum, 2017). The term post-racial emerged as a way to describe the Obama era, meaning it was the era that supposedly saw the end of racism because Americans had elected a non-white president (Cantiello, 2011). Yet, we still see student enrollment in American schools segregated along racial lines. White families' interest might be invested in an educational system that provides advantages to them, but allows other people's children to attend schools in conditions that would not be tolerated for their own children (DiAngelo, 2018). In addition to the conditions and lack of resources that may plague underperforming schools of mostly Black and brown students, the teaching staff might be mostly White in all schools. According to 2016 labor statistics, 80% of U.S. teachers were White (Loewus, 2017). This was considered progress because the number of LatinX teachers rose 1% over the previous four years. However, the number of non-white students still dominates the student population in public schools.

The National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov) noted 2014 as the year White students slipped to less than half the public schools population at 49.5%, which decreased from 58% the prior decade. This was while the Hispanic student population increased from 19% to 25% in the same amount of time. The Black student population went from 17% to 15%. To summarize, public school students got browner and blacker, while the teaching population remained White. This fact does not constitute an argument

that racism may play a part in the level of student achievement in low performing schools. However, there should be some consideration as to how a teaching population that has remained mostly White for generations is able to understand and provide support for a rapidly changing student population from different racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Programs like Teach for America recruit teachers from privileged backgrounds to work with students of color in poor communities (Emdin, 2016). The White teaching population's backgrounds and perceptions should be considered as to whether they are effectively meeting the needs of these students, who come from different backgrounds and cultural norms from their teachers.

Bias and Perceptions

Could the teachers' inherent whiteness create unconscious bias and play a role in what they perceive to be acceptable norms or appropriate ways to shape the students they serve? A mistake would be to treat racism as some sort of "anomaly" or "illness in an otherwise healthy body" (Brooks and Newborn, 1994, p.798-799). Instead, racism is embedded within a larger system. Tatum (2017) defines unconscious bias as "attitudes that influence our behavior sometimes below the level of our consciousness" (p. 24). DiAngelo (2018) defines whiteness as "the norm or standard for humans, and people of color as a deviation from that norm." (p. 25). Whiteness can be understood as linked institutionalized power and knowledge that privileges White people (Fylkesnes, 2018). That privilege does not assign guilt or innocence, but it does assign entitlement and fairness (Vaught and Castagno, 2008). Whiteness is the reference point to which all others are compared. Racism does not have to be reserved for the violent overt expressions that we have stereotyped as a quality for villains. Racism is expressed in

subtler ways daily. DiAngelo dissects the difference by explaining, “simplistic definition(s) of racism - as intentional acts of racial discrimination committed by immoral individuals - engenders a confidence that we are not part of the problem and that our learning is thus complete.” (p.9). There may also be macroaggressions committed, or “daily slights and insults experienced by marginalized people” (Tatum, 2017, p. 51).

The U.S. teaching population is dominated by White females, totaling 84% of all active educators (Loewus, 2019). Of this dominant group, teachers may believe they are not conscious of the students’ race in their care (Irvine, 1990). Elements of color blindness have come into educators’ mindset where White female teachers will claim they treat all their students the same regardless of race. The conclusion would be that acknowledging race would make one a racist (Bennett, 1986). However, by ignoring racial differences, teachers might be implicitly holding all students to one Middle-class ideal of whiteness, which perceives blackness and black culture as inferior (Irvine, 1990). Social justice advocate Robin DiAngelo (2018) personally acknowledges “if I am not aware of the barriers of you face, then I won’t see them, much less be motivated to remove them” (p. xiii).

As previously stated, teachers are not immune to having biases just because they work with students of color. These biases can influence teacher expectations for their students. According to Irvine (1990) research has revealed that “White teachers have more negative expectations for their Black students than their White students” (p. 56). If White teachers genuinely believe that racism is only present when there are overt acts of discrimination performed, they might be at risk of believing that racism and bias on their part does not exist in their classrooms or schools. They might not believe they are

capable of being biased against their Black students. However, they might measure their students' behavior as subpar or less than because those Black or brown students are being viewed through a biased lens set by whiteness standards. For White teachers that teach in urban schools, there may need to be an intentional effort to “unpack their privileges” along with all “institutional, societal, and personal histories”, they might bring with them into the classrooms where they will teach students of color (Emdin, 2016, p. 15). For White teachers to be the champions of all their students, intentional work will need to be done to prepare them to not only acknowledge how their own biases impact instruction, also to realize the power they could possess as change agents in disrupting the negative realities of urban education.

Teacher Preparedness and Student Achievement

The advocacy group Education Trust addresses the underachievement of minority students, pointing the finger partially at one reason for this phenomenon, which is teacher quality (Haycock & Peske, 2006). It begs the question of whether students in poverty-stricken communities and schools are being underserved by teachers who lack qualifications, therefore exacerbating or influencing the problem of low achieving schools and inequity in their educational opportunities. Teachers in Texas are considered qualified to teach if they meet the state's minimum certification requirements and be considered highly qualified if they hold certification in the content area they teach (Cohen-Vogel and Hunt, 2007). One source the article's data is from a 2002 study, also published by the Education Trust, which looked at the experience and professional training of teachers working in high-poverty schools. The indicators used to assess

teacher quality were teacher assessment of academic skills and knowledge, mastery of content, experience, and pedagogical skills.

With their combined teacher quality index, they found that teacher quality has a direct impact on student achievement. Whenever teacher quality increased, so did the percentage of students who met or exceeded state standards. Their data shows that students in these schools are more likely to be taught by novice teachers with degrees outside the subject that they teach. In the United States, 40% of Black children live in poverty, compared to 23% of all children nationwide (Morris, 2016). If underqualified teachers are teaching this many poor public school students of color, it is not too surprising that student achievement levels are lower in these schools. Teacher expectations for their students have an impact on student achievement as well. Teacher efficacy impacts student achievement. If teachers believe their students can learn, it influences what students believe they are capable of achieving. However, in urban settings where poor Black students are taught, low expectations depress student learning. Negative perceptions of teachers influence the self-image of students and their work efforts (Thernstorm, 2003).

Teacher Bias and Discipline

Another component of teacher racial bias is how it plays a role in school discipline. Monique Morris (2016) has studied the discipline practices in K12 schools and found disproportionate outcomes for students of color referred for discipline issues. Instead of examining the impact of discipline practices for all Black students, Morris specifically researched how discipline practices affected Black female students. According to Morris (2016), “Black girls make up only 16% of the female student

population, but nearly one-third of all girls referred to law enforcement and more than one-third of all female school-based arrests.” (p. 2). There is an intersection of identities for Black girls perplexing for them and those who have social interactions with them. This complexity shapes how they are seen and treated by others, especially when a failure to acknowledge their whole self fails to understand their full experience and the hierarchy of oppressions against them (Morris, 2016).

With Black girls in particular, there is currently a growing politicization and vilification of their natural hair, whether it is thick, curly or kinky. Dress codes in US schools characterize naturally curly or kinky hair of Black girls as an area in need of regulation. These oppressive dress codes require that Black girls straighten their naturally curly, coily or kinky hair to styles that are considered more socially acceptable by non-blacks. Hairstyles like afros and dreadlocks are being outlawed and targeted by school discipline policies because their hairstyles are called distracting, thus trying to make Black girls’ hair in its natural state a bad thing. Morris (2016), says this creates a system that makes it acceptable to punish girls “for who they are, and not for something they have done” (p. 91). This perpetuates a message to Black girls that they are inferior, and reinforces the internal and external oppression they must overcome during their formative years. If measures are being taken to simply police young Black girls’ hair, they are being pushed out of their learning environment and disciplined for nonthreatening behaviors. Student achievement suffers again.

This is in addition to dealing with age compression and adultification, which is the phenomenon of a child, in this case a Black girl, being perceived and treated older than her age. The negative impact of age compression and adultification is that Black

girls' behavior is not dismissed as the behavior of a child with childish innocence, but instead of a person who had deliberate intentions or someone of an age that "should know better" (Morris, 2016). Another unfortunate part of the age compression and adultification of Black girls is that they are sexualized in the eyes of adults. At the same time, their White counterparts are perceived as innocent children for longer through their developing years.

Pedro Noguera's research proposes that, although Black males occupy 6% of the American population, they occupy a larger portion of the American imagination. Serving as the ultimate "other," they are most often depicted in American literature and film as "villains, conmen, and feeble-minded buffoons," and regarded as individuals who should be feared because of their "uncontrolled unrefined masculinity" (Noguera, 2008, p. xi). They are feared and regarded as a menace to innocents, in particular White women. In schools, Black males are more likely to be underrepresented in honors and advanced academic classes, but overrepresented in every category associated with distress and failure, such as discipline referrals and dropout rates. Noguera (2008) and Morris (2016) conclude from their respective research that Black males and Black females are the most likely of any other subgroups to be classified as intellectually disabled.

Overcoming Bias in the Classroom

How can teachers overcome racial bias in order to work with students of color and work toward meaningful societal changes? The majority of US teachers are White, who themselves the products of predominantly White neighborhoods and White colleges of education (Nieto, 1996). The teaching population's demographics are not expected to change any time in the near future (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). To

expect them to inherently understand how to best work with students of color to affect change is not fair or realistic. Culturally responsive teaching “favors an asymmetrical ideal” that rejects “race blindness” and instead focuses on empowerment (Brooks and Newborn, 1994, p.790). There has to be than just a general awareness of racism and bias among teachers. Sleeter explains that if our understanding of root causes of social inequality is too shallow, our approach to making changes will be superficial (Sleeter, 1996). This is not to say that White teachers are clueless and not well-intentioned as they begin to work with Black students, but tangible steps must be taken to help them actuate change. Teachers will need intentional preparation.

DiAngelo (2018) suggests that “ideologies such as color blindness, meritocracy and individualism” must be challenged by all groups, especially Whites, to change systems they “benefit from and are complicit in.” (p. 100). This includes talking openly about race and admitting that there are deep cultural legacies of anti-blackness in society that have contributed to creating racist systems that we all take part. Researcher Khalil Gibran Muhammad gives historical context to how Black people and blackness characteristics became synonymous with negativity in American history. According to Muhammad, the 1890 census was the first time Blacks were counted in U.S. population data since slavery was abolished. Due to strict racially motivated Jim Crow laws and other black codes instituted as a means of social control over Black, the census found that 30% of the prison population was made up of Blacks. Propaganda articles of the period focused on this data point to force the idea that Blacks were not suited to being productive citizens, and were naturally prone to committing a crime (Muhammad, 2010). What followed were years of legitimizing various forms of racial segregation and

discrimination against Black because of beliefs that they were a dangerous criminal population. Discrimination was yielded in employment and housing, as well as with educational opportunities.

DiAngelo (2018) also says that Whites must come to terms with their deep “internalized superiority sense of a right to rule over oppressed groups.” (p. 100). White teachers must recognize their role in perpetuating the pedagogy of White superiority and instead learn more about the realities of our societal systems that rely on the status quo further to oppress other racial groups (Fylkesnes, 2018). Racial stereotypes helped perpetuate beliefs that working with poor students of color meant a White teacher would need to have strong classroom management skills and exhibit tough love, because Black unruly students need to be controlled and require a tough hand to keep them in line (Emdin, 2016, pp. 9-10). Ironically, studies within the sociopolitical context are discovering what White teachers might feel is threatening behavior may be different from what students feel is threatening (Hammond, 2010). In fact, researcher Napoleon Wells coined the term “post-racial tension stress disorder”, which is the result of the youth of color seeing themselves as powerless in a world that tells them race doesn’t matter, while continuing to subject them to physical and symbolic racial violence (Emdin, 2016, pp. 22-23).

Hammond (2010) stresses that it is important to remember students’ definitions of what feels welcoming or threatening instead of our own when working with poor marginalized students. Cultures with strong oral traditions rely on social engagement systems to process new learning. She speaks of how using cultural aids like stories, music and repetition can help get the brain to respond to new information (Hammond,

2010). This can also help teachers understand how to manage classroom expectations, social behaviors, and discussions with students. When students speak or act in ways that the teacher is uncomfortable with, they are labeled as troubled or have attention deficit or oppositional defiance disorders (Emdin, 2016). Students treated more harshly for presumed behavioral issues are less likely to be academically engaged in the classroom. If teachers do not recognize that these behaviors are not necessarily problematic, but instead just culturally different, it can lead to better learning outcomes for the students.

Christine Sleeter of California State University works with groups focused on diversifying teacher preparation programs. Sleeter (2016) says we must de-centralize whiteness to identify our political place in race and racism. She further explains how to begin to make meaningful change:

This issue offers snapshots of whiteness in the teacher education classroom, impacts of whiteness on students of color, portraits of White teacher candidates grappling with racism, exploration of contexts that impact on White teachers' learning and teaching, and analyses of White identities that probe entry points for racial learning. (pg. 1066).

Sleeter also suggests that teacher education programs must be far more selective when admitting White teacher candidates, or at least permit them into racially diverse cohorts, as well as focus on the need for them to participate in community-based learning in groups from cultures different than their own (2016). Beyond just preparing White teachers to understand better how they can and must push against racism in their everyday role, there must also be more research studies on how the predominantly White

teacher workforce is affects the achievement of students of color. There may be more work needed to dismantle racial bias in an education system currently allowing one group to benefit from other groups' oppression. There definitely is more work needed to help teachers understand the significance of their role in making these impactful changes on society as a whole.

Conclusion

Emdin (2016) believes the key to helping White teachers work more effectively with students of color is to first decentralize their whiteness ideals and to instead focus on the students' experiences. When there is a role reversal, the teacher is still the one to deliver the content, but the student is the "person who shapes how best to teach that content (p. 27). Hammond (2015) states that this allows for learners to connect new content to what they already know. What we already know is based on our cultural experiences and values. Those connections, or "scaffolds between the existing schema and the new content stimulates brain growth (p. 49). When White teachers are more intentional about uncovering their implicit bias, they will be better prepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. It is important to remember that racism and bias live within all people. These feelings are not acted upon only by villains in popular literature and historical horror stories. Macroaggressions are committed each day in subtle and overt ways that reinforce ideals and standards that institutionalize Black and brown students' second-class experience. Because most teachers working with these students are White, we must be intentional with preparing them to overcome their biases and become more critical of an education system in dire need of social justice improvements.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The study explored what new teachers' perceptions of their professional development needs for implementing culturally responsive classroom practices are. A qualitative research design was selected for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as a method to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them. This includes but is not limited to personal experiences, interviews, and observations. In following a case study approach, the research shared the stories of three individuals. Creswell (2014) defines a case study design as one where the researcher "develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 14). In this design, the researcher must collect information from multiple data sources and analyze them for common themes. As new teachers, their lived experiences will be told from their perspectives through two interviews, a survey, the researcher's journal notes and email correspondence between the researcher and research participants. Teachers' experiences examined within a specific context and shared through a narrative approach led to a greater understanding of education as a whole (Rushton, 2001; Weber, 1993).

Methodological Framework

The researcher's experiences as a professional development director in a large urban school district led to the desire to explore further essential elements that might be missed within standard teaching and learning professional development offerings. The typical professional development sessions focused on curriculum and instruction, but not

necessarily culture or relationship building with students. This professional obligation was paired with the researcher's own personal goals to help teachers better support students of color. By reflecting on experiences and writing in the first person, the researcher became the object of the research (Belbase, Luitel, & Taylor, 2013).

The researcher recognized a gap in the support teachers needed to understand how to relate to and instruct students of color. In the researcher's current job responsibility of leading the professional learning department in a large urban school district, she is allowed a firsthand look at the professional development and coaching support teachers receive in the district. The professional learning team makes this determination. Because of the researcher's position, there is access to a data dashboard for the district that allows the researcher to see a broad cross-section of information ranging from student achievement data to discipline referrals. This data analysis is done for building principals so they can narrow down high priority areas related to their staff's professional development needs.

Case study was the method chosen for this qualitative research study. The researcher felt the best way to understand the people and the culture of this school district was through words of the people directly impacted by the district's professional development efforts. This method will help answer the research question of exploring their professional development needs for implementing culturally responsive classroom practices. In recent years, research has elevated the teacher's voice and their practical knowledge of teaching learning (Calderhead, 1991). Merriam states that case study design is used "to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The researcher will be personally involved in the

actions studied and can offer the organization's cultural perspective from her field notes, and with her "personal practical knowledge" after more than twenty years of service within the school district (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3).

Positionality

The researcher has long been involved in the role of teacher training support and development, both a professional development administrator and curriculum developer. This personal practical knowledge is also evident throughout the study, from the inclusion of the researcher's journal notes from personal communication with human resources directors directly responsible for the recruitment efforts and onboarding of new teachers. The data collected for this study included one survey, teacher interviews and first person field notes and reflections from the researcher. The researcher intends to share this study with district administrators to continue to build and strengthen the professional learning focus with more targeted resources and support for culturally responsive teaching practices. The experiences shared by the teachers in this context will help the school district grow and lead to further experiences that will aide new teachers for years to come (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). If the population continues with its current trends, this plan to include culturally responsive practices can become part of the onboarding process for all incoming teachers to the district as well.

As the researcher, I was careful to make sure the participants were comfortable with sharing their experiences candidly without intimidation. Because I serve in a district administrative role, there was a chance that these teachers may have known who I was prior to this study. I recognized that they could have felt some hesitation with sharing their experiences with someone who was in a leadership role with influence over their

position within the district. The effort was made on my part to check for their level of comfort in each interview. They were given text copies of the interview questions to have time to think through their responses. They were also given access to of each interview transcripts as a part of the member checking interview to allow them an opportunity to review if their responses to the interview questions accurately represented their views. They were reassured that their anonymity would be protected with the use of pseudonyms and that the journal notes would be accessed only by the researcher.

Context of the Study

The school district that serves as the backdrop of this study is in a unique position. The outside community is accustomed to hearing stories of struggling underpaid underappreciated teachers and underperforming students. Stories of disconnected administrators and grossly underfunded schools also make up the urban legends of how the modern education system is broken. However, these generalizations do not make up this school district in this study. The district is doing well fiscally. It has long supported teachers through vast professional development opportunities. The problem is that during a recent curriculum audit by the Texas Association of School Boards, TASB, it was discovered that too much money was being spent on professional development and a structure was not in place to evaluate the impact of professional development offered.

The district has followed a stable path for the over 80 years that it has been in existence. However, student demographics have changed over the years, while the teacher forces' demographics have not. According to the district's site, the student population is 73% Hispanic and 22.7% African American, with 35% classified as having limited English proficiency and 87.2% economically disadvantaged (By the Numbers,

2019). The teachers are recruited in large numbers from Midwestern universities and are from predominantly White middle-class backgrounds. The district's professional learning team is tasked with helping these teachers acclimate to the new cultural norms they will encounter with their students of color. The researcher will use teacher interviews to illustrate how a growing cultural disconnect as a root cause has led to an increasing problem with discipline and relational issues between frustrated teachers and students.

The qualitative design of this study will allow the researcher to elaborate on being "part of the culture and possessing a particular cultural identity." (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 276). Although the researcher has been immersed in this organization for years and can speak to the history of how the district came to its decision to create a professional learning team, she will learn from the perspectives of the research participants. As stated by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2001), her experience as the researcher may not be the main focus of the study, but professional reflection will add context and layers to better understand the story as it is told from an active participant in the organization (Ellis et al., 2011). This will be a turning point from several perspectives. Creating this new professional learning team and the plan they create will provide structure for an area that was treated very loosely in the past. It will give clear resources and pathways for teachers looking for research based instructional support. It may also help with teacher retention if teachers feel more supported with some of their most challenging issues of understanding and better relating to their students. If teachers feel they are better equipped to positively impact their students, they may feel more rewarded and may want to remain a part of the district organization.

Participants

The participants selected for this study were chosen using purposive sampling. They were participating in a phenomenon taking place, which was the development and implementation of culturally responsive professional development for the first time as a district initiative. Three participants completed the study, as three to ten participants are an ideal range (Dukes, 1984). A fourth person, a White male in his thirties with two years of teaching experience initially was chosen as a participant but withdrew before participating in the first round of interviews. For a case study specifically, Creswell (1998) advises no more than four to five participants, as this amount is sufficient to identify themes. The participants of this study were teachers within a large urban school district in Houston, Texas.

Creswell (1998) states that participants “must be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their conscious experiences.” (p. 111). The individuals were asked if they would like to share their experiences as a part of a larger study. They were asked to share their perspectives. The participants who were asked to participate will fit a specific profile representing the average newly recruited teacher to this school district. That profile includes White individuals that are from predominantly White Middle-class Midwestern regions of the United States prior to relocating to the Houston area. It also includes one LatinX teacher who was born and raised in the school district of this study. The research concentrated on the participants’ experience as new teachers, so individuals with one to three years of teaching experience were the focus. The participants’ anonymity was protected and a list of their real names and matching pseudonyms was stored separately (Creswell, 2014).

As stated previously, a fourth person was chosen to participate in this study. According to his initial interest survey, he was a White male in his thirties from upstate New York with military experience. He had three years of teaching experience. He engaged in some preliminary email correspondence with the researcher, but eventually declined to follow through with the interviews. The researcher did not pursue any additional communication with the individual after he declined to participate.

Sampling Design

The research participants were chosen through a convenience snowball sampling, from the researcher's social network "based on their convenience and availability" (Creswell, 2014, p. 158). Creswell defines a convenience sampling as an approach "in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability" (Creswell, 2014, p. 158). This study was conceived prior to the COVID-19 school and nationwide closure. The original plan was to solicit research participants through an interest survey embedded as part of feedback gathered during one of the face-to-face district professional development sessions. Teachers were going to be asked during any post-professional development session procedures to offer feedback in a digital survey and then asked within that survey if they would be interested in being part of a research study. Then the school closure happened, essentially cancelling those planned activities. As a result, the researcher altered plans to solicit participation.

The new approach was to create an interest survey and embed a link to it in the district's online professional development platform. Since the school closure began, the district has offered all teachers training support to manage remote learning with online course creation and integrate various digital tools. The learning management platform

used by the district was Schoology. The professional learning department facilitated online support. The link to this survey was to be placed in the sessions' training agendas. The interest survey was created using Google Forms. The responses were to be accessible only to the researcher. The survey included questions about the potential participants' work experience, background and willingness to be interviewed through video conferencing platforms. The researcher was planning to narrow down the list of interested individuals to five people based on how closely they fit the preferred research participant profile and their availability to join the research study while under quarantine stay-home orders.

However, when the school closure continued for more time than expected, recruiting research participants became more difficult. Eventually, one lone teacher responded to the survey and agreed to participate. After she participated in the interviews, she recommended the researcher contact a colleague of hers to be interviewed as well. This colleague had a similar personal and professional profile as the first research participant. The researcher sent a recruitment email to that colleague and she agreed to participate. In a snowball effect, another new teacher learned of the study through the mutual colleagues within the researcher's extended social network and agreed to be participate. This teacher expressed that she was interested in participating because she felt her feedback on her experiences would help new teachers like her have a smoother transition into the profession. Although the original goal was to have between three and five participants for this study, ultimately, three teachers participated until the end.

Data Collection

For this qualitative study, data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews, member checking, one focus group interview, and the researcher's journal notes. Creswell (2014) states that "qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior or interviewing participants." (p. 185). The goal was to collect data from participant perspectives at all levels of the professional learning initiative. My experience as the researcher may not have been the focus of the study. Still, my perspective added context and layers to understand the story better as it was told from an active participant in the organization (Ellis et al., 2011). To fulfill the professional goals, the researcher recorded observations in a daily journal to speak to the overall district vision and intent for the professional learning initiative. These journal notes served as research text of the "people, scene and plot" to complete this particular space's narrative and time where this study takes place (Clandinin and Connely, 2000, p. 155).

The teachers provided initial demographic data through feedback forms they were invited to complete during the study's recruitment phase. The feedback form was not anonymous. It asked for full names or other personally identifiable information, especially their demographics, including age, gender, and ethnicity. It also asked about their background information regarding teacher preparation and certification. Their feedback provided insight that was included in the narrative of their individual stories, as told through this case study.

Instruments

This qualitative study used individual interviews, researcher journal notes and an initial questionnaire form for data collection. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted through videoconferencing in the Zoom platform, as Creswell (2014) recognizes this as an appropriate method for conducting interviews (p. 163). This videoconferencing platform was chosen in consideration that participants might have limited access to technology tools while quarantined at home. This tool allowed the participants to connect through a web-based platform that did not require software installation or specialized tools to connect. The researcher recorded the interviews and saved the recordings on an external hard drive, which was stored at the researcher's private residence. The researcher recorded observations in a daily journal to speak to the overall district vision and intent for creating this professional development initiative. Many of the researcher's journal entries were written prior to the study and without the researcher "imagining a specific purpose" for those notes (Clandinin and Connely, 2000, p. 153). However in review, the researcher determined these notes added to the overall narrative of how culturally responsive teaching became an urgent need in this district.

Instrument #1: semi-structured interviews.

The teacher research participants took part in semi-structured one-on-one interviews. They responded to five open-ended questions, which allowed them to respond openly with as much detail as they felt comfortable sharing. There was a conscious effort to keep the dialogue "one-way", to alleviate any "unequal power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee" (Creswell, 2014, p. 173). The intent was for the questions to remain open-ended to allow their testimony to take whatever

trajectory results from their narrative (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Creswell (1998) recommends designing “an interview protocol, a form about four or five pages in length with approximately five open-ended questions.” (p. 124). The researcher created an interview protocol form, with spaces in between each question, which allowed the researcher to make notes of any visible non-verbal communication while recording each response.

The first question asked them to provide information regarding their background, childhood and family structure, as well as information about the surrounding community in which they grew up. The next question focused on their individual teacher recruitment process and their expectations upon entering their teaching career while relocating to a new city. The following question asked them to reflect on their initial experiences working with their students, as well as any surprises they may have experienced while learning to relate to their students of color. If the individual experienced any problems relating to their students, they were asked to elaborate in the following question about how they handled those issues and what support was provided when they sought it out. The final question focused on what adjustments they made because of their initial years of teaching experiences. Participants were also asked to reflect in general about lessons learned from working with students of color.

Instrument #2: Member Checking and Follow Up Interview

A follow up interview was conducted as a means of member checking with each individual to verify if the responses they provided were accurately represented in the researcher’s notes. After that session, the next semi-structured interview asked the participants to share their recommendations for future professional development efforts

targeting new teachers like themselves. The researcher listened for whatever themes that emerged because of the individuals elaborating on their own, and reflecting on their previous responses. They were asked three open-ended questions and allowed to respond freely, and the research listened carefully allowing each participant a chance to speak (Creswell, 1998). The first question asks about their perceptions and awareness of culturally responsive teaching, and whether past awareness of culturally responsive teaching would impact their early teaching experiences. The second question asks about their willingness to participate in future professional development sessions that focus on culturally responsive teaching, and best delivery method for that training that they felt would be most effective. The final question asks if they felt training on culturally responsive teaching practices would influence their plans for staying employed as teachers of students of color.

Data Analysis

The tools used to analyze the data for this study include holistically hand coding the researcher's observation journal, and the use of a software program to code the participants' interview and survey responses. Video recordings were made of all video and audio of the interviews. The transcription software Happy Scribe was used to transcribe the audio from the recorded video. The researcher analyzed all data by uploading the interview transcripts and journal notes into the transcription software platform to code and capture themes from all the data collection instruments.

Creswell (2014) recommended breaking down the data analysis process into a series of steps. The first step was to review the researcher's observation journal to look for recurring themes. The next step was to prepare the interview responses for analysis

by transcribing the information using a transcription software program into a small database. From there, the next step is to review the responses of the interviews and the teacher surveys. The Happy Scribe transcription software program was chosen to help review the interviews and survey responses to categorize large amounts of feedback efficiently and identify themes within those responses. This researcher looked for relationships between the collected responses, which allowed me, as the researcher, to determine the significance or meaning of those connections.

Triangulation and Trustworthiness

Through rich and thick descriptions, the phenomenon within this case study was told in great detail (Merriam, 1998). That phenomenon under study was revealing the perspectives of the participants about a specific issue. That issue was listening to their perspective of their needs regarding culturally responsive professional development. The research participants met with the researcher for two semi-structured interviews and one member checking session conducted over a video conferencing platform. Each interview session was video recorded, and the audio of the recordings were transcribed using transcription software. The video recordings were shared with each respective interview participants to review in a member checking session, as an opportunity for each teacher to clarify their initial responses or expand on their thoughts.

Their reflections and responses to those interview questions are shared throughout the study as direct quotes. This was done in an effort to accurately depict their perspectives in their own words and remove researcher bias. Prior to each interview, the researcher first looked at their responses to the initial interest survey as one data point. This survey asked necessary demographic information. It also asked them to reflect their

current level of awareness about culturally responsive teaching. A Likert scale of one to five was used for them to rate their own level of awareness. The researcher used this demographic information to understand each participant's background and certification method they followed. Their answers to each interview question were analyzed first individually and with the researcher's journal notes that were taken before and during the interviews.

The participants were aware of the researcher's role as an administrator working within the school district's professional learning team where this study takes place. Participants were told within the body of the initial recruitment email of the researcher's role. It was important for the participants to have confidence in how the study was being conducted and how their shared information would represent them (Merriam, 1998). They were assured that pseudonyms would be used in place of names for any people or places mentioned with their interview responses. The names of the participants themselves are also pseudonyms. The demographic information shared about each person and their childhood background was factual. Each participant had access to the interview protocol, which the researcher created, in an effort to be transparent with each person before and during the interviews. Merriam (1998) states that qualitative researchers seek "many interpretations of what is happening" (p. 205).

Summary

This qualitative case study aimed explore the perspectives of new teachers, and explore their reflections from working with students of color. This study's background was a new phenomenon of creating and delivering support on culturally responsive teaching practices as a district professional development priority. This study holistically

analyzed the phenomenon from the perspective of new teachers that were also new to the Houston area, and new to working with students of color in a high-poverty school district. Their responses were recorded and analyzed. The goal was to gain insight on what they felt were the most critical needs of new teachers who were learning to work with students of color for the first time.

Chapter 4

Three teachers were interviewed for this research study. They each shared similar demographics. Each teacher was in their twenties. Two were not originally from Texas or the Houston area. One was from the Houston area and actually grew up in the exact community where she now teaches. Each teacher joined the school district with zero to three years teaching experience. The two White teachers each relocated to the Houston area from smaller Midwestern communities and attended Midwestern colleges and universities. The one LatinX teacher and Houston native had not lived in any other area outside of the community where she grew up. Houston is the largest and most racially diverse city either of them have ever lived in. However, the researcher made every attempt to ensure their personal stories and perspectives would still come through in this study. Every teacher and every classroom is different. The students that enter each classroom are different, though some shared similar demographic and economic traits. This study's attempt was to start with the generalizations of the new teachers and their students of color, and then explore the personal details of each classroom scenario. This narrative shares the teachers' perspective as they learn how to relate and work with their students.

Table 1*Demographics of Research Participants*

<i>Participants</i>	Hope	Anna	Mary
<i>Age</i>	22	24	26
<i>Ethnic Identity</i>	White	White	Hispanic
<i>Gender Identity</i>	Female	Female	Female
<i>Socioeconomic Background</i>	Middle High	Middle	Low
<i>Certification Path</i>	University	Alternative	University
<i>Grade Levels Taught</i>	High School	High School	Elementary
<i>Years of Teaching Experience</i>	1.5	1.5	2.5

Hope

For this study, the first teacher was Hope, a White female teacher in her early twenties, from rural Iowa. Hope not only was the first teacher interviewed for this study, she was the first to agree to be interviewed, which was within twenty-four hours of initially being asked to participate. She is a self-described social person who likes “making eye contact”.

According to the Texas Education Agency’s A-F rating, the high school where Hope worked as a visual arts teacher was rated as a C-school. The high school was located in the district’s western region, which has a higher population of Black students than the other high schools in the district. Over 2,100 students attended the school with close to 150 teachers on staff at the time of this study. According to the district’s website, the student ethnic distribution was 66.8% Hispanic, 28.9% African American, 2% White, 1.4% Asian American, 0.1% American Indian and .7% Multiracial. The school is located in a high-poverty community, with 65% of the students being eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. As a visual arts teacher, Hope had a mix of students from all grade levels on her roster.

She said she experienced a bit of culture shock upon initially working in the district because it was her first time working with any students of color. Through attending district and department professional learning sessions, she met and developed a close bond with other visual arts teachers in the district that genuinely supported her. One such bond was with a fellow art teacher from a nearby elementary school. The teacher was Hispanic and bilingual, and she taught Hope about cultural and linguistic differences with some of her students. This was because so many of Hope’s students

were new arrivals to the country, having immigrated from Guatemala and Mexico, among other Central and South American countries. She proudly explained how she learned short but full sentences in Spanish to better communicate with them.

When Hope spoke about her Black students, she went into much detail about their personal backgrounds. With this being the first time she had ever worked with Black students or Black people in general, she said she felt as a White person like there a defined line she needed to remain in. She did not know what or if there were things she should be concerned about when working with Black students, having no experience at that time. She was optimistic and idealistic. She recalled how when she told friends back home in Iowa what school district she would be working for, they voiced concern about it being a presumably tough area or a challenge to work with this district's type of student population. However, they applauded her for making the commitment to work with less fortunate students.

She described her physical classroom as small, with a capacity to fit no more than 25 people at a time in the space. Due to course content, she says she did not have a defined teacher space, other than when she sat at her desk against the wall to update grades. Most of the time she moved around the room with a stool she used to sit next students as they worked through various art techniques and projects. As a result, this put her at an advantage of having to engage with students on an individual level. She got to know their personalities, their fears and insecurities about their art work. She also got to learn about their backgrounds and personal challenges. She credits this with why she rarely had a problem with students not attending or not actively working in her class. Her students always showed up and they worked while they were there.

If she ever had a rare issue with a student trying to sleep or not engaging with their work, she had one-on-one conversations with them to find out why. In an extreme example, she says she allowed a student to sleep the first ten minutes of the class period if he agreed to work the rest of the time. This was because she learned he worked a full-time night job that did not allow him to go to sleep each night until 2 am. This was in addition to being the primary caretaker of two younger siblings. She used this as an example of how she could have easily jumped to conclusions about that student being apathetic and disinterested if she had not taken the time to get to know him and his personal situation.

Hope later stated that the topic of culturally responsive teaching was something she had already taken the initiative to learn more about. She had recently returned to rural Iowa during the summer break to visit with family. She spent her time on the plane trip reading various sources on culturally responsive teaching, including a book from culturally responsive teaching expert and author Beverly Tatum. In her words, she got off the plane and immediately began talking to her parents, seeking their opinions about race, bias and color blindness. Having lived in a mostly White rural town their entire lives, her parents were not prepared to engage in a discussion about race and race relations. Hope felt like they were unable to understand her urgency for learning more about cultural responsiveness. She easily relates to her parents' disassociation of race relations, because she can only remember one Black family living in the town where she grew up. She felt like the opportunity to confront racism and cultural responsiveness just did not present itself often enough because of the town's lack of diversity. Since

everyone was White like her, she never had to analyze how she felt about other racially different people.

Hope says she felt a little culture shock when she initially came to the school district where this study was conducted. She explained that her first surprise was regarding the high-poverty rates and housing conditions of some areas. In personal communication, she mentions several times how many of her students came from single parent households, unlike the two-parent Middle-class household in which she grew up. Hope says unlike her students, she never had to worry about where her next meal might come from. She says the bills were always paid and food was always on the table. Although she never considered her Middle-class background much before, because everyone else in her rural Iowa community had similar economic status. However, after moving to Houston and this school district, she realizes that her childhood socioeconomic status was far more comfortable than that of her students.

Anna

Anna is another new visual arts teacher within the same school district. The school where she was working at the time of this study was only two years old and rated as an A campus by the Texas Education Agency school accountability rating system. The high school's demographic breakdown was 82.9% Hispanic, 13.6% Black, 1.6% White, 1.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian and 0.2% Multiracial. The school was located in the school district's central region, where the Hispanic student population was higher than the district average. Anna was looking forward to the start of her second full year as a certified classroom teacher at the time of her interviews for this research project.

Although she was a rookie certified teacher, she was a veteran substitute teacher in Austin, Texas prior to turning to the career full time in Houston. Because she did not seek education as a career upon graduating from college, Anna received her teaching credentials through an alternative certification program. Originally from a small waterfront community in Virginia, she described her background as very stable. Both her parents worked for NASA, which provided for a comfortable existence in a community where most of the other adults also either worked for NASA or a local shipyard. In her words, Anna's parents had a healthy marriage:

“Part of the reason my parents moved there is because the schools were really great. And both my parents had a really healthy marriage, were very supportive. There was kind of the expectation that we would go to college. I have one sister, too. There was the expectation that we would go to college. It always felt like without it really being said, if we never talked about it too much or was just an expectation” (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Her decision to leave Virginia was initially driven by a plan to relocate to Las Vegas, Nevada. On the way to Nevada, she made a pit stop in Austin and found herself drawn to the city. After trying Nevada for a brief spell, she eventually came back to work as a substitute teacher in Austin, while also studying in an alternative certification program. Networking in education social circles led to her apply for a teaching job in her current school district in Houston. She had a total of two and a half years teaching experience at the time of this study, with one year as a substitute teacher in Austin and the other as a fully certified teacher in Houston.

Anna expressed that her biggest shortfall with working as a teacher in Texas was not being fluent in Spanish. A large number of her students in Austin and Houston were LatinX and communicated comfortably in both Spanish and English. Anna said she felt this area would help her better communicate with the parents of those students. Many of the parents were English learners themselves. She explained how her non-English speaking parents seemed so eager to support their children and events at the school, but felt that the language barrier held her and them back from truly building partnerships.

Mary

Mary was a new teacher that was starting her second full year of teaching. Outside of her undergraduate college experience, she had not lived anywhere else other than the community where she grew up and now works as an educator. Mary, who has lived in apartments her entire life, is LatinX and attended college in Texas as well. She grew up in a single-parent household with her mother and two brothers, where pursuing higher education was not expected. She is a proud first-generation college graduate, who already had her sights on enrolling again so she could get her Master's degree in education. Although she speaks conversational Spanish, she still struggles with mastering written and academic Spanish. She listed this as a goal she hopes to achieve professionally in the very near future, as she attempts to gain an additional certification as bilingual education teacher.

At the time of this study, she was working at a C-rated elementary campus, according to the Texas Education Agency's accountability standards. It is located in the school district's eastern region, where the Hispanic population overwhelmingly outnumbered other subgroup populations. The campus demographics were 93.6%

Hispanic, 3.8% Black, 1.7% White, 0.4% Asian and 0.6% Multiracial. She was hired mid-year, which means she started teaching in the spring semester of her first year. Because of her first year being a half year, plus the early district shutdown from the COVID19 public health crisis, she doesn't feel like she has the confidence she hoped for this year as a new teacher who has gained two and half years of professional experience. She spoke of how she missed this year's students and said she felt like she needed the feeling of closure from seeing the full year through. She expressed numerous comments of unfinished business with her students, all filled with thoughts of what could have been if the school year had not been disrupted.

Mary was actually the most experienced of the research participants and the most familiar with the surrounding area, because she is a former student of this school district. Mary grew up in the exact community where she now serves as a teacher. When asked what motivated her to seek a career in education, she gave what she described as a "cliché" response. She says she wanted to give back to students like her. She wants to be a person that can provide support and inspiration in ways that she needed when she was a young student. During the conversations related to this study, Mary repeatedly stated how much she saw her younger self in the personalities of the students she now teaches. When asked if she ever considered teaching in a different district or community, she answered that working somewhere else was never a consideration for her. As a first-generation college graduate, Mary says did not receive encouragement or praise for academic accomplishments growing up. She felt as though she grew up in the shadow of her two brothers, who did not have the same academic goals she set for herself. Her mother was a dedicated sole provider for their family, but had little energy and

experience to help her daughter with academic support. Mary's motivation to take her education seriously came from seemingly random experiences in high school, when she pulled into situations that helped build her confidence. Her thoughts traveled back to a positive memory with one high school teacher that placed her in a leadership role for a school project, which gave her the drive to want more responsibility and set bigger goals. That memory still drives her today as she works with students she says are so similar to who she was as a young child, attending the same school where she currently works.

Parallel Themes That Emerged

Over the course of several weeks, the researcher corresponded with these women multiple times. They each participated in an initial interview and one follow up interview, along with one member checking session to verify if their responses to the interview questions accurately represented their viewpoints. There were also multiple email correspondences between the researcher and each participant. Each interview was about one hour in length and conducted through videoconferencing, with participants connecting online from the comfort of their own homes during the nationwide schools closure due to the COVID19 public health crisis. Each participant had not seen their students in person for about three months at the time these interviews began. They were surprisingly emotional as they reflected on the incomplete school year, wondering about all the activities and events they would not experience with their students. Even as a veteran, sometimes jaded educator, the researcher found herself saying comforting words to each participant as they sentimentally recalled heartfelt moments from the past year during each session.

Through the course of talking through semi-structured interviews, several themes emerged that seemed to reveal parallels with each of the participant's experiences as young teachers early in their careers. One parallel that emerged was their respective childhoods growing up in culturally homogeneous communities, where they had no previous personal relationships with Black people or any other racial group outside of their own. Another area of great similarity was their comfort levels when talking about their Black students in particular, compared to their comfort level when talking about their LatinX students. When talking about their LatinX students, their overall concerns for those revealed another theme, which was regret for the language barrier between them and their Spanish-speaking parents. This led to another theme that emerged, which was how each teacher recalled traumatic classroom experiences with building relationships with their students. However, the focus area that was most obvious from each conversation with their request for more social and emotional learning support. The information following includes the collective perspectives of each of the research participants in response to interview questions posed to them through two semi-structured individual interviews, conducted during the summer after the COVID19 national schools closure.

Theme 1: Cultural Homogeneity

Each of the research participants was asked to describe their background and the community they grew up in their own words. Hope described her hometown as a rural area in Iowa with a population of around 1000 people. Her parents are still married and raised her in a small ranch house on what she describes as a "medium high income" by Texas economic standards. She says she never had to worry about where her next meal

was coming from. She only recalls one Black student being in her high school, but he transferred at some point to attend a school that would help his quest of being recruited for sports. Hope was actually a high school student with multiple interests. She participated in 4H, visual arts and was a kicker for the football team at one point. She considered herself a student leader. Hope describes her school years in Iowa with great enthusiasm:

“I’m from Stewart, Iowa, which is a town of about a thousand people. So (the high school where she currently works) is about, you know, two or three times that. That was the first big change. But growing up, I was in full range of FFA (Future Farmers of America) and highly involved in agriculture. It wasn’t really until high school that I decided that art and education were two of my passions that I wanted to combine together. I was seeing how I could make a difference in the lives of others through youth education” (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

She attended college in northern Iowa and recalls with much detail how she came to learn about the school district in this study, because her boyfriend was the one initially recruited to join the district. One of the district’s human resources directors visited him in Iowa. When her boyfriend came to Houston to visit for an initial tour of the district, Hope came with him and recalled their experience. While driving around north Houston, they were lost and eventually roamed through a low-income area that was not part of the school district. She and her boyfriend were relieved to learn that this extremely high-poverty area was not where the district’s students lived. However, when they were able to go on a guided tour of the district, they saw some high-poverty residential areas similar

to what they saw initially. She explained how the human resources director wanted them to see this area and other areas that were not as poverty stricken so they would have an understanding of the full range of environments the district's students were coming from.

After her boyfriend began working as a teacher in the school district, Hope also relocated to Houston and joined the same district. She fulfilled her student teaching requirement at a high school and elementary school in the district before accepting a position as a visual arts teacher at another high school. As a result, she felt like she was able to receive a good cross section of experience with her first year as a teacher. At the time of this research study, this district, like many others across the country had closed prematurely during the spring semester because of the COVID19 public health emergency. In her first year of teaching, Hope had to quickly rethink everything she had been trained to do as a classroom teacher and shift to virtual instruction.

At 22 years old, Anna had already relocated the three cities before finally settling in Houston. Originally from a self-described small segregated community in Virginia, Anna's hometown had a population of roughly 12,000. She describes her high school as having 150-170 graduates in her class and all of them were White. She lightly mentioned that diversity is not a huge discussion topic when everyone looks like you. Anna seemed well versed in her knowledge of the historical context of her hometown's lack of diversity. She shared that the town sprung up from a deliberate migration of White families that left other surrounding communities as desegregation laws forced communities and school districts to integrate and allow Black families. The resulting White-flight led to communities like hers being formed, where White families eventually came together to resettle and thrive without having to allow much diversity.

“Thinking back to my own school that I grew up in, it was very White and was kind of known for being very White. Whereas all the districts around us had a lot of diversity, we were a small school, but we would still only have one Black student in each grade. Then maybe I want to say maybe like one or two Hispanic and maybe like five Asian, but majority White. It affects your interactions with other districts, too. Like we were all very aware that it was a very white school” (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

She explained that the outside perception of her community was that it was made up of racists. She shared examples of how students from schools in other surrounding communities would openly ask if they were racist when their teams played against each other for high school sporting events.

“I used to run track and we had a meet. I was with maybe four of my friends and we had three other Black athletes from another school who camp up to us. His friend had dared him to ask us if we were all racist, which was really awkward as a high schooler. Sure like, obviously no, but you can’t just tell that, you know, when your school doesn’t have diversity. And with your experiences growing up in, we’ll just say, it was a segregated area where there was just not a lot diversity” (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Mary, on the other hand, actually grew up in the school district in this study. Although her surroundings were made up mostly of Hispanic people, it still lacked diversity beyond the dominant Hispanic population. Growing up with a single mother and two brothers, Mary says her entire childhood was spent living in apartments in eastern area of the school district. She says the demographics of the community have not

changed since she was a child. Although Black families did live in the area, she says even the apartment complexes were noticeably segregated. She says there were clusters of units where all the Black families lived, almost as if the apartment managers were deliberate in some families' placement. She says she never ventured to the sections that were occupied by mostly Black families and never really questioned it during her childhood.

“I lived in the apartment complexes, but you kind of knew what area. It was almost like the apartment complex managers kind of placed them in a certain way. I’m pretty sure it was by chance, but there was a part of the apartment complex where it was like either a White person lives or an African American person lives. It was kind of isolating in a way, because I felt like within my apartment complex, in the center of it, there were three courtyards. My courtyard was mostly Hispanic” (Mary*, personal communication, August 5, 2020).

Theme 2: Brown Comfort, Black Discomfort

When Hope, Anna and Mary were initially asked about their perspectives as non-Black new teachers working with students of color, they each leaned into talking about their LatinX students instead of their Black students. They each easily pointed to the language barrier in building partnerships with the parents of their LatinX students. However, when the researcher redirected and asked again about building relationships with their Black students and parents, it took a little more effort for them to share comfortably. They would pause before answering and seemed to seek the politically correct terms to use as they spoke. They spoke carefully at first, and watched me, the Black researcher, closely as they described their efforts to relate to their Black students.

When they were each asked questions using language like “students of color”, both teachers answered referencing examples from the LatinX students. The researcher had to phrase questions using specific language like “Black” or “African American” for each teacher to also bring in examples of experiences with their Black students as well. As Hope stated, it is sometimes difficult to understand where her lane is as a White woman to speak to some issues involving her Black students. Both Hope and Anna explained that they cautiously try to listen more than they assume, given their own limited experience with relationships with Black people. She said they could be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing out of fear that their actions could be misinterpreted and hurt their chances of winning their Black students’ trust and respect.

The researcher made these deliberate efforts to bring their experiences with Black students into the conversations, because as stated previously, the district’s discipline referral rates showed a disproportionate amount of Black students being represented for classroom infractions. This led the researcher to want to learn more of what was happening with these students from the teachers’ perspectives. There could have been a bit of hesitancy in approaching the conversation about relating to their Black students, as this study took place in the shadow of the Black Lives Matter protest movement growing across the country during the summer of 2020. Surprisingly even Mary, who grew up within this school district community, showed no greater amount of comfort in discussing relationship building with her Black students than Hope or Anna. Overall, during this research project, the researcher faced some difficulty recruiting new teachers that were willing to be interviewed. The researcher sent a recruitment email to participate in this study to over forty new teachers in the school district. The email included an explanation

that the researcher was using the study to inform her work in developing relevant support for future new teachers to the district. The recruitment email clearly stated that the focus was on culturally responsive professional development needs when working with students of color. Several of the new teachers responded to the initial email invitation, however most did not follow through with scheduling an initial interview. As a Black woman, the researcher found herself having to put the research participants at ease when talking about their early experiences with their Black students. The teachers were gently reminded that no real names would be used to reference actual people or places in the final study.

Of the research participants, Hope leaned in to speaking about race relations most comfortably. She referenced an encounter with her parents when she returned home to Iowa at the beginning of the summer break. She had recently read books by culturally responsive teaching experts like Beverly Tatum on the plane and immediately dove into a conversation on the topic when her parents picked her up from the airport. “With my parents, we already had this conversation on the way back from the airport. I was so excited to talk about it and they were afraid to say the word ‘black’ because they think its offensive” (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Their response to her was hesitant, she says, because their personal relationships with Black people were limited due to the Black population in their rural Iowa town being so limited. They could not easily relate to the country’s race relations problems because they themselves lived in a homogeneous community where those racial issues are not tested. Hope herself was able to see her hometown community from a different perspective when she returned for summer break, realizing that only one Black family

had ever lived there in her lifetime. However, that did not shield her from witnessing racially insensitive moments.

“There’s a lot of racial undertones to a lot of the jokes that are being said, and there’s also talk in that book I am talking about. If you are laughing at that joke, you are still agreeing with it. You are still letting yourself apply to that joke and its little things like that that kind of get you thinking and observing yourself and then the people around you, too” (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Anna stated that although she grew up in what she described as a segregated community, she did not initially feel like it affected her ability to work with students of color. At first, she referenced examples from her experiences with her LatinX students, but transitioned when the researcher specifically asked about developing relationships with Black students. She stated that she simply did not think about race much prior to moving to other regions of the country. “We didn’t really think about race much, even though there were a lot of minorities. We still had friends that were minorities and just did not really think much of it. I don’t think it’s affected me” (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Theme 3: Language Barrier

The school district’s demographics where this study was conducted was 73.3% LatinX, 22.7% Black/African American, 1.9% White, 1.1% Asian American and 0.7% identifying as two or more races. A change that each of the research participants listed as a goal was to learn conversational Spanish as a second language for themselves. They each explained that speaking Spanish would remove a barrier currently keeping them

from building relationships with their students' parents. For the sake of this study, the researcher did not collect data on how many students of the district lived in households where Spanish was the primary language. However demographic data posted on the district website did identify 8,223 students, which was 11.79% of the student population as EL, or English Learners. The U.S. Department of Education website states that in 2015, approximately 10% of all American students are categorized as English Learners and eligible for additional federal supports through language instruction programs (United States Department of Education, 2015). The school district's website also lists there were 15,321 students, or 21.96% of the population listed as part of the Bilingual Education, which instructs students equally in both English and Spanish.

Each of the research participants felt overcoming the language barrier would make a significant difference in their efforts to build relationships with not just their students, but their students' parents. Anna stated that felt her students' parents would simply attend more events at the school and become more involved if they could communicate more effectively with staff.

"I really wish I spoke more Spanish because our parents want to be very involved. Sometimes there is just a communication barrier and I wish I could feel more comfortable communicating with the parents. But a lot of times if I call, we just can't really speak and it's kind of uncomfortable. But when you see the parents come into the school and everything, they want to be really involved in everything and they want their students to do well (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Hope actually had a class of Accelerated English Academy, or AEA students, which was a program that included students who were new immigrants to the United States. According to Hope, that class included students that recently immigrated from Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Brazil. Although she experienced challenges as she and the students attempted to overcome the language barrier, she found success in related to one shared life experience. She found parallels between their journeys as recent immigrants to the country, similar to her experience of moving across the country away from Iowa to Texas. Because her students were all from different regions and spoke varying dialects of Spanish and Portuguese, they found common ground in their shared experience of being far from their original home communities. Hope explained that she made attempts to learn Spanish with the help of a veteran teacher colleague.

“If I could go back and kind of give myself advice on what to do, it would be to immerse myself, to not be afraid, to talk to some of those students or to some of those families when practicing my Spanish. We actually went to a restaurant and I practiced my Spanish. I was afraid that I was going to offend them by maybe appropriating in their minds or just doing something that was offensive to them and not staying in my lane (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Some of Hope’s fears were eased when that veteran colleague reassured her that her students and their parents would not be offended, but instead might be appreciative that she was attempting to learn Spanish just like they were attempting to learn English. However, Hope’s plans include an additional step. She plans to learn more about the cultures of her students that are recent immigrants. In her words, she wants to go beyond celebrating cultures in a superficial manner in her high school art lessons.

“I want to get away from the novelty around a specific holiday for a culture, because I understand there’s an appreciation for it. There’s a time for it and I don’t want to take away from it. But I think that Hispanic, a Pacific Asian, an African American artist should be covered in every single lesson. I don’t think we should study dead White guys every single time because there needs to be representation across all my lessons. I want to see it as connecting to that one student in my class that will appreciate it, even if they are Caucasian (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Of the three research participants, Mary was the only one who actually spoke Spanish, though she admitted to being fluent in conversational Spanish only. She felt that by at least understanding Spanish that she had an advantage over teachers that understood no Spanish at all. However, she easily admitted that she needed to work on her academic Spanish. She explained how being a Spanish speaking teacher that cannot write in Spanish has its challenges.

“It’s easier for me now to speak English than it is to speak Spanish, because with the Spanish I get stumbled on some words. I just don’t know how to explain them, whereas it’s just hard academic vocabulary. I just hope to get better at it. We hear things just in conversation and then you are like, wait a second, how do I actually write that in a sentence?” (Mary*, personal communication, August 3, 2020).

Her overall goal was to work towards getting a bilingual educator’s certification, all in an effort to better relate to and support her students. Even with that goal and her overall positive outlook regarding concerns for any language barriers, she still expressed frustration that more academic resources were not available to support bilingual

instruction. She admitted to being reduced to doing Internet searches for lesson ideas that would support bilingual instruction.

Theme 4: Home-to-Classroom Trauma

Another universal theme for the participants of this research study was the trauma each of them learned their students were enduring in their home life that ultimately impacted their performance in class. They shared stories of students missing class due to suspected homelessness. There were stories of students having violently emotional outbursts in class. One participant, Hope, had an especially difficult time sharing one story of a student she lost contact with when he left school before Spring Break. The sophomore student missed a lot of class and was on the verge of being classified as truant. When he did come to class, he was visibly troubled and she suspected he was suicidal because of abuse he admitted to enduring at home. Various intervention specialists have not been successful in locating him since the COVID19 public health crisis forced schools to close in the spring. Hope recalls one of her last interactions with him, as they walked and talked together while he was having a particularly difficult day.

“We shared a good hug and I said I need to see you after spring break. I kind of straight up told him I need to see you here. I will see you in school, and he knew exactly what I meant. So right after all of this [COVID19] starting happening, he was the first one I thought of and emailed. But yeah that’s something I’m not necessarily trying to get used to, because I never want to get used to that” (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Hope shared several stories about students that struggled with school in general, but did not appear to be generally apathetic towards their education or future. She admits

there are signs on the surface that seem innocent, like absenteeism or sleepiness in class could lead a teacher to misjudge their students. She recalled a story of another student that was sleepy in her class daily, but he did not seem to be apathetic or defiant. The student, who was Asian American, was a motivated student when he was present in class. He just seemed completely exhausted most days, so she asked him why. After looking through his other classes' attendance, she was shocked to discover that he was absent in all his other classes, but was present for her class. The student opened up to her over the course of several conversations, and shared a multitude of challenges he was facing daily. His family included a mother who worked from three in the morning until eight at night.

As a result, he was a caretaker for two younger siblings he had to get to and from school each day. Because of a few incidents when he was attacked on a public bus and his belongings were stolen, he instead opted to walk to school for a two-hour commute. He followed this routine each day. On days when his mother was able to give him a ride to school, he would be dropped off by four in the morning and would have to sit in front of the school until it opened. Hope said she was thankful she was able to learn more about his situation and was able to report the family to protective services. However his current status is still unknown to her because he was to begin receiving support right as the COVID19 school shutdown happened.

“We didn’t have closure. That’s how I see it, is that you for spring break, that all of us take a break. Us, the kids, everybody takes a break and then you come back fresh for that final push between spring break and graduation or whatever grade level you’re in. And we never got to do that. We never got to tie up those loose ends” (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Mary, who teaches elementary students, was not spared from having to confront the impact of traumatic home events affecting her young students either. She explained how most days she was not able to jump into a lesson right away. In her words, she explained that her students need a “brain break” before the learning gets started. Instead she found herself listening to her students’ share what was on their minds, and related to events that were affecting them from home. Mary talked about one little girl who seemed so wise and mature beyond her years as a third grader. The student always had motivating things to tell her when she could tell Mary was not at her best some days. Mary realized this maturity was because the little girl had been exposed to heartbreak and tragedy already in her young life. She recalls one of many conversations where the student shared what was on her mind.

“She was like a little person with a grown up’s mind. She told me she really wanted to focus in school, but her [relative] lost her baby. It was just a really serious situation for just one little girl to come up and tell me, almost in tears. All of these kids go through something at home. Whether we think it’s a big deal or not, to them it’s a big deal” (Mary*, personal communication, August 5, 2020).

She shared another story about a Black boy in her class that had an extreme emotional outburst one day that caused her to have to clear the room when the student became so upset that he began physically acting out. She was forced to evacuate the classroom when he started throwing chairs. Although the student caused this level of disruption on multiple occasions, she said she still could not blame him for any of the incidents. She suspected there was a connection to something traumatic happening in the child’s home when she witnessed the student’s younger sibling acting out in the same

manner on a different occasion. “I can’t think of what would really make them act out this badly. What’s hurting on the inside? I would feel for him. I would always want to hug him and hold them and show them so much love. That’s how much they got under my skin” (Mary*, personal communication, August 5, 2020).

Situations like this led Mary to seek out ideas from more experienced colleagues for ways she could get her students to open up to her when they needed someone to talk to. She got the idea of giving kids appointment cards that they could use whenever they needed time to share in private. She created the decorative appointment cards that would serve as a hall passes for individual students to come to her class early in the mornings before all other students came into their homeroom classes. It was a project she was just getting started with before spring break, but never got the chance to implement due to the COVID19 school closure. At the time of our interview, she was planning to move forward with introducing this strategy with her students for the upcoming school year.

In spite of being disconnected from the physical school building for several months, Mary was still optimistic about starting the new school year. She was enthusiastic about participating in this research in particular, because she felt it would ultimately help with how the district supported and prepared new teachers.

“You’ve got the whole high-poverty situation. You’ve got a lot of kids that are probably coming to you that just don’t have a lot of resources at home. And you probably have some people that are just not used to the Houston picture at all and the diversity. I would tell them [new teachers] be patient and understanding. Just be compassionate. I feel like in teaching, you just have to” (Mary*, personal communication, August 5, 2020).

Theme 5: Social Emotional Learning

In this school district where this research study was conducted, there was a new initiative to promote social and emotional learning. The primary focus was to recognize the trauma experienced by poverty-stricken students of color and how it impacted their academic and social development. As mentioned previously, this study was conducted during the time when Black Lives Matter protests, the COVID19 public health crisis, and continuous political coverage of the upcoming 2020 presidential election were all happening at the same time. The societal climate was that of civil unrest, economic uncertainty and tribalism that all intersected. This could understandably leave individuals of any demographic feeling anxious and emotionally unstable.

However, as young new teachers learning how to work within average levels of professional stress, the research participants each had high praise for the district introducing the social and emotional learning initiative at this time. This research study took place during the summer of 2020, which was roughly four to five months after schools in Texas was forced close due to the COVID19 outbreak. They had been isolated and social distancing in their personal lives. They had been physically cut off from their classrooms and their students in their professional lives. In addition to this, as new teachers, they each echoed the feeling that they had no closure.

They craved the closure to all the groundwork they had laid to build better relationships with their students. They needed the closure of a summative evaluation from their supervisors to know if they did a good job. They wished for closure to know if their more troubled students were doing okay. As the months since the school closure carried on, they each were forced to let the previous school year go and look forward.

Instead they began to plan for a new year, with levels of uncertainty and fear. Neither of the research participants were in the first year of teaching, so they needed reassurance that the recent lessons they had learned to better themselves professionally were actually working. They were still new to teaching in general, but the veteran colleagues they had leaned on for advice and guidance were also new to the frontier of virtual instruction. The usual pillars of support they had each leaned on previously were now looking for support themselves, as all levels of educators were relearning what to do.

Mary frankly commented that the social and emotional learning focus has been impactful for her as an individual, and not just in her classroom instruction. She explained that she could relate to her students needing encouragement to talk through their feelings and struggles. She found herself struggling against her Hispanic cultural norms when she needed help. She said, “People in my culture or in my neighborhoods or my family, we don’t go talk to someone about how we’re feeling. It was just weird.” (Mary*, personal communication, August 12, 2020). She reminds herself that her young elementary students are held to some of the same cultural norms she herself still works through as an adult. Mary was excited to try out some of what she learned from the social and emotional support she received to her students. She uses that as motivation bring calming breathing exercises into their classroom routine. She explained that taking deep breaths as a group has a calming “contagious” vibe.

“The social and emotional thing, I really do enjoy it. Growing up, whenever I was going to school, none of this stuff was talked about. In my household, therapy was not a thing. A friend was kind of the one who made me feel like these things were normal. He applauded me for reaching out to talk to someone therapeutically. He

mentioned it takes a lot of courage to do that. It did actually, because that's not what I came from" (Mary*, personal communication, August 12, 2020).

Mary was somber as she reflected on the Black student that had the severe emotional outburst in her classroom. By the time she discovered the benefits of social and emotional learning and therapy, the student had already been removed from her school. He was sent to an alternative school earlier in the school year, not long after the incident took place. With sadness and regret, Mary shared that could still envision him as he was that day with his clenched face as anger rose up in him. "I think it would have benefitted him, maybe not all the time, but every now and then." she says. (Mary*, personal communication, August 13, 2020).

Anna thought highly enough about incorporating social and emotional learning, that she felt it ranked equally as important as culturally responsive teaching. She referenced a negative impact cell phones are having on her students' abilities to socialize in real life. "It is hard to get them to socialize and do group work. I'll try to do games or things and they're just really not interested in them." (Anna*, personal communication, July 24, 2020). Just as Mary reflected on how some of the social and emotional learning tips had helped her, Anna also shared how she had to remind herself of some things. "I've noticed at least with myself and the whole quarantine issue and trying to socially distance. When I do get out of the house, I have to make myself not look at a screen, not check my phone." (Anna*, personal communication, July 31, 2020).

When the researcher initially met with Anna for the first interview, she mischaracterized Anna as shy and reserved. That first impression did not continue. The researcher would later conclude that Anna's demeanor was more reserved as she

appeared to be more careful and efficient with her language, and used fewer words to convey her thoughts. When she spoke in one of our interviews about how the current social climate will impact the changes she planned to make for the upcoming school year, this was the case.

“We’re definitely going to talk about what’s going on in the world right now. I try to relate this in my art classes a little more. It’s going to definitely become more open and more fluid to other conversations about race. Now that conversations are happening, I think that’s why everyone is putting it in their curriculum more. I think it would actually be with a little relief.” (Anna*, personal communication, July 31, 2020).

Each of the research participants expressed a need to continue growing and connecting within a network of other teachers with their same level of experience. They specifically wanted to connect with teachers not only with their same level of experience, but also within their same grade and content areas. They believed time to ask questions in a safe environment where they would not be judged for their lack of experience would be beneficial. They felt this networking community of new teachers would be able to discuss things like “the silly things of unwritten rules of using too much printer paper” or “how Texas schools are oriented”, according to Hope (Hope*, personal communication, July 17, 2020). Hope also explains that this type of networking could help new teachers from various backgrounds break the ice of talking about the diversity of a district like this one. She also suggested having new participants in culturally responsive teaching book studies.

She recalled several new teacher gathering her first year, and detailed an activity idea that could help ease anxieties about new teachers working with diverse student populations. New teachers were invited to after school meet ups, where pizza would be served for the roughly sixty people that would show up. She noticed how the group would normally separate into clusters of homogeneous subgroups, usually by race and similar backgrounds. Her suggestion was to break up those clusters by facilitating activities that would force the meeting attendees to physically sit next to individuals different from themselves. She explained that the goal would be to start conversations between new teachers from different backgrounds to help them start building connections. Then a facilitator would lead the group through some introductory questions to get some conversations or role playing simulations started.

“I would ask them how many of you went to sit next to a person of another race and who sat next to a person of their same race. I think we could dive into a further exercise to empathize and start talking about culture and culturally responsive teaching so they can understand what they’re going to be walking into” Hope*, personal communication, July 31, 2020).

As previously stated, the teachers interviewed for this study were at least four months into a nationwide quarantine at the time they participated in these conversations with the researcher. It was difficult to determine if they were looking for this kind of networking community merely because they may have been feeling a little isolated in their current quarantine circumstance. The school district where this study was conducted actively supported teachers having time to connect within their professional learning communities, or PLCs. However, these teachers each expressed a need to have

ongoing connection with other new teachers beyond their campuses, who might be feeling the same uncertainties and anxieties they were feeling. As Mary stated, “We spend a lot of time worrying about things that don’t matter. Then we realize, wait a second, we’re kind of all in the same situation” (Mary*, personal communication, August 5, 2020).

In regards to social and emotional learning, an unexpected occurrence happened during each interview that was conducted for this study. The researcher designed the interview protocol to include broad open-ended questions to allow each person the opportunity to speak freely. The researcher’s goal was to keep the interviews conversational and keep the research participants at ease enough to tell their stories in their own way, in their own words. This would help remove bias on behalf of the researcher, but using direct quotes of the participants and allow their voices to characterize their experiences. To the researcher’s surprise, and likely to the participants, they each became very emotional as they reflected on their experiences from their first years as teachers. Their voices cracked and eyes glistened with unshed tears as their vulnerabilities were put on display with every story they shared.

Hope said she felt our meetings were quite therapeutic, as it was the only time she really allowed herself to be reflective of a school year that ended too abruptly. She felt robbed of the closure she needed, far more than she originally could admit. Again and again, each of these young teachers praised a recent district initiative to begin incorporating social and emotional learning into their professional awareness. Although the primary intention was to address the needs of their students of color, each of these teachers were grateful for the awareness they gained for their own mental and emotional

well-being. From using simple breathing exercises to seeking professional help from a therapist, they discovered personal benefits they did not expect. As a result, they all echoed how their own personal enlightenment will have a direct impact on how they approach relationship building with their students, especially those who may have already endured traumatic life experiences.

Summary

In an effort to remain fully transparent, I must share that my lines blurred between being an objective researcher and a teacher-mentor as my conversations with the participants carried on through this study. There was quite a bit of insignificant email correspondence that was not relevant to the purpose of this study. They each seemed to look forward to our talks and connecting in general. I don't believe they were especially impacted by the study itself, but instead about having the opportunity to share and reflect on their experiences from the past year. It is possible that anxieties and uncertainties had taken a toll on each of them by the time this study took place. As stated previously, the participants became unexpectedly emotional during their interviews. I found myself saying comforting and reassuring things to them to help process what they were feeling.

Overall, the three teachers of this study shared a wealth of anecdotal information from their perspectives of culturally responsive teaching, and teaching in general. What appeared to glean through their interview responses was the overall need to learn more of how to build relationships and trust with their students. The new teachers in this study did not appear to lack access to resources to help them through some of their more challenging development. What they each seemed to desperately need was more time to revisit and reflect on their teaching experiences. Due to societal and political events that

add rich context to this study, it was evident to the researcher that these teachers were open to ways for how to incorporate these sociological elements into their instructional content for the upcoming school year. They were each open to more application of social and emotional learning, not just for their students, but also for themselves.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Three teachers with one to three years of professional experience were recruited through a convenience snowball sampling to be interviewed for this study. The objective of the study was to hear their perspectives on their professional development needs for implementing culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. In the end, that question was not fully answered. However, there was quite a bit revealed about their support needs in other areas. All three teachers were women in their twenties, recruited to work within the same large urban school district. This was the first full-time teaching job for each of them, though they entered the profession from different entry points. Two of the teachers were White women from Middle-class backgrounds. One was from a small rural area in Iowa, while the other was from a small suburban community in Virginia. They both grew up in two-parent households where attending and graduating from college was an understood expectation. One entered the teaching profession through a traditional university prep program, while the other entered the profession through an alternative certification program after working as a substitute teacher.

The third teacher participant was LatinX or Hispanic and grew up in a single-parent household, in the high-poverty community where she now teaches. Although education was not a priority for her growing up, she still pursued education and became the first in her family to graduate from college. She also prepared for teaching through a traditional university program. Despite their differences in background and education perspectives leading up to entering the profession, their experiences as young teachers working with students of color had striking similarities. Their reflections are the heart of

this study. They spoke of their individual backgrounds and how it might have shaped their viewpoint of race and race relations. They spoke to how the current state of race relations in the U.S., along with other societal ills may be taking a traumatic toll on their students, as well as themselves. Although they expressed an openness to learning more about culturally responsive teaching practices, they candidly shared their apprehension about carefully navigating relationship building in such a racially charged time in history.

Overview of the Study

This study asked new teachers about their perspectives on their professional development needs to implement culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. Using a qualitative narrative case study design, three young new teachers were allowed to share their stories of triumph, struggle, enlightenment and loss as they navigated the waters of teaching students of color in high-poverty communities. The study was conducted in a large urban school district in southeast Texas, which has a student population of over 67,000. Of that number, approximately 87.3% are classified as economically disadvantaged. The overwhelming majority of the student population is Hispanic or LatinX and Black. The majority of the young new teachers recruited from university teacher preparation programs are White females.

The school district where this study was conducted found itself in a period of reflection of its past and present practices. The student discipline rates were out of proportion with the student ethnic data. Black students were written up for disciplinary infractions and referred to Special Education or alternative placements at a far higher rate than other subgroups of students. This was in spite of Black students only making up 22.7% of the total student population.

It was of interest to the researcher to contribute to a district-wide effort to improve the academic and social outcomes of the student subpopulations, by taking a closer look at the teachers' needs from their own perspectives. Was there a relational disconnect between teachers and students that was resulting in an increased amount of disciplinary referrals? The district was exploring several areas of need to positively impact the discipline rates of student subgroups and alternative methods of addressing student and teacher behaviors in the classroom. Were the student discipline rates really reflective of a generation of Black learners that were truly out of control behaviorally? Were new teachers prepared to work with students that were from socioeconomic backgrounds different from their own? Would new teachers need professional development to support implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms? This study explored these questions, but from the perspective of new teachers that found themselves thoughtfully pondering these issues in the middle of global pandemic and an increasingly racially divided modern America. The parallels that emerged from the teachers' reflections centered on cultural homogeneity, language barriers, trauma, social and emotional learning, and shared discomfort with relating to Black students in general.

Triangulation and Trustworthiness

Through rich and thick descriptions, the research participants met with the researcher for two semi-structured interviews and one member checking session conducted over a video conferencing platform. Each interview session was video recorded, and the audio of the recordings were transcribed using a web-based transcription software tool. The video recordings were shared with each respective interview participants to review in a member checking session, as an opportunity for each

teacher to clarify their initial responses or expand on their thoughts. Their reflections and responses to those interview questions are shared throughout the study as direct quotes. This was done in an effort to accurately depict their perspectives in their own words and remove researcher bias.

Each participant was well aware of the researcher's role as a professional development administrator within the district where the study was conducted. The researcher's primary role was that of an active listener through each interview, allowing participants to share as much or as little as they felt comfortable conveying. They were told the information they shared would be used to design professional development opportunities for future new teacher cohorts, especially in respect to the culturally responsive teaching support. Although it was the original intent, each participant said they felt this study allowed them an opportunity to reflect on the previous school year. These reflections proved to be far more emotional than either the participants or the researcher expected them to be.

Implications

Although this study targeted new teachers in a school district that educates predominately students of color, it does not blame the teachers who are doing the work. The students in this district, in particular the Black students, are in great need of support that can yield more positive results than the district is currently experiencing. The goal is to learn more of how to support and help the new teachers. Of the school district's partnerships with 37 university teacher preparation programs, new teachers are recruited and hired from 20 that are located in White-majority regions of the country. Suppose those new teachers are making the choice to come to this school district and work with a

majority students of color. In that case, the role of the researcher-practitioner is to explore their areas of highest need to aid their transition and build their capacity to successfully grow their students.

Future Research

Throughout the efforts to recruit teachers to participate in this study and during the interviews that ultimately made up the heart of this qualitative case study, the research documented these new teachers' differing responses regarding their LatinX and Black students. It is to be noted again that over 70% of the student population is LatinX, so teachers are likely to think in terms of the dominant demographic when they reference their students. However, the disproportionately high discipline referral rates for the Black students in the district indicate that there are issues that must be addressed in that area. If the teachers are the initiators of those discipline referrals, it could be assumed that they would concur this is a high priority issue.

Instead, the researcher took note in observation journaling that teachers had to be redirected to consider and include Black students when answering questions about the issues within their classrooms. The researcher noted that the teachers appeared to be more at ease with openly discussing their relationship building efforts with their LatinX and Asian students. However, on more than one occasion, the researcher had to ask interview questions a second time to make sure teachers' perspectives of relating to their Black student subpopulation were included in their reflections. Were the experiences with Black students less eventful or forgettable? Could it be that new teachers didn't "know their lane" when it came to speaking on issues related to their Black students, or Black people in general (Hope*, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Does this feeling of new teachers not “knowing their lane” when it comes to building relationships with Black students, or race relations in general, warrant further investigation? Should this take priority when those new teachers will be working primarily with Black students? The researcher recorded journal notes that the teachers in this study did have a willingness to discuss this issue, but needed a little encouragement to begin the discussion. Further discussions could lead to greater understanding of how to encourage more young new teachers openly talk through this perceived barrier.

Recommendations

It is of interest to know, as stated previously, that the researcher in this study played the dual role of the practitioner. This study served the need to partially fulfil the requirements of graduate studies, but it also served to reach an equally important professional goal. The researcher currently serves as an administrator responsible for designing and providing professional development for all district teachers where this study was conducted. At the time of the study, the district’s professional development team was in the process of rethinking the support and resources that were provided to its newly recruited teachers. This was in consideration of Black students’ negatively disproportionate discipline rates, and the fact that most of the district’s newly recruited young teachers were White from Middle-class backgrounds.

Instead of assuming that these new teachers will gain the wisdom and enlightenment from a long career of teaching students of color, maybe plans should be made to fast track the skills they will need sooner rather than later. If new teachers to this district will encounter a large number of parents that are English learners, then maybe the new teachers will need to become proficient conversationally in whatever that dominant

language of the parents might be. If we already spent years observing new teachers react emotionally to the highs and lows of profession, then maybe introducing them to resources and services that will provide wrap around support for them the same way it does for students should be planned in advance.

The researcher's underlying interest was to not only explore new teachers' perceptions of their professional development needs regarding culturally responsive teaching. As a Black woman and district administrator, I understand the difficult process of recruiting quality teachers to long term careers in K12 education. I also see how few of those quality educators are currently choosing this career. In Texas alone, state certification processes are being reimagined and districts are hastily creating incentive packages to attract more people to the field. Once they come to my district, I want to ensure I have done my part to grow their capacity to work with all students at a high level. An additional area that could warrant research is whether or not providing this type of comprehensive support to prepare teachers to work with students of color might positively impact whether those same teachers choose to remain teaching in those same communities with those same student populations long term. Helping teachers develop those skills of culturally responsive teaching could then become an investment in the future of underserved communities. A generation of teachers that enter their education careers fully prepared to build cross cultural relationships and set consistently high expectations for their students of color have societal impacts far beyond just their classrooms.

References

- BLACK LIVES MATTER HOUSTON. (n.d.). Retrieved September 18, 2020, from <https://www.blmhouston.com/>
- Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.
- Annamma, S.A. Whiteness as Property: Innocence and Ability in Teacher Education. *Urban Review* 47, 293-316 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0293-6>
- Anon. 2019. "Opinion Piece by Amy Stuart Wells Urges White Parents to Consider Diverse Schools." *Teachers College - Columbia University*. Retrieved September 20, 2019
- Anyon, J. (2014). *Radical possibilities: public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Belbase, S., Luitel, B. C., & Taylor, P. C. (2013). Autoethnography: A method of research and teaching for transformative education. *Journal of Education and Research*, 1, 86–95. doi.org/10.3126/jer.v1i0.7955
- Billingham, C. (2014). Parental choice, neighborhood schools, and the market metaphor in urban education reform. *Urban Studies*, 52(4), 685–701. doi: 10.1177/0042098014528395
- Brooks, R. L., & Newborn, M. J. (1994). Critical Race Theory and Classical-Liberal Civil Rights Scholarship: A Distinction without a Difference? *California Law Review*, 82(4), 787–845. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480932>
- Buendía, E. (2010). Reconsidering the Urban in Urban Education: Interdisciplinary Conversations. *The Urban Review*, 43(1), 1–21. doi: 10.1007/s11256-010-0152-z

By the Numbers. (2019, August 22). Retrieved from aldineisd.org:

<https://strategicplan.aldineisd.org/by-the-numbers/>

Calderhead, J. (1991). Images of teaching: Preservice teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 7, 1-8.

Cantiello, J. W. (2011). From Pre-Racial to Post-Racial? Reading and Reviewing "A Mercy" in the Age of Obama. *MELUS*, 165-183.

Chang, H. (2008). *Auto ethnography as method*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press.

Cohen-Vogel, Lora, and Hyland Hunt. 2007. "Governing Quality in Teacher Education: Deconstructing Federal Text and Talk." *American Journal of Education* 114(1):137–63.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, 4th edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Darling-Hammond, L., Barnett, B., Thoreson, A. 2001. "Does Teacher Certification Mater? Evaluation the Evidence." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23(1): 55-77.

del Brey, C. (2018). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic ...*
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>.

Diangelo, Robin. (2018). *White fragility: why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2004). *Teacher-centered professional development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

- Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of religion and health*, 23(3), 197-203.
- Durkin, P., & Rothman, R. (2006). *Educating vulnerable pupils*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (138), 273-290.
- Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Fylkesnes, S. (2018). Whiteness in teacher education research discourses: A review of the use and meaning making of the term cultural diversity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 71, 24–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.12.005>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice; third edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, A SAGE Company.
- Harpalani, V. (2005). *Racial stereotypes and achievement -linked identity formation during adolescence: An investigation of athletic investment and academic resilience* (Order No. 3179744). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305452260). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/docview/305452260?accountid=7107>

Haycock, K., & Peske, H. (2006). *Teacher inequality: How poor and minority students are shortchanged on teacher quality*. Retrieved from The Education Trust:

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED494820.pdf>

Henke, S. (2013, November 19). Who Considers Teaching and Who Teaches? First-Time 2007–08 Bachelor’s Degree Recipients by Teaching Status 1 Year After Graduation (NCES 2014-002). Retrieved September 18, 2020, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2014002>

Irvine, J. J. (1990). *Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practices and Prescriptions*. Praeger Publishers.

Jones, S. H., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C. (2016). *Handbook of Auto ethnography*. Routledge.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Kleiner, & J., D. (2010, June 09). ACRES HOMES, TX. Retrieved May 16, 2020, from <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hrazv>

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Loewus, L. (2019, February 20). The Nation's Teaching Force Is Still Mostly White and Female. *EdWeek*.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education:*

Revised and expanded from case study research in education. San Francisco, CA:

Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Milner, Murray. (1972). *The illusion of equality*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. The New Press.

- Muhammad, K. G. (2010). *The condemnation of blackness: Race, crime, and the making of modern urban america*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Murphy, R., & Daniel, A. (2019, April 05). Aldine ISD. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from <https://schools.texastribune.org/districts/aldine-isd/>
- Noguera, P. (2008). *The Trouble With Black Boys*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Noguera, P. A. (2003). The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African American Males. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 431–459.
doi.org/10.1177/0042085903038004005
- OUR NATION'S ENGLISH LEARNERS*. Our Nation's English Learners.
<https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-characteristics/index.html>.
- Peske, Heather G., and Kati Haycock. n.d. “How Poor and Minority Students Are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality.” 20.
- Reardon, S.F. (2016). School Segregation and Racial Academic Achievement Gaps. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(5), 34.
<https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.5.03>
- Reed-Danahay, D. (2017). Bourdieu and Critical Autoethnography: Implications for Research, Writing and Teaching. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 144-152.
- Reeves, D. B. (2010). *Transforming professional development into student results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Rushton, S. P. (2001). Cultural assimilation: A narrative case study of student-teaching in an inner-city school. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(2), 147-160.

Sleeter, C. (2016). Wrestling with problematics of whiteness in teacher education.

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 1065-1068.

Stronge, J. H. (2018). *Qualities of effective teachers*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Sullivan, K. (2017, December 19). *Trends in teacher mobility in Texas and associations with teacher, student, and school characteristics*.

<https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=REL2018283>.

Tatum, B. (2017). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York, NY: Hachette Book Group.

Thernstrom, A., & Thernstrom, S. (2003). *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. Simon & Schuster.

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *School Composition and the Black-White Achievement Gap*.

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2015018.aspx>.

Vaught, Sabina E., and Angelina E. Castagno. 2008. "I Don't Think I'm a Racist":

Critical Race Theory, Teacher Attitudes, and Structural Racism." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11(2):95–113.

Weber, S., (1993). The narrative anecdote in teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 19, 71-82.

Whipp, Joan L. 2013. "Developing Socially Just Teachers: The Interaction of Experiences Before, During, and After Teacher Preparation in Beginning Urban Teachers." *Journal of Teacher Education* 64(5):33.

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Akilah Willery and I am conducting a research study regarding culturally responsive teaching in Aldine ISD. I currently serve as a member of the Professional Learning department within the district. This research study is a part of my doctoral studies, but the information gained will also help the district better plan efforts to prepare incoming teachers for working with students of color. If you would be interested in participating in this research study, please fill out the form through the link* below. As a research participant, you will be interviewed 2-3 times through a video conferencing platform and your responses will be recorded. The interviews will be no more than one hour each. If you would like to participate, simply fill out the form and I will contact you for the initial interview within the next week. If you would rather not participate, no response to this email is needed.

You are in no way obligated to participate and there is no compensation for your time. However, your input will have a deep impact on how the district designs and delivers professional development support for teachers in this particular area.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

[LINK TO INTEREST FORM] -----> *This link when clicked in the email message body by the recipient opened the initial interest survey, which each participant filled out prior to their first interview. The data collected in this survey was used in the study.

Akilah Willery

Doctoral Candidate

University of Houston, College of Education

Appendix B

Research Study Interest Attached to Recruitment Email

9/12/2020

Research Study Interest Survey

Research Study Interest Survey

The following survey is for individuals interested in participating in a research study regarding new teachers, professional learning, and culturally responsive teaching practices. The results of this study will help the Professional Learning team focus support for new teachers with culturally responsive teaching practices. The study is only for teachers with 0-3 years of teaching experience.

If you are selected, the researcher will contact you directly through email to set up a date and time to be interviewed via Google Hangouts Meet or Zoom. You must be able to participate in up to three (3) virtual meetings, up to one hour each, from your own device through your own internet connection with your webcam on. All virtual meetings will take place during the month of June 2020.

1. Name

2. Personal Email Address

3. Personal Phone Number

4. Gender?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other:

Appendix C



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

July 27, 2020

Akilah Willery
awalker12@uh.edu

Dear Akilah Willery:

On July 4, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	New Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Professional Development for Working with Students of Color
Investigator:	Akilah Willery
IRB ID:	STUDY00002333
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None

Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Akilah Willery, HRP-503 Protocol (updated 7-24-20).pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Akilah Willery, Interview Protocol V.1.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • AISD First Year Teachers Survey - Google Forms.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • A.Willery- Recruitment email to research participants (2).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Akilah Willery, HRP-502a - TEMPLATE CONSENT DOCUMENT- NON-CLINICAL (updated).pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Research Study Interest Survey - Google Forms (1).pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • Willery Decision Letter.pdf, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission;
---------------------	---

Review Category:	Expedited
Committee Name:	Noncommittee review
IRB Coordinator:	<u>Maria Martinez</u>

The IRB approved the study on July 27 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated. As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure
- Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

Institutional Review Boards

downloaded from the documents tab. In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office

University of Houston, Division of Research

713 743 9204 cphs@central.uh.edu
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

Appendix D

Consent to Take Part in Human Research Study



Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of research study: *New Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Professional Development for Working with Students of Color*

Investigator: *Akilah Willery. This study is part of a thesis being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cameron White.*

Key Information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the “Detailed Information” heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.

- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about culturally responsive professional development because you meet the following criteria of being a White teacher with 0-3 years of experience working with students of color.

In general, your participation in the research involves participating in up to three virtual interviews. Each interview will not last longer than one hour. There will be at least five open response questions regarding your background, teacher preparation and classroom experiences. All video and audio will be recorded.

The primary risk to you in taking part is the commitment of your personal time through participating in up to three virtual interviews, and there is no potential benefit for your participation. You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Detailed Information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study is to explore the perceptions of new teachers regarding professional development to help them culturally responsive practices for working with students of color.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for two interviews for a duration of no longer than one hour each.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about five people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

- The research participant will electronically sign and return this consent form to the researcher via email. The researcher will store the consent form with all documents associated with this study. The researcher will ask you via email to choose a convenient date and time to conduct two interviews.
- The length and duration of each interview will be up to one hour. There will be two interviews.
- You will interact only with the researcher.
- The interviews will be conducted through video conferencing (Zoom).
- The interviews should be completed within 4 weeks.

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio record/video record you as the research subject:

€ I agree to be audio recorded/video recorded during the

research study. ____ € I agree that the audio

recording/video recording can be used in

publication/presentations.

€ I do not agree that the audio recording/video recording can be used in
publication/presentations.

€ I do not agree to be audio recorded/video recorded during the research study.

If a participant is unable to be recorded through audio or video, they will not be able to participate in this study.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. Your alternative to taking part in this research study is not to take part.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still includes your name or other personal information will be removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not expect any risks related to the research activities. If you choose to take part and undergo a

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no known benefits to you from your taking part in this research.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Taking part in this project is anonymous, and information you provide cannot be linked to your identity.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at the UH College of Education Graduate Studies Office at coegrad@central.uh.edu, attention Dr. Cameron White.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu

if:

- Your questions, concerns or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

May we contact you regarding future research opportunities?

In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. There is never any obligation to take part in additional research. Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?

☒ Yes

☐ No

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Appendix E

Interview Protocol, Sessions #1 and #2

Research Study Interview - Culturally Responsive Professional Development

Research Participant:

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Video Conference Meeting Link:

Release Form Signed and Returned: YES / NO

Reminder: Inform participant that pseudonyms will be used in place of any names or references to people or school district buildings and landmarks.

1. Describe your background, childhood and family structure. Describe the surrounding community in which you grew up.
2. Tell me about why you decided to become a teacher. Describe your student teaching experience. How were you recruited to teach in Houston, Texas in [School District] ISD?
3. Reflect on your initial experiences as a new teacher working with students of color in a high-poverty community. What issues did you face? If you faced issues, how did you handle them? What support did you have to address these issues?
4. Based on your teaching experience so far, what adjustments will you make for the upcoming school year? What resources or support will you seek out to prepare?
5. Share what general lessons you learned from working with students of color in a high-poverty community. What are some things you wish you could share with other new teachers like yourself before they start the same work?
6. In the context of culturally responsive teaching and reflecting on your collective experiences from recruitment to student teaching to being a full-time teacher, can you expand on what you wish you would have known or prepared for at each point?
 - a. What (if anything) do you wish you would have known during the recruitment phase?

- b. What (if anything) do you wish you would have known during the student teaching phase?
 - c. What (if anything) do you wish you would have known during your first year as a full-time teacher?
- 7. If you could prioritize the professional development and support that is needed for new teachers to be successful in working with students of color, what should be at the top of the list?
- 8. From your perspective, what is [School District] doing well with preparing new teachers and what are they not doing well?
- 9. How likely are you to continue teaching in this district with your current student population? Explain your answer.
- 10. What other thoughts or comments would you like to add?