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Let's Talk About It: Bridging the Gap Between Diverse Students and Their White Teachers

Beth DeAn Boring Shoff

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LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN DIVERSE STUDENTS
AND THEIR WHITE TEACHERS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my students. I have learned so much from you. I especially wish to thank my students who have opened my eyes and heart to their worlds.

To my parents who harnessed my independence and curiosity and loved me even when I wasn't so lovable. My best qualities are a result of the collective attention, love, and dedication that I have received from you. You have made all things possible, and I will always love you.

To Jeff E who has supported all my endeavors over the last 25 years and continued to love the unlovable parts of me. What could I possibly think up next? Thank you for your love and support.

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To my patient furry friends. It is time for us to hit the trails again.

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To my colleagues who became my allies and friends. We were powerful allies who unsettled the status quo. I undertook this dissertation to fill the void created when our team dismantled. I hope the future holds a place for us to co-conspire for good!

ABSTRACT

The achievement gap is a notorious construct of 21st-century schools and refers to the achievement of marginalized groups as compared to their White counterparts. This qualitative action research studied this phenomenon in a small, suburban school district experiencing shifting demographics by analyzing educators' perceptions and attitudes for multicultural education and culture-centered themes. Survey responses and interview data were coded using Banks's five dimensions of multicultural education (content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture) to frame professional learning opportunities for White, middle-class educators. Additionally, emergent themes were identified that impact the achievement gap in this setting: 1) whiteness is a barrier to equity, 2) intersectional identities impact achievement, 3) administrators are perceived as barriers to equity, and 4) educators must become activists to counter inequities. The findings and implications of this research are summarized in the Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP) for individual or district-wide use. The E-CAPLP seeks to focus professional learning on developing equitable opportunities for historically underserved students.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
CRT.....	Culturally Responsive Teaching
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
E-CAPLP	Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan
ECAS	Educator Cultural Awareness Survey
HUS.....	Historically Under Served
PoP	Problem of Practice

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Mrs. Shoff, do you think Black Lives Matter? Aww, never mind, this is public school. We can’t talk about that.”

—M. (sixth-grade student)

Before I could even answer, he walked away. Had he stuck around, I would have told him how much it mattered, but the business of the school day ended the conversation before it even started. I would have assured him I do indeed believe Black Lives Matter, especially his.

By the fall of 2020, when M. posed this rhetorical question, I had been in education for thirty years and I had always been confident that I was fair, student-centered, equitable, and not racist. I am a White, middle-class, female educator in a suburban Pennsylvania public school district that only recently started becoming more diverse. Once the steel and coal industries left the area, the population plummeted, and the demographic composition began shifting. During this time, I worked as a reading specialist, an ESL specialist, and most recently an English teacher. Beginning in 2008 through 2018, I used school-wide achievement data to target which students required reading intervention. Data indicated a prevalent achievement gap, and it was growing increasingly worrisome each year.

When I began my doctoral work in 2017, identifying a Problem of Practice (PoP) for my dissertation gave me an opportunity to formally address the achievement gap by

reviewing scholarly literature, examining the attitudes and perceptions of my colleagues, and engaging some of them in critical discourse to identify causes and solutions. The increasingly standardized curriculum coupled with the increasing number of diverse students in my small, suburban school district led to glaring discrepancies in achievement among the majority group and the minority groups.

Some researchers, educators, legislators, and policy makers describe this achievement gap as one of the most difficult educational and social challenges of the 21st century (Howard, 2010). The achievement gap is a significant issue in American schools that has been unresponsive to interventions and policies attempting to eradicate it. It is identified through a comparative analysis of achievement data between demographic groups. The achievement gap is measured via analysis of grades, standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, placement in special education, participation in advanced placement courses, and suspension and expulsion rates of diverse students (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Urban schools are typically the focus of achievement gap studies and interventions, but as demographics shift in suburban schools like mine, educators in these settings are tasked with designing programs and practices to address the discrepancies in achievement between student groups, often with limited resources (Shiller, 2016). The achievement gap in suburban schools can appear more obvious than in urban schools (Shiller, 2016). As a specialist in my suburban school who used the data to identify students needing academic support and interventions, I saw the achievement of historically underserved students (HUS) had not significantly improved. The achievement

gap grew as diversity increased and more students met the guidelines for academic support.

I hypothesized that the core curriculum and instructional practices were not responsive to the culture of the students entering our school since the academic interventions consistently did not improve the achievement of diverse students. The curriculum reflected the standards-based reform occurring in Pennsylvania and around much of the country, with more scripted resources requiring increasing compliance from teachers and students. As standards-based reform and demographic shifts converged, HUS achievement became more elusive.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a widespread impact on education beginning in March 2020 (United Nations, 2020), has also exacerbated the local achievement gap. Even though all students have a device to use during virtual instruction, our HUS are less likely to attend class via Zoom and less likely to complete assignments. Many of our HUS have opted to participate in all virtual classes instead of attending in person. These students are further marginalized by the pandemic, as well as the persistence of structural racism in our educational systems.

In addition to the ongoing pandemic, in May 2020, while many Americans argued whether mask orders violated their civil rights, George Floyd, an unarmed black man, was detained and killed by four Minneapolis police officers. Mr. Floyd was handcuffed, then pinned to the ground while Officer Chauvin kneeled on his neck and killed him (Dwyer, 2020). The world erupted in protest over this most recent act of police brutality. Despite the global pandemic, people protested world-wide and the activist group #Black Lives Matter set in motion organized protests to this most recent senseless killing

(Dwyer, 2020). Racism in American institutions had become more blatant and contested, which further divided Americans.

The events of this past year demonstrate an urgent need for reflection on current practices, policies, and pedagogy in the education of our young citizens. As a practitioner, I can approach my community's shifting demographics and troubling achievement gap as a Problem of Practice using action research. Thus, this study was conducted in my suburban public school district in a Rust Belt community in western Pennsylvania. Because previous interventions had not impacted the increasing achievement gap, I sought a more multicultural approach to improve the achievement of diverse students in my setting.

Theoretical Framework

I initially approached the achievement gap at my school with the lens of an interventionist attempting to diagnose deficiencies and identify instructional practices to improve the achievement of HUS. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) provided insight for how we might use diverse students' cultural capital to improve academic outcomes. These culture-centered pedagogies are undeniably necessary to replace the Eurocentric canon and promote a social justice education, which ensures equal rights and opportunities for all students. As I analyzed data within the backdrop of a divisive political time in our country, it became evident that educators, including my colleagues and me, must become social justice activists to improve outcomes for our diverse students.

As I progressed through the literature and continued to observe and experience power relations within my setting, I applied a critical lens to the Problem of Practice. I

noticed an absence of equity and inclusivity in our policies, practices, and pedagogies, as well as the marginalization of HUS within the school setting. Multicultural education as a philosophy and a pedagogy provided a framework to structure this critical lens and guided my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My initial observations informed the survey questions I posed to fellow educators in the district, and critically reviewing their existing attitudes and perceptions enabled me to develop a plan for professional learning opportunities so my colleagues and I can become co-conspirators and social justice activists. I will elaborate on this framework in Chapter 2, but I introduce each of the core components below.

Critical Theory

Critical theory oriented this action research study from its conception to its conclusion. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), critical theory, as a philosophy, critiques social conditions and how they create unequal power relations based on attributes like race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Additionally, critical theory challenges truths that have been perpetuated by dominant groups in the effort to emancipate and eliminate oppression in society (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). More specific to education, critical pedagogy applies critical theory to identify the oppression and dehumanization of students within educational institutions (Giroux, 2020). Critical pedagogy empowers students and teachers to recognize power relations and question this structure of oppression.

Critical theory informed the methodological design of my action research as I sought to examine such inequities. This lens aligned with my action research methodology, as action research addresses the unique context, characteristics, and

perceptions of a school community and acknowledges that everyone perceives school reality differently (Efron & Ravid, 2013). It seeks to create meaningful school change and experiences for students by examining differing perspectives held by those within the setting. Critical action research is grounded in a social justice agenda and attempts to expose inequities to inform change (Efron & Ravid, 2013). After exposing inequities and oppression in my setting, I sought to apply multicultural education and culture-centered pedagogies to promote more equitable education for our HUS.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a multi-faceted framework to address the achievement gap and other inequities in educational institutions. It is both philosophy and pedagogy. This action research enlists Banks's (2019) five dimensions of multicultural education to frame the perceptions of educators at the research site. Additionally, multicultural education illustrates how schools are in position to contribute to a democratic society and promote principles of social justice by imbuing the attitudes and values of a pluralistic society and ensuring that traditionally marginalized groups have equitable opportunity to achieve (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2020). Multicultural education and other culture-centered pedagogies propose a counternarrative to the Eurocentrism of public education.

Culture-Centered Pedagogies

Several culture-centered pedagogies influenced the initial stages of this action research and served as the scaffold to improving my own practice and deepening my social justice advocacy. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009) focuses on educating the whole child through a cultural lens. It is an affirming pedagogy

that empowers students to embrace their own identities and validates these identities through equitable practices. Educators develop classroom environments focused on caring relationships with high expectations for students. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) preserves student culture and language and centers learning on students' experiences. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) expands the work of Ladson-Billings (2009) in the education of diverse students in a changing social climate by recognizing the contributions of multiple cultures and the explicit commitment to sustaining them. CSP counters persistent deficit-framed policies and practices and captures the power of cultural differences in an additive model of education.

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) focuses on the classroom environment and the production of personal stories in which to view, experience, and analyze the world. The approach is individualistic and intends to address the underachievement of Black students through story making, which is reflective of values and traditions that are inherently important to each student. Gay used the idea of CRT as a story on how to improve the achievement of Black students.

As a whole, my theoretical framework conveys my belief that democratic citizenship requires understandings and practices that sustain and support diversity. Giroux (2020) linked pedagogy to politics by explaining that pedagogy works to construct critical agents who live and work in a democratic society. He elaborated,

My view of critical pedagogy developed out of a recognition that education was important not only for gainful employment but also for creating the formative culture of beliefs, practices, and social relations that enable individuals to wield

power, learn how to govern, and nurture a democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values, and freedom seriously. (p. 2)

Seeking a deeper understanding of the achievement gap as a social justice issue warranted theories and pedagogies designed to investigate obscure influences that oppress culturally and linguistically different students. The interplay of critical theory, multicultural education, and culture-centered pedagogies framed the design of this critical action research.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes and perceptions of my fellow White, middle-class educators in a suburban district experiencing shifting demographics to seek a deeper understanding of the ongoing achievement gap. The following research questions guided this action research study:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of White, middle-class educators in response to the changing student demographic in a suburban public school district?
2. What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban school experiencing increasing cultural diversity?

To truly enact critical theory in the exploration of the achievement gap that is occurring in my district as it becomes increasingly multicultural, I needed to explore the hidden transcripts that influence the achievement of diverse students. Therefore, my research questions focused this exploration on the perspectives and attitudes of White, middle class educators within the district. My position as a former interventionist

identifying the achievement gap and the recognition that interventions did not improve outcomes for diverse students in the core curriculum convinced me to address the Problem of Practice through action research. The research questions sought to deepen my understanding of the achievement gap and identify perspectives and experiences that would inform professional learning opportunities. The guiding research questions, grounded in critical theory, had a major impact on the findings and implications, which will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Positionality

As an action researcher, I approached my Problem of Practice as an insider with a vested interest in the ethos of the district. During my lengthy career in this setting, I have been a classroom teacher, a reading specialist, and an ESL program specialist with a focus on learner-centered pedagogies. My learner-centered philosophy aligned with district leadership and my fellow colleagues for the first twenty years of my career. The culture was student-focused and empowering. When the demographics began to shift and the accountability era emerged, district leadership also underwent a series of changes, becoming more top-down and authoritarian. The curriculum and instruction reflected what Paulo Freire (1972) referred to as the banking system of education, wherein students are vessels that receive knowledge predetermined by educators.

Many of my colleagues and I did not transition well to the new “culture” of the district. The new leadership appeared to direct repeated criticisms toward existing district leadership and teacher leaders, many of whom left the district for different educational jobs, retired, or changed careers entirely. Over the next several years, my position would change several times. As I continued my advocacy for our culturally and linguistically

diverse students, I philosophically collided with the new leadership. In my naiveté, I did not realize that we all did not think the same way about instruction for our marginalized students. My previous administrators had encouraged me to focus on the whole child, differentiate, and engage students, which empowered me to problem-solve and act accordingly. This new top-down leadership was foreign to me. Scripted resources and time-blocked schedules replaced thematic studies and school-wide enrichment. I had spent years developing my skills and understandings as a reading specialist, and I openly shared my educated opinions on literacy matters. I also became the ESL specialist during this time. I developed support programs, interventions, and curriculum in addition to managing support programs. As I tried to execute my educational duties, I was met with resistance, retaliation, and removal by administration. I was effectively silenced.

The achievement gap I had first recognized during my time as a reading specialist has since proliferated, especially in literacy development. Nearly 40% of students in the primary grades did not reach grade level benchmarks. I had anticipated this outcome based on my extensive training and experience with literacy development and remediating reading difficulties and attempted to warn administrators of my concerns, but the administration dismissed my experiences and educational opinions. As a current sixth-grade English teacher, I continue to observe the challenges the students face and the continued existence of the achievement gap. My frequent position changes provided me with a personal view of how damaging being pushed to the margins can be for the less powerful. My time in the margins has allowed me to view the system critically and deepen my understanding of the achievement gap through my colleagues' perceptions and a self-reflective process of action research.

Studying my own colleagues to improve my praxis and that of my students aligns with the spirit of action research and hermeneutic phenomenology. Considering the perspectives of others in relation to my own beliefs and values anticipates the “fusion of horizons” that occurs when discourse leads to new understandings (Findling, 2007). Gadamer (1960/1989) explained that these “fusions of horizons” cannot be planned but present themselves and one must be open to the experience so that through these interactions new understandings emerge. As I interacted with my colleagues, this openness provided the opportunity for me to identify allies and thought partners. Attempting to understand how educators in my community are poised to teach students in increasingly multicultural classrooms immersed me in the research as an insider studying other insiders, which also allowed me to reflect on my own praxis.

As an action researcher, I also acknowledge my biases and subjectivities are present in my study. The events discussed above had a profound effect on all aspects of the methodology, findings, and implications. As a graduate student in the Curriculum Studies program at the University of South Carolina, I have engaged in coursework and scholarly discourse on issues of social justice and activism. As a current sixth-grade English teacher, I approach my role as a social justice activist and an educator.

Research Design

Qualitative critical action research is an appropriate methodology to study the achievement gap in my setting. The collection of qualitative data provides the opportunity to examine the PoP beyond a surface level and get a glimpse of the hidden curriculum that may be influencing the achievement gap. Past interventions to address the achievement gap focused on the written curriculum and monitored outcomes through

quantitative data. Using a critical lens to approach this PoP, I chose to examine the attitudes of my colleagues and how they perceive the demographic changes in our district and their preparedness to educate diverse students. According to Efron and Ravid (2013), action research is constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical. The situational practicality of my study stems from my having spent three decades in the setting, observing trends that have contributed to the development of the research questions. I constructed knowledge through the systematic collection of data via an Educator Cultural Awareness Survey (ECAS, Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews to investigate my Problem of Practice, yet this study is just the beginning of a continual research cycle that can improve teaching and learning at this site and in other settings in my sphere of influence. Specifically, this study is considered critical action research as it combines critical theory with action research.

The ECAS was a researcher-developed survey I distributed to all 103 teachers in my district. It consisted of mostly open-ended questions and maintained participant anonymity. Of the 7 teachers who completed the survey, 2 participants volunteered for follow-up interviews. I coded and analyzed all data inductively and deductively (Efron & Ravid, 2013). I first matched the data to preexisting themes reflecting Banks's (2019) five dimensions of multicultural education. Secondly, I analyzed the data to identify emerging themes that were not evident in the first round of analysis. After each step of analysis, I wrote a thick, rich description including significant participant quotations (Ivankova, 2015).

Qualitative researchers are tasked with demonstrating that their studies are credible, which I accomplished through member checking and thick description

(Creswell & Miller, 2000; Efron & Ravid, 2013). Member checking ensured I accurately represented participants' attitudes and perceptions by sharing the transcripts with them. Thick description provided an authentic transmission of their attitudes and perceptions by using their own words in a detailed narrative (Efron & Ravid, 2013). I will elaborate on my data collection and analysis methods, as well as any ethical considerations, in Chapter 3.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of this critical action research, which I synthesized into an Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP, Appendix A) can inform all stakeholders at my small suburban school—especially White, middle-class educators—of professional learning opportunities that will address inequities in the opportunities and outcomes of diverse students. The E-CAPLP presents these findings and their implications by breaking them into those that can be implemented within a system-wide initiative or independently since educators in my district indicated a desire to learn more and enact equity pedagogies.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways. Most importantly, the impact it has had on me as a practitioner is significant. As a White, middle-class educator in a suburban school, I have been able to critically reflect on my own attitudes and perceptions while surveying my colleagues and engaging them in critical discourse regarding my Problem of Practice. I looked beyond academic interventions to understand the achievement gap and identified hidden constructs that contributed to the oppression of our HUS. Providing students with academic interventions without examining the broader context of the

achievement gap limited the progress of diverse students. I now realize the importance of teachers' becoming social justice activists and speaking up when we see inequities. In my setting, I was silenced and powerless; I lacked the resilience to continue my advocacy. I now recognize I must harness the resilience of my diverse students and their families and become a co-conspirator in the fight for social justice in our society, especially our schools.

The changing demographics in the suburbs require White, middle-class educators to reflect on their practice with a critical lens and address implicit bias, deficit views, and stereotypes. Additionally, White middle-class educators who wish to become social justice activists can replicate this research design to identify colleagues and possibly families in their settings who can be their co-conspirators and allies as they advocate for more equitable and inclusive environments for their diverse students. This research design can identify the preparation White middle-class educators need to teach in diverse classrooms and the barriers that exist when attempting to implement those professional learning opportunities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Machi and McEvoy (2016), a literature review “presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study” (p. 5). As introduced in Chapter 1, my Problem of Practice relates to the poor academic achievement of diverse students in my community due to long-standing European influences on public schools in the United States. Once I recognized this problem, my quest for answers began in the University of South Carolina’s library databases, using search terms like achievement gap, culture, diversity, culturally relevant teaching, and multicultural education.

This initial literature had similar themes that introduced me to the works of Geneva Gay (2018), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994; 2009), and Paulo Freire (1972), among others. Through these resources, I surmised that the root of the problem was quite possibly related to the vast divide between school and the lived experiences of the diverse students. My research then narrowed to the impact of culture on learning and the continued oppression of marginalized students in a Eurocentric educational system. I sought literature addressing educator attitudes and perceptions of current practices in public schools, which further contributed to my understanding of my Problem of Practice. Likewise, literature on culturally centered pedagogies in conjunction with multicultural education guided my approach to fostering critical review of the perceptions, attitudes, and practices in my school district.

Chapter Organization

This chapter continues with a more comprehensive explanation of the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1, followed by further explanation of the pedagogy that influenced the development of educational praxis that will inform my actions as the teacher-researcher. Related research on increasing suburban diversity, the achievement gap, responses to diversity in the suburbs, teacher preparation for multicultural classrooms, and reflective teaching contributed to my understanding of the Problem of Practice.

Philosophical and Ideological Influences

There are many philosophies, theories, and pedagogies that influence educators, curricula, schools, and communities (Wiles & Bondi, 2015). This study acknowledges these different interpretations and manifestations of goodness, truth, and reality as the basis of inequitable practices and policies in schools, many of which have led to achievement gaps between the majority groups and the minority groups. This study exhibits a preference for progressivism and other learner-centered approaches that focus on learner needs and concerns and position learners as active decision-makers in the educational process.

Progressivism recognizes that the world is constantly changing, and reality is what is actually experienced; therefore, social subjects and experiences are prominent in curricula reflecting this philosophy (Wiles & Bondi, 2015). Progressivism first arose at the beginning of the 20th century and exists well into the 21st century as evidenced by organizations like the Progressive Education Network that continue the mission of

educating the whole child for a democratic society. Their website includes the following mission statement:

Building on the common vision of pedagogy articulated by our forbearers in the Progressive Education Association and the Network of Progressive Educators, we are guided by a century-long legacy while enthusiastically embracing a commitment to diversity, equity and justice in our schools. (para. 1)

A progressive lens allows students to view reality through their own experiences and enables teachers to provide them with the opportunity to become constructors of knowledge. These experiences are culturally influenced, which elevates the importance of culture in addressing discrepancies in the achievement among the dominant group and historically marginalized students.

A Critical Lens to Address the Problem of Practice

This research study used a critical lens to examine the education practices that marginalize diverse students. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “the point of a critical action research study is to help people understand and challenge power relations in the process of the study and to make something happen while the study is going on” (p. 59). They further explain that critical research involves questioning the power differential in the educational organization and identifying the beneficiaries of the system. Critical research questions how one group maintains power while oppressing others.

Freire (1972) wrote, “human activity consists of action and reflection; it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis it requires theory to illuminate it” (p. 1904). Applying theory in this way exposes power relationships between those who have been dehumanized and those who have stolen humanity from others. Freire cautions that

the oppressed, in the quest to regain their humanity, oppress their oppressors but seek to restore the humanity of both. Through this struggle, the hands of the oppressed “become human hands which work and, working, transform the world” (p. 40).

Additionally, Freire critiqued the banking concept of education as a methodology to control and further oppress students and inflate the role of the teacher as the authority of knowledge. This concept aligns with teacher-centered ideology, which maintains the locus of control with the educator. Freire would argue that learner-centered ideology would provide the means for the oppressed to reconcile with the oppressor, the teacher, and develop the critical consciousness to transform the world. As indicated by Freire’s work, critical theory is a lens to create more humanizing relationships in society.

This critical lens is evident in the philosophical foundation of multicultural education. As African American students gained access to quality education during the Civil Rights era, the relevance of pedagogies positioning culture as the basis for knowledge acquisition became prevalent (Sleeter, 1996). The National Association of Multicultural Education (2020) describes multicultural education as:

A philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. It affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It

challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice. (para. 1)

Multicultural education shapes the pursuit of social justice within schools and society by recognizing the significance of culture in education and the various ways of learning and thinking. Cultural competence and multicultural pedagogy must permeate all aspects of the school setting. Equity pedagogies such as multicultural education disrupt the cycle of hegemony, inequality, and oppression that results in low academic achievement among students of diverse backgrounds (The National Association of Multicultural Education, 2020). The fundamental goal of multicultural education is to focus on equity and democracy by ensuring traditionally marginalized groups have equitable opportunity to achieve.

Culture Situates Learning

Teacher preparation programs have traditionally incorporated the works of White, European, and European American theorists into learning theory coursework. One such theorist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), emphasized the social nature of learning and the impact culture has on human development in the early 20th century. Cognitive thought and willful communication require an opportunity to interact with others because learning is “the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological function” (p. 90). From an educator point of view, Vygotsky’s sociocultural cognitive theory explains the uniqueness of students and the way they learn. While Vygotsky laid the foundation for situating culture and learning, 21st-century teachers must incorporate current learning theory and pedagogy that recognizes diverse cultures. Critical review of my ongoing action research and continued engagement with the literature revealed to me

how most preservice educators are only provided with the whitewashed version of learning theories. The earlier theories generalize that all students will have similar experiences. After studying Vygotsky's research, Nasir and Hand (2006) concluded, "learning, as an aspect of cultural activity, is profoundly influenced by this joint social enterprise where transformation of activity occurs within the interplay of global and local processes" (p. 463). They recognized that sociocultural research lacks information on more specific means of making sociocultural cognitive theory actionable. Thus, my study is also framed by learner-centered approaches that expand on culture's significant impact on learning and instruction. These various culture-centered pedagogies have similar underpinnings and are often used interchangeably.

Culture-Centered Pedagogies

Many more recent pedagogies exist to support acknowledging and incorporating student culture to improve academic outcomes for marginalized students by becoming more culturally responsive. Most influential in this action research is the work of Ladson-Billings (1994; 2009) and Gay (2018), whose scholarship promotes pedagogies that emerge from critical theory and foster emancipatory education and social justice.

In 1975, Gay (2018) encouraged teachers to improve academic success of minority students through "ethnic identity development, citizenship skills for pluralistic societies, knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity, and cross-cultural interactional competence" (p. 30). Additionally, Gay suggested, "content about cultural diversity has both intrinsic and instrumental value for classroom instruction. The instrumental value includes improving interest in and motivation for and establishing linkages among school, home, and community" (p. 30). Gay defined this approach, culturally responsive

teaching (CRT), as “the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them” (p. 31).

Gay (2018) addressed the underachievement of students from diverse groups with the implementation of a paradigm that “teaches to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (p. 67). CRT filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through students’ cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. Culturally responsive teaching insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving outcomes.

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1994) used the term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to explain “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 13). Ladson-Billings documented the instruction of eight educators over the course of 3 years, noting their pedagogical practices, mindsets, and beliefs that supported African American students and thus exhibited CRP. In contrast to the pedagogical preparation teachers receive in their colleges, from their administration, and through conventional wisdom, which Ladson-Billings explained as leading to “intellectual death,” CRP can “transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 17).

Ladson-Billings (1994; 2009) tells the stories of educators who discovered unique and affirming ways to accelerate the learning of African American children. The primary aim of such CRP is to assist the development of “relevant black personality” that allows

African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).

Ladson-Billings (2014) later lamented that although she hears culturally relevant pedagogy everywhere she goes, the practices she observes today do not represent what she witnessed from the “dreamkeepers” she observed over 25 years ago. Thus, there is still a critical need for CRP that focuses on student learning, develops each student’s cultural competence, and supports students’ critical consciousness. Student learning can be based on various measures as opposed to disconnected standardized test scores, yet cultural competence requires an in-depth understanding of what represents culture: “worldview, thought patterns, epistemological stances, ethics, and ways of being along with the tangible and readily identifiable components of human groups” (p. 143). Critical consciousness, Ladson-Billings argued, is the most neglected element of CRP. Culturally relevant teachers must engage students in meaningful work of importance to students and help them develop skills to critically analyze their social, cultural, economic, and political environments (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Multicultural education and antiracist teaching can directly target critical aspects of equity and justice in education.

Insights from youth culture and new advocates in the field have revolutionized CRP. Paris and Alim (2017) used the term culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) to refocus culturally relevant pedagogy on the critical examination of the hegemonic structure of schools and reimagine schools that value and sustain diverse, heterogeneous practices. The authors described state-sanctioned schools as guilty of expecting students and families to deny their language, literacies, cultures, and histories and assimilate to White middle-class norms. Consequently, CSP incorporates emancipatory education and

acknowledges the value of Hip-Hop pedagogy as a meaningful way to engage and elevate social justice issues.

Multicultural Education

As discussed in Chapter 1, multicultural education provided the framework for analyzing data collection and contributed to the overall design of this action research. Multicultural education refers to a wide variety of programs, practices, and policies that are focused on educational equity. It arose because of the Civil Rights Movement as advocates demanded equal educational opportunities for marginalized students. The initial implementation of multicultural education was primarily to disseminate information about various cultures like a static, tourist-based approach to culture and learning (Convertino et al., 2020). This version of multicultural education was filtered through the worldview of White educators and was often relegated to a course in school. Advocates of multicultural education clarify it is not just a class in school. Banks (2020) explained, multicultural education “is at least three things: (1) an idea or concept; (2) an educational reform movement; and (3) a process” (p. 3). This view of multicultural education recognizes that culture is not stagnant and unchanging but dynamic, interactional, and emergent (Convertino et al., 2020). Multicultural education is an ongoing process of solving problems related to the inequitable opportunities for diverse students.

Multicultural education is a multi-dimensional system of school reform. Banks (2020) identified five dimensions necessary to move multicultural education from content acquisition to an area of study that addresses social justice issues: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school

culture. Additionally, Lee (2008) recommended implementing multicultural education in stages: surface, transitional, structural, and social change. The final stage reflects the application of multicultural education within the community, which illustrates the potential of multicultural education to influence the community at large. A multicultural education framework provides a critical review of the educational system in its entirety so failed first attempts of multicultural education will not be ignored and repeated. Recent culturally responsive pedagogies emphasize educator praxis, but a multicultural education framework focuses on the inequities of the system and provides a structure for change. Likewise, my study engaged educators in reflexive thinking about culture, diversity, and pedagogy. Multicultural education, as an established framework, provided the structure to conduct a surface-level investigation of the preexisting attitudes and perceptions that educators possess.

Review of Related Literature

In addition to reviewing theoretical literature, I also reviewed empirical literature related to the achievement gap, opportunity in the suburbs, responses to demographic change, administrative responses to demographic change, teacher perceptions and actions, and teacher preparation for diverse classrooms. This literature is presented in this final section of Chapter 2.

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is representative of a persistent failure of the American educational system to successfully educate all students and has proven immune to the endless interventions and resources dedicated to its eradication. The achievement gap is the discrepant achievement and outcomes among different demographic groups with

White and Asian students outperforming Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). Not only does the achievement gap have negative outcomes for marginalized students, according to Karoly (2015), it has a negative impact on state and national economies, manifesting in an estimated hundreds of billions of dollars in lost earning potential in addition to the billions of dollars spent on ineffective interventions.

Applying my theoretical framework necessitates viewing the achievement gap through a critical lens. The mere definition of the achievement gap is explicit in acknowledging the marginalization of students; therefore, the power differential must be redistributed to affect meaningful change. As stated by Carter and Welner (2013), “Educational disparities and intergenerational economic inequalities are highly correlated to skin color, ethnicity, and social class status” (p. 1). Intergenerational poverty is further evidence that marginalized students and their families are confined to the margins and the American educational system has failed to provide a pathway to actualize economic improvement for the poor. The achievement gap, in theory, focuses on the deficits of marginalized students without a concerted effort to improve the conditions that create poverty (Carter & Welner, 2013). Therefore, the achievement gap is a consequence of the lack of resources and opportunities for poor families to gain wealth and the associated outcomes that wealth brings.

Horace Mann, who is often credited with the establishment of the public school, grew up in poverty and recognized the importance of a free education as “the great equalizer” (Baines, 2006). He ascended the ranks of social class through self-education and devoted his entire career to establishing a public education system based on

principles of equality. His ideology, although not embraced by many at this time, became the foundation for our present-day public schools.

Two centuries later, poor students are not guaranteed the opportunities for success Mann envisioned during the 19th century due to exclusionary practices that further marginalize students. Neoliberal policies and standards-based reform have been hyper-focused on standardized tests that attest to measuring student achievement despite the inequities in the distributions of access and opportunity (Gorski, 2018). The achievement gap cannot even begin to be overcome until every child has the opportunity to learn.

This action research was initially based on my analysis of academic standards-based data, which glaringly indicated an achievement gap in my community. Once the literature review commenced, I began employing a critical lens and concluded the gap is not going to be remedied through further alignment to academic standards and a hyper focus on data-based decision making if the inequities are not addressed. The opportunity, or lack of opportunity, is a much more pressing problem and addressing the lack of opportunities afforded to “underachievers” appears to have more potential to close the gap than the data-based decision-making cycle of test – analyze data – intervene – nonresponse – repeat, which will only be effective when the opportunity gap is eliminated.

Opportunity in the Suburbs

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse, and classrooms reflect this demographic shift. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the resident Hispanic population of children ages 5 to 17 grew 9% from 2000 to 2017. During that same time, the population of White children within the same age

demographic decreased 11%. The percentage of Black children decreased 1%, and both Asian students and students of two or more races increased by 1%. This trend is projected to continue through the year 2027, when the percentage of minority students ages 5 to 17 together will make up 55% of this age demographic and White students will make up 45%. Additionally, most recent poverty rates indicate that Black (31%) and Hispanic (26%) children under the age of 18 live in poverty at a rate nearly three times the rate of White (10%) and Asian (10%) children. These statistics are often incorrectly interpreted as the divide between urban and suburban demographics; however, the suburbs are becoming increasingly racially, ethnically, and economically diverse.

Historically, the suburbs have been representative of the American Dream. In a country that embraces meritocracy, the *house in the suburbs* once exemplified hard work and effort. From 1945-1970, suburbs grew as prosperous white families collected their resources and moved from the city. During this same time, African Americans were victims of policies that left them racially and economically isolated (Coates, 2013). This period of suburbanization and White wealth accumulation came at the expense of African Americans (Shiller, 2016).

By the 1980s, the suburbs began to change as more minority groups moved from the city. Suburban poverty has increased steadily since that time as well. According to Shiller (2016), “The suburbs have reproduced the same obstacles that poor people have had in cities, with less infrastructure to meet their needs” (p. 11). Some advocates believe district leaders in suburban schools are unprepared for this demographic change, but Shiller argued, “Political and educational leaders are not unprepared for demographic change; rather, they are not fully willing to face it” (p. 16).

Responses to Increasing Diversity in the Suburbs

Suburban districts are often ill-equipped to deal with demographic change (Shiller, 2016). The literature indicates there are three common responses to increasing diversity in the suburbs: race-neutral policies and practices, colorblindness, and deficit views (Diem et al., 2016). Shiller (2016) argued some leaders in suburban schools are unwilling to acknowledge demographic change. Often, demographic change in suburban schools is interpreted as problematic and the solutions focus on instruction and academic interventions (Holme et al., 2014). After 20 years of policies that have a limited scope and focus on strong instruction and intervention, the achievement gap remains.

Diem et al. (2016) conducted a study of three school districts as part of a larger study on how federal and state policies influence local actors' discourse and understanding of race. They interviewed district and school leadership because these leaders influence how state and federal policy inform local policy. The researchers framed their study in critical discourse analysis to investigate the policy context in response to race and demographic change and summarized the discourse over the last 20 years as a "non-racial" policy shift that preserves the system of White privilege and maintains a racial caste system (p. 734). During their discussions with district leadership, they recorded responses reflective of race-neutral policy discourse, deficit perspectives, and colorblindness. Staff development and training addressed learning styles, English learners and their language challenges, cultural differences, color consciousness that is race-neutral in practice, essentializing race, and white community resistance to change, all of which avoids critical discussions of race. Diem et al. (2016) thus concluded, "School leaders need to be more aware of the impact of federal, state, and local policy

contexts and feel empowered to push back when policies fail to explicitly address demographic change” (p. 759).

Most school subjects and environments reflect Eurocentric and middle-class beliefs, values, and expected behaviors. As schools become increasingly diverse, educators must analyze curricular resources, environment, biases, and pedagogy. Accordingly, culture must be at the forefront of the analysis and of educational programs and processes in which diverse students are underachieving (Gay, 2018). The overreliance on accountability measures from standardized tests has added to the achievement gap for minority students.

Teacher Perceptions and Actions

Beyond the administrative level, some teachers may respond to pedagogies and policies to support diverse students with resistance or ambivalence, which protects the Eurocentric structure of public education that proliferates inequities and whiteness and thwarts efforts to develop equitable policies and practices. Glock et al. (2018) uncovered teachers’ negative implicit and explicit attitudes toward ethnic minority students by administering an implicit association test and a questionnaire to measure explicit attitudes. This study was conducted using fictive vignettes including masculine names only and occurred in Germany, where negative stereotypes exist toward the largest ethnic minority, the Turks. Preservice teachers exhibited more negative stereotypes toward culturally diverse schools than in-service teachers; however, both groups had negative implicit attitudes. The authors concluded that teacher attitudes toward diverse students may predict teaching actions that impact the achievement of diverse students. This result illustrates stereotype threat, the concept that negative stereotypes do indeed impact

assessment results (Good et al., 2003). Addressing these stereotypes is necessary to eliminate this barrier to student achievement.

In a more promising study, Salinas et al. (2009) discovered that minority students in learner-centered classrooms were able to close the performance gap on state standardized tests. This finding is significant for schools looking to improve school-wide outcomes on standardized tests without using authoritarian ways. This study also revealed that a learner-centered education produces better outcomes for non-minority students. To determine outcomes, the researchers used state standardized test data as well as nontraditional criteria correlated to the learning requirements of a 21st-century workforce, such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, creativity, initiative, the ability to work in groups, and diversity.

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) also explored the impact of pedagogy by examining African American high school students' preference toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons. These students were from a large urban high school in Colorado with diverse demographics. The African American majority population was diminishing as the Latino population was increasing in numbers. Data collection consisted of feedback forms, transition-termination forms, group discussions, and a focus group of African American students. The quantitative results were statistically significant, indicating all students preferred the culturally relevant lessons. The qualitative results identified three themes: (1) challenging topics such as racially demeaning terminology can be enriching and stimulating; (2) lessons should be interesting and fun; and (3) teacher interaction, energy, sense of humor, and interest in the student are imperative in promoting student learning. Another important finding in

this research is that African American students preferred integrated culturally relevant lessons. The focus group revealed that some African American students were sensitive to other minority issues being left out of the lessons. This important discovery aligns with existing literature from Gay (2018) in that the students wanted teachers who value them, establish relationships with them, call them by their names, and have creative learning environments that stimulate them experientially.

Such culturally responsive teaching is learner-centered, with specific focus on culture as the lens for gaining a better understanding of each student. In contrast, Brown (2007) examined existing literature to determine if teacher-directed, “one-size-fits-all” instruction serves the needs of diverse student populations and concluded that a learner-centered approach is preferable, especially for diverse students. As Gay (2018) argued, cultural diversity is a strength and must be tapped into to effectively educate diverse students. Therefore, standardized tests must be analyzed cautiously. A culturally responsive educator must begin to understand why students are not successful on these assessments and refrain from blaming social class, lack of motivation, or other nonhelpful excuses. A critical analysis of data should attempt to identify factors that tell the whole story, such as students’ gender, residential location, immigrant status, and linguistic background (Gay, 2018). Additionally, as Salinas et al. (2009) discovered, an analysis of pedagogical application and curriculum resources may reveal that the absence of cultural frames of reference may be responsible for the achievement gap. Gay (2018) identified these positions in current thinking about at-risk students and highly structured, scripted instructional programs that emphasize only the technical and academic dimensions of learning.

Similarly, Powell et al. (2013) observed in their study that many middle school teachers exhibit reductionist teaching practices as they feel forced to teach to the test in this accountability era of education. In response, they proposed a model for culturally responsive instruction that integrates cultural knowledge of students and families into the curriculum. This approach resembles Schmidt's (2005) illustrations of teachers who incorporated culturally responsive practices into their secondary content areas. The teachers shared strategies, and the author linked the seven characteristics of culturally responsive instruction to the lessons and interviews. Schmidt described the teachers' thoughts and reflections, which provided helpful insight as I reflected on my own practices.

Earlier, Jackson (1993) addressed the increasing diversity of students in the United States, yet even today, the teaching force remains mostly White, middle-class females, limiting schools' ability to address students' needs. Even though many schools across the country offer diversity training to teachers, teachers leave without practical strategies to make a difference. Jackson offered the following strategies: build trust, become culturally literate, build a repertoire of instructional strategies, use effective questioning techniques, provide effective feedback, analyze instructional materials, and establish positive home-school relations. These strategies are still conducive to culturally responsive instruction in the 21st century and therefore of use in my study.

As students enter school, many face situations that are very different than their home and community environments. Educators emanate the beliefs, behaviors, and communication patterns of their own culture, which may differ from their students' culture. This cultural incongruity can be challenging to overcome without a caring,

culturally responsive teacher, yet many White educators do not recognize that educational institutions favor the White middle-class students and marginalize students of color. Schools attempt to assimilate diverse populations into the Eurocentric school culture through special programs and policies intended to close the achievement gap. Unfortunately, attempts to improve the outcomes of students of color are unsuccessful when policies and programs focus on what ethnically, racially, and culturally different students cannot do and what they do not have (Gay, 2018). This deficit orientation will negate the efforts of any program or policy intended to close the achievement gap. Furthermore, educators who adopt a culturally neutral stance by treating all students the same regardless of cultural identity further discriminate against the cultural capital and potential of diverse students in the classroom.

Teacher Preparation for Diverse Classrooms

As the literature above illustrates, educators must develop a level of cultural competence to meet the needs of ethnically, socially, and economically diverse students. Without educators' conscious effort to understand the impact culture, including their own, has on their practice, diverse students will not reach their full potential. To become culturally responsive, teachers must obtain an authentic view of core characteristics of cultural frames of reference of all students and self-reflect on implicit bias and personal culture. Moule (2012) explained that developing cultural competence requires five basic skills. The first is an awareness and acceptance of differences. Secondly, educators must develop self-awareness regarding their own culture. The third skill, dynamics of difference, considers that miscommunication and misinterpretation of actions may be due to cross-cultural differences. Teacher knowledge of student culture is another skill, and

finally, culturally competent teachers adapt and adjust teaching practices to accommodate cultural differences. Gaining cultural competence is a developmental, ongoing process that requires time well beyond one professional development session.

Focusing on a population directly responsible for teacher preparation, Howard (2003) aimed to improve teacher educators' ability to critically analyze race, ethnicity, and culture and the effect this has on learning so teachers can construct pedagogical practices that are relevant to students' social and cultural reality. The teacher educators in the study had to engage in self-reflective practice of their own identities, opinions, viewpoints, and bias during a 3-day workshop. Using a case study protocol, Howard identified five areas of self-reflection that can translate into culturally relevant teaching: ensure teacher educators are able to sufficiently address the complex nature of race, ethnicity, and culture; be aware that reflection is a never-ending process; be explicit what to reflect about; recognize that teaching is not a neutral act; and avoid reductive notions of culture (p. 199).

In the past few decades, becoming a reflective practitioner has become the predominant methodology for professional learning for adults and is useful in addressing existing attitudes and perceptions of the predominantly white teaching force in increasingly diverse classrooms. Schön (1983) explained that the technical preparation adults receive is a starting point, while useful learning occurs in real-world practices, hence the significance of reflective practice. Merriam and Bierema (2014) conceptualized Schön's idea of reflective practices as reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Novice teachers engage in reflective practice after instruction has occurred, but with experience, teachers can operationalize reflective practice during the instruction. Framing

this reflection through a critical lens can begin to transform the attitudes and perceptions White educators implicitly and explicitly hold toward their diverse students. As proposed by Brookfield (1991), being critically reflective requires the identification, scrutiny, and reconstitution of the assumptions and beliefs that practitioners hold, which advances critical action such as transformative social justice education. By using an action research approach, this dissertation also exhibits reflective practice.

Summary

This chapter reviewed how 20th-century progressive educators promoted learner-centered ideology, which encouraged environments where students learn by doing and through social interaction. As demographics continue to shift in the 21st century, educators in the United States must critically evaluate our systems for an imbalance of power. The traditional, teacher-centered ideology; scripted, Eurocentric curriculum; and unwavering whiteness of our educational systems are contributing to poor outcomes for diverse students.

Thus, this review also explored how the role of student culture in education has been discussed for nearly a hundred years. Newer, more defined theories and pedagogies, such as critical theory and critical pedagogy, have developed to counter the power differential in American classrooms. Ethnicity and culture are the foundational anchors for all other behaviors (Gay, 2018); therefore, culturally responsive teaching must take this into consideration and provide opportunities for individuals to express learning preferences. Such considerations should be the focus of interventions to address the achievement gap. In the next chapter, I will explain the methodology behind my critical action research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the qualitative critical action research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) designed to address my Problem of Practice. As explained in prior chapters, this study uses a theoretical framework comprised of critical theory, multicultural education, and culture-centered pedagogies to identify attitudes and perceptions held by my fellow White, middle-class educators regarding the increasing diversity in our district. As an educator in a small suburban district for nearly thirty years, I have witnessed, simultaneously, increasing diversity within our district and the overrepresentation of diverse students receiving academic and behavioral supports. Also, during my tenure, the continued standardization of the curriculum has created a significant disparity in outcomes, further marginalizing diverse students. The persistent achievement gap evident in our district, as in public education nationwide, underscores the need for educators to enact pedagogies to improve outcomes for diverse students in suburban schools. This study was designed to investigate existing attitudes and perceptions that White, middle-class educators have related to increasing diversity and interpret the data into a professional learning plan that will prepare us for teaching in multicultural classrooms and enable us to improve outcomes for diverse students.

To explore this Problem of Practice, I turned to action research, which provides the structure for practitioner-researchers to position themselves as insiders, aligned with my attempt to understand how my fellow educators and I are poised to teach students in

increasingly multicultural classrooms (Efron & Ravid, 2013). My experiences and observations during my lengthy history in the district, combined with the identified Problem of Practice, meet the requirements of an action research study. Action research enables educators to improve their practice by studying personal mindsets and practices for the benefit of their students (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

This study is also critical action research as it draws on critical theory to influence a professional development plan to improve outcomes for diverse students. Table 3.1 indicates how I collected and analyzed data for each research question:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of White, middle-class educators in response to the changing student demographic in a suburban public school district?
2. What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban school experiencing increasing cultural diversity?

During the first phase, I surveyed White, middle-class educators and then analyzed and coded the data for emerging themes related to multicultural education and culture-centered pedagogies. During the second phase, I interviewed two colleagues from the survey population to address the second research question to frame a path for professional learning opportunities for White, middle-class educators at the research site. Both questions attempted to address the lack of literature on attitudes and perceptions of White educators in suburban settings experiencing shifting demographics in a way that would ultimately help me resolve my Problem of Practice.

Table 3.1 Alignment of Data Collection and Analysis to Research Questions

Phase	Research Question	Data Collection	Rationale	Analysis
1	What are the attitudes and perceptions of White, middle-class educators in response to the changing student demographics in a suburban public elementary school?	Educator Cultural Awareness Survey (ECAS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To elicit perceptual and attitudinal data from participants as related to diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct thematic analysis (code data and identify emerging themes) Align data to multicultural education (Banks, 2020) and culture-centered pedagogies
2	What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban school experiencing increasing cultural diversity?	Semi-structured Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member checking Development of Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thick, rich description of the focus group interview Development of the E-CAPLP

Research Site, Participants, and Researcher Positionality

The research site is a small suburban district in Western Pennsylvania that is a part of the larger Rust Belt Community. The average yearly student enrollment is 706 kindergarten to sixth-grade students and 700 seventh- to twelfth-grade students. In 2019, there were 126 non-White students enrolled, and 40% of the student population receives free or reduced-price lunch, which qualifies the elementary school in this district as a Title I school. Historically, the district consisted primarily of White, middle-class families, but the community has experienced an increase in poverty and ethnic diversity. All the teachers and support staff are White and middle-class and were considered potential participants for this study.

Before recruiting participants, I received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. The superintendent also approved my request to survey the staff. I distributed the Educator Cultural Awareness Survey (ECAS, Appendix B) via Google Forms to all K-12 teachers in the public school district ($N = 103$). I sent an introductory e-mail (Appendix C) to each personal e-mail address and a follow-up e-mail to each school address to notify them the link to the anonymous survey was in their personal e-mail inbox. I chose to contact teachers via personal e-mail, as opposed to school e-mail, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In the e-mail, I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study, and provided instructions for the completion and return of the survey. I also explained the process for asking questions so as to ensure informed consent.

As explained in detail in Chapter 1, my positionality in this action research study is that of a practitioner-researcher. I am an insider investigating the Problem of Practice I

identified during my tenure analyzing data: an achievement gap between the historically marginalized students and their peers in the dominant demographic group, despite evidence-based interventions. In a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, a triangle represents the three tiers of support, with the peak being the fewest number of students with the most academic or behavioral needs. The base of the triangle should equal 80% of the students, who only require the core curriculum to achieve. Our triangle was beginning to invert. As more students required intervention, changes made to the core curriculum did not close the gap. My Problem of Practice arose from this situation as I wondered what curricular changes needed to occur to reduce the number of students requiring intervention. As an insider to this phenomenon, I must recognize my bias and assumptions related to this Problem of Practice (Herr & Anderson, 2015). I attempt to make my own beliefs and assumptions visible during data analysis by including a rationale for different phases of the research. For this reason, this action research resembles a hermeneutic phenomenology action research study.

Research Design

To investigate my Problem of Practice, I chose to use a qualitative critical action research methodology with hermeneutic phenomenological underpinnings.

Qualitative Critical Action Research

Action research is a reflexive process that involves the practitioner-researcher as the primary means of data collection. It begins with the identification of a problem and a review of literature to align the research to theory to improve the educator's practice. It is a method to empower teachers' professional growth, grounded in social justice advocacy (Mertler, 2017).

The theoretical framework for this study originated with critical theory; therefore, the design of the methodology reflects that origin. I began my research to find out what was going on in the core curriculum that was creating an achievement gap for diverse students. In the true spirit of critical theory, I also engaged in a cycle of review that critiqued this phenomenon to identify oppression or apathy that leads to poor outcomes for less powerful (diverse) students, in the hopes of creating a more equitable and inclusive environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In a qualitative study, the researcher constructs knowledge during engagement with the activity, experience, or phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is an ongoing process in which the researcher reviews data and makes meaning. Data collection usually occurs during interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis. I chose a qualitative methodology for this action research to unveil attitudes and beliefs that told a story, as opposed to quantifying the beliefs and attitudes of the educators at the research site.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

More specifically, this study is based on the underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology, which in this case is the study of a phenomenon (achievement gap) through the worldview of White middle-class educators. The educators described their personal attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to the research questions, and I interpreted the data. Hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes the researcher's experiences, knowledge, and biases are expected to influence the inquiry (Neubauer et al., 2019). This critical action research is based on understanding a phenomenon grounded on the perspectives of other educators. As I collected, analyzed, and interpreted

data from the responses provided by my colleagues, I simultaneously reflected on my own experiences as an educator of diverse students and an insider in the community, in line with action research. These findings, which went beyond the scope of my research questions, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Data Collection

As noted above, I used an anonymous survey and semi-structured interviews to collect data. The first six survey questions gathered demographic data and the other questions focused on perceptions, understandings, attitudes, and feelings, which I could further explore in the interviews. In Chapter 4, I will elaborate on my rationale for the survey questions to make visible my bias in my attempts to understand others.

Educator Cultural Awareness Survey (ECAS)

As noted above, I distributed the ECAS (Appendix B) via Google Forms to all teachers in the district. Participants were asked to return the survey within 10 days of receipt. The surveys were anonymous and voluntary and could be completed in one 30-minute session depending on the depth of the responses. Participating teachers ($n = 7$) provided demographic data; professional development and preservice teacher preparation data; and information regarding their cultural awareness, cultural competence, and attitudes and perceptions regarding the shifting demographics in the district. The questions were multiple-choice or short answer and reflect Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) guidance for background/demographic questions, experience and behavior questions, opinion and values questions, and feelings questions. Most survey questions required open-ended responses, and the final question asked participants to volunteer to participate in the next phase of the research, which I originally intended as a focus group interview.

Semi-structured Interviews

To address my second research question, I originally intended to conduct a focus group interview using a semi-structured protocol (Appendix D). Because only 2 participants volunteered, I pivoted to individual semi-structured interviews and explained this modification to the participants. Initially, I intended to conduct the focus group as a means to co-create a professional learning plan to address culture in the classroom (E-CAPLP). Much like a focus group, individual interviews provided authentic data that contributed toward this aim, yet as I began to analyze the survey data, I saw a need for the district to address issues of diversity and equity at the systems level as well. I will say more about this shift in my thinking in Chapters 4 and 5. Despite the small interview sample, my participants became allies and thought partners as I continued to analyze data and interpret that information into the plan and reflect on my own practice as a White educator in this district.

Data Collection Challenges

Several factors limited this action research. The COVID-19 pandemic restricted me to virtual data collection. My community was experiencing significant community spread during data collection and the district resorted to a full virtual learning model. Consequently, I eliminated diverse community members as participants and an important data source as my mode of data collection was planned to entail sustained, in-person contact with families. A critical flaw of many educational decisions and programming is the absence of voices from the HUS, so I reluctantly removed these potential participants from the study to adhere to guidelines established to maintain the safety of our

community. Improving the outcomes of diverse students must include the voice of families in the decision-making process, so I will say more about this in Chapter 5.

The ongoing pandemic also prevented me from interfacing with my colleagues to develop a rapport and level of trust. There are many new staff members whom I have not met, which I believe impacted the number of responses. Another possible factor was educators' increased cognitive load due to transitioning learning models. A final consideration that may have impacted the number of responses could align with a whiteness ideology, which according to Castagno (2013) protects whiteness by ignoring race, structural arrangements, and inequity. I do not wish to imply that this ideology is intentional; I believe it is so ingrained that we have normalized our attitudes and values and anyone who does not fit "normal" needs to assimilate and conform. This protection of whiteness and maintenance of the status quo would cause educators to disregard a study based on cultural awareness (Castagno, 2013). Furthermore, as indicated by Matias (2016) confronting whiteness will create feelings of discomfort, sadness, guilt, and remorse among other overwhelming emotions that many white educators may wish to avoid thus limiting discourse on social justice. I will elaborate on this in Chapter 5, as well.

I designed this study knowing the results will not be generalizable to any other setting. The process below could be replicated, which could provide results applicable to other locales, but the results are intended to only be applicable to this research site, in accordance with the principles of action research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved several processes and began upon completion of the surveys. I coded the survey data and identified emerging themes related to my theoretical framework that could direct the learning pursuits for the (E-CAPLP), which was developed after the second phase. As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2006), the following topics guided my analysis: events, behaviors, perspectives, relationships, and strategies. I organized data into a three-column table by transcribing participant quotes into one column, adding my insights and reflections in the next column, and coding the data into the emerging categories in the third column. A member check upon completion of the data analysis ensured internal validity by eliciting feedback on the emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I analyzed data collected from the interviews using emerging categories aligned with my theoretical framework while striving for thick, rich description. Creswell and Miller (2000) explain that thick description, a detailed account of events, can produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced or could experience the events being described in the study. This is important to attain for developing the E-CAPLP, the summary of this action research study. The intention of the E-CAPLP is to identify professional learning that will prepare educators to teach in multicultural classrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes and perceptions of my fellow White, middle-class educators in a suburban school experiencing shifting demographics to seek an understanding of the ongoing achievement gap. The data for the study were collected through anonymous surveys and voluntary interviews and analyzed

for emerging themes. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the data using a rich, thick description and summarize the findings in the Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of my study. I will begin with a brief overview of the study before presenting the data and elaborating on the findings. Additionally, I will present key findings in the Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP) and address the overall findings related to my research questions at the conclusion of the chapter.

Overview of the Study

As I explained in prior chapters, the purpose of this study is to understand the achievement gap at my suburban public school with shifting demographics by using a critical lens to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of White, middle-class educators that may contribute to the achievement of diverse students. Critically examining my practice and the perceptions and attitudes of my fellow educators was guided by my ongoing engagement with literature related to multicultural education and several culture-centered pedagogies to investigate the achievement gap in my setting.

Data Presentation

As I explained in Chapter 3, I used two data collection methods in this qualitative action research study. The first tool, the Educator Cultural Awareness Survey (ECAS, Appendix B), was a researcher-made, anonymous, electronic survey created on Google Forms and distributed to the entire teaching staff ($N = 103$) at the research site. There

were 7 teachers who completed the ECAS. The second set of data, collected from semi-structured follow-up interviews, was the result of collaboration with interested participants ($n = 2$) who focused on the second research question. Below, I present the survey questions with rationale, participant profiles, coded responses aligned to Banks's (2020) five dimensions of multicultural education, and coded responses sorted for emerging themes. At the end of Chapter 4, I summarize the findings by research question and reflect a more abstract analysis of the data, which extends my original theoretical framework to include antiracist education.

Educator Cultural Awareness Survey Data

The ECAS contributed multiple types of data, including a demographic view of the respondents (Table 4.1). Each survey question also yielded emerging codes gleaned from the participant responses, which I then aligned to Banks's (2020) five dimensions of multicultural education (Table 4.2). I sorted each emerging code into a dimension and used a representative quote from the survey to visualize my analysis. The ECAS, through direct responses from questions six and seven, also yielded data that indicate White, middle-class educators' perceptions related to teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Rationale for Survey Questions

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research has underpinnings in hermeneutic phenomenology, which acknowledges that the researcher's experiences and bias are present throughout the research. In my attempt to understand this phenomenon to the best of my ability and understand the others in my study, I reviewed the questions from the ECAS and considered my rationale for including them in the survey. Several questions were exploratory, and others were to detect alignment with my perceptions. Since

hermeneutic phenomenology studies someone’s existence in the world, and how that affects meaning making, interpretations, and decision making, it is important to reiterate that I collected data through a researcher-created survey. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the researcher’s position and experiences in an inquiry, which guides the interpretation of data, and I openly acknowledge my biases are present, which is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology’s philosophical roots (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Participant Profiles

The following table delineates important demographic information of the participants.

Table 4.1 Participant Profiles

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Years Teaching</u>
Female	21-30	0-5
Male	31-40	6-10
Male	31-40	11-15
Female	31-40	11-15
Female	41-50	16-20
Female	51+	16-20
Female	51+	21+

Perception, Attitudes, Understanding, and Feelings Questions

I explored the data several different ways. I first reviewed the data by participant, which did not sufficiently answer my research questions since this action research seeks to analyze a phenomenon rather than an individual case. Next, I reviewed the data by survey question. The process of analyzing qualitative data begins with coding, then identifying themes, and finally developing larger units of abstraction (Creswell, 2013). As I reviewed my survey data question-by-question (9-21), I coded the responses based

on my understandings of multicultural education and culture-centered pedagogies but without predetermined codes. Questions 7-8 specifically align with the research questions and were excluded from the coding process.

Once I had the initial codes, I sorted them first into preexisting themes based on Banks's (2020) five dimensions of multicultural education to visualize how the codes related to these dimensions and whether this analysis contributed to answering the second research question. The data collection is displayed in a table to make visible my data analysis and interpretation process (ECAS Data Aligned to Banks's Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education, Appendix E). Each code is represented in the table regardless of its frequency in the coding process. This is referred to as horizontalization and gives each piece of data equal weight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I will discuss these initial findings in the following sections.

Secondly, I sorted the codes into four major themes that emerged from the data. I interpreted the codes and themes into larger units of abstraction that addressed what perceptions White, middle-class teachers have in response to shifting demographics in a suburban school, their preparedness to teach diverse students, and what professional learning opportunities are fundamental to effectively teach diverse students and close the achievement gap. These larger units of abstraction are presented by research question.

ECAS Questions 7 and 8

Questions seven and eight on the ECAS directly asked whether teachers felt prepared to teach in multicultural settings and what professional learning opportunities they deem important. This data contributed to answering Research Question #2. Two

participants in the ECAS answered with definitive “yes” responses. One response was “yes, to a certain degree,” and four responded ambiguously or negatively. For example,

No. I feel that there are many differences between cultures, and I am unfamiliar with many of the practices and traditions that are not common to the white community. I lack an understanding of the reasons behaviors are different from culture to culture.

I also asked respondents to explain learning opportunities that would help them navigate the shifting demographics. My fellow White educators indicated they would like professional diversity training, cultural awareness training, guest speakers, and information related to engaging reluctant learners. One participant emphasized the need for opportunities “In service directly related to the students we have and not a blanket class.”

After I read and analyzed the survey data multiple ways, the final analysis was an open-sort process to identify emerging themes not captured previously. This process revealed four themes that correlated to my original theoretical framework and also linked to antiracist teaching: whiteness as a barrier to equity and inclusivity, intersectional identities as barriers to achievement, administrative barriers, and co-conspiring to implement grassroots efforts to operationalize equity pedagogies. These themes were also evident in my interview data, and I will elaborate on them later in the chapter.

Semi-Structured Interview Data

As I explained previously, only two survey participants wished to participate in a focus group; therefore, I adapted the data collection method to a semi-structured interview format via email by asking each participant to respond directly to my second

research question. Additionally, we discussed the initial survey and other topics relevant to the research site.

After engaging with the data at length, I sorted the coded data into like categories and identified themes related to the theoretical framework or themes that extended beyond the theoretical framework. Triangulating the survey data, I identified the following themes: 1) whiteness is a barrier to equity, 2) intersectional identities impact achievement, 3) administrators are perceived as barriers to equity, and 4) educators must become activists to counter inequities.

Findings

The following sections provide my interpretations of the data as they relate to multicultural and culture-centered pedagogies and the impact these interpretations have on the Problem of Practice I identified in my setting.

Thematic Analysis Related to the Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Banks's (2020) five dimensions of multicultural education provide a framework to ensure diverse students have equitable access to the curriculum. As I explained in Chapter 2, the dimensions are content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture. Having sorted my coded data into the five dimensions, I present the following thick description.

Content Integration

Content integration is a surface-level dimension of multicultural education, evident in classroom celebrations of “heroes and holidays” and viewed as ethnic content that is separate from the rest of the curriculum and not an integral part of the American saga (Banks, 2013). One question on the ECAS specifically asked participants to describe

their current understanding of multicultural education. The responses indicated most participants had little or no understanding. One participant's response aligned with the content integration dimension and explained multicultural education as "Creating lessons that incorporate our differences." Participant responses indicated multicultural education includes a surface-level integration of content.

The responses illustrate the varied understandings of multicultural education at the research site. Teachers who have a deeper understanding of multicultural education evidently gained that knowledge by their own accord, as none of the participants referenced any training or coursework that added to their understanding. These responses indicate my district must develop a clear and consistent definition of multicultural education with professional learning opportunities that align with the vision for educating diverse students. Professional learning opportunities should originate at the content integration dimension and expand to other dimensions. BIPOC students must see themselves reflected across the curriculum and not just in certain subjects at certain times of the year.

Knowledge Construction

Knowledge construction refers to the different ways people gain knowledge and understanding. Public education in the United States reflects the Western canon, and those of us who have been educated in this system may lack diverse perspectives. We approach education with a white gaze, which normalizes whiteness and pushes other ways of knowing and being to the margins. One participant did recognize the proliferation of male, Eurocentric influences in education and explained multicultural education "as one that addresses and values experiences and realities that lie outside of

the white heterosexual male experience.” This response indicates an understanding of multiple ways of knowing and interacting with the world. This aligns with the second dimension of multicultural education, knowledge construction.

To build White educators’ capacity to view and understand the world in different ways and recognize our students’ worldviews, we need professional learning opportunities focused on how culture impacts the acquisition of knowledge. As indicated previously, most respondents had little to no understanding of multicultural education and therefore did not discuss different ways that individuals construct knowledge. One respondent did recognize “the white-biased nature of the tests we give” as a significant barrier for diverse students at the research site.

My awareness of different ways people construct knowledge developed in the process of this action research through a lengthy engagement with literature on the impact culture has on knowledge acquisition. My lack of understanding of this dimension of multicultural education, knowledge construction, inadvertently contributed to the achievement gap. Considering race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in the instruction and assessment of diverse students will have a positive impact on their achievement as indicated by the knowledge construction dimension of multicultural education.

Equity Pedagogy

Banks (2020) defines equity pedagogy as, “Teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” (p. 152). Equity pedagogy is a critical dimension of multicultural education, as it intersects with the other dimensions to achieve

its goals. Developing an equity pedagogy involves all stakeholders collaborating to actualize the goal of teaching students to be caring, thoughtful citizens with the skills and understandings to become agents for social change and challenge oppressive structures.

Three survey questions specifically asked participants their understanding of multicultural education, culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy, and anti-racist teaching, and the responses were limited. Participants stated they did not know or did not remember these equity pedagogies. The lack of data from these questions indicates that past professional learning opportunities have not targeted the equity pedagogy dimension of multicultural education. This also suggests why I identified an achievement gap as a problem of practice and lacked the understanding, background, and cultural competence to address it. Understandably, my colleagues are lacking the pedagogical foundation and common vision, as did I, to improve outcomes for our increasingly diverse student body.

Prejudice Reduction

The prejudice reduction dimension of multicultural education strives to improve the interrelations among citizens in a democratic, global society. Allport (1954) indicated that prejudice reduction occurs with intergroup contact. In my suburban school district with shifting demographics, White teachers and students have had limited contact with diverse students and teachers. Previous administrators believed a colorblind approach to this phenomenon was justified; however, settings that are or have been predominantly White should engage in intentional and sustained prejudice reduction to improve outcomes for diverse students. Identifying and analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding the shifting demographics helped me reflect on and understand my own attempts at prejudice reduction and how it can inform professional learning opportunities. One

practice I initiated at the start of this action research is a self-reflective process of checking my own biases, which made me aware of many biases I am now attempting to eliminate. I asked participants on the ECAS if they would willingly discuss their biases, and six of the seven respondents provided the following examples of bias and deficit views they have toward diverse groups:

- “I often avoid people of color when in a store or have noticed myself crossing the street when a person of color is walking towards me.”
- “I have often caught myself generalizing that people that are economically marginalized are not as educated as affluent people.”
- “I’m sure my bias comes from years of exasperation when my marginalized students don’t take advantage of the education they are provided. I realize they are only doing what they learn (or don’t learn) at home and I’m not sure how the cycle can be broken.”
- “I believe I am quicker to judge a student’s behavior early on if they are a different culture.”
- “I am quicker to judge behavior and attitude toward school”
- “I’m sure I don’t understand all the difficulties they face in a day.”

The responses reflect implicit biases and microaggressions I am also working on eradicating and that can be addressed through professional learning opportunities as I will indicate on the E-CAPLP.

The participants responded more readily to questions regarding equity and systemic racism, as evident in the following ECAS responses:

- “I have conversations about real-world events with students when appropriate. My goal is to understand my students and all people.”
- “I try to have conversations with small groups of students when a racially charged situation occurs in our district. Students seem more open to these conversations when in small groups.”

I interpret this to mean that even though the district has not devoted professional development time to issues of equity, teachers desire and will advocate for a more equitable experience for our students.

Empowering School Culture

An empowering school culture can be a vehicle for transformation in the broader community, and the policies, practices, and programs reflect a commitment to empowering diverse students and improving outcomes (Banks, 2020). This dimension of multicultural education impacts educators’ attitudes and beliefs, the formal and hidden curriculum, instruction, instructional materials, assessment, and the counseling program. A challenge my colleagues and I recognized at this site, based on my data, is the lack of administrative support for this dimension to be actualized. The ECAS did not contain any questions to gather information specific to administrative support, but several respondents perceived that the administration’s attitudes and beliefs do not align with an empowering school culture. One respondent noted “an overall lack of cultural awareness among the student body and school board,” adding, “This tends to be a conservative district and not always open to pushes for increased diversity awareness.” Another respondent shared,

As a teacher, we face challenges such as how to adjust when you are stuck within the constraints of programs and instructional practices mandated by the administration. We have an administration that does not understand our changing demographics and doesn't seem to want to learn. There are many students with emotional needs that we can't just dismiss and place somewhere else as we have in the past.

As I analyzed this data and reflected on my own experiences, I recognized the lack of administrative support as a major barrier to enacting any dimension of Banks's multicultural education framework. Like other small suburban districts that have existed in a monocultural bubble, we face vast challenges of reaching this dimension. How can I become a social justice educator within a district that prioritizes a standards-based reform? Can a multicultural education framework coexist in a system focused on standards-based reform? If standards-based reform has contributed to the achievement gap as our schools are becoming more diverse, then why does it persist? The data related to this dimension, empowering school culture, prompted more questions, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 5.

Thematic Analysis Related to Emergent Themes

After conducting the deductive analysis of the data and fitting it into the dimensions of multicultural education, I looked through a broader lens and identified four emerging themes that contribute to answering the research questions: 1) whiteness is a barrier to equity, 2) intersectional identities impact achievement, 3) administrators are perceived as barriers to equity, and 4) educators must become activists to counter inequities.

Whiteness as a Barrier to Equity

Simply stated, whiteness is an ideology that posits that being white is normal and is the standard to which others are compared. It is a system of oppression and a barrier to equity, justice, and democracy (Castagno, 2013). In educational institutions, whiteness manifests in assimilationist views as educators respond with colorblindness or indifference to diverse students. As I described in Chapter 1, my positionality is that of a White, middle-class educator who grew up with limited contact with diverse people. Only after 25 years of teaching did I realize that education is white, especially in my setting. The data I collected from my colleagues indicate younger teachers are acquiring this awareness sooner, yet these understandings are incomplete. My colleagues' responses indicate various levels of understanding of the construct of whiteness, as illustrated by these examples of their perceptions of white privilege:

- “I believe some people take it to the extreme while others do not believe it is what people make it out to be”
- “I think it is present in our world. I think it would be ignorant to not recognize that it exists.”
- “I’m sure it is real and something I may not even be aware of since I’m white.”
- “Not sure, I think all people deserve to be treated the same, kindly and fairly”
- “I think it exists and i have it even though I am middle class. I inadvertently enjoy privileges because I am white”
- “Having our race represented in every aspect of life almost a built-in advantage.”

- “Very real and, once again, sadly dismissed by many who benefit from it. As white, straight, and male I have opportunities and pathways that I can’t even fathom.”

The responses indicate these educators do not have consistent understandings of whiteness and the privileges associated with being white, which may indicate the absence of critical conversations about equity and justice. The responses range from “I think it exists” to white privilege is “very real and, once again, sadly dismissed by many who benefit from it.” This lack of consistency in responses is an indication of the importance of a clear vision to improve achievement for diverse students.

Although I asked 103 colleagues to complete the Educator Cultural Awareness Survey, only seven educators responded. This response rate could suggest how whiteness is preserved in suburban settings through indifference and indicates a critical need to address whiteness within the framework of multicultural education and culture-centered pedagogies in predominantly white settings. Additionally, ambivalence toward white privilege, whiteness, and systemic racism allows it to continue undeterred in educational institutions.

Interestingly, I asked my colleagues if they believed systemic racism exists in general, without indicating a particular institution. They all believe that systemic racism does exist. When I asked them if it is prevalent in schools, the answers were mixed. See Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2. Similar to my findings, Sleeter (2018) discovered that many preservice teachers are unaware of the inequalities perpetuated within education because of systemic oppression. This is another indication of the need for a critical review of teacher preparation programs and the incorporation of critical discourse within them.

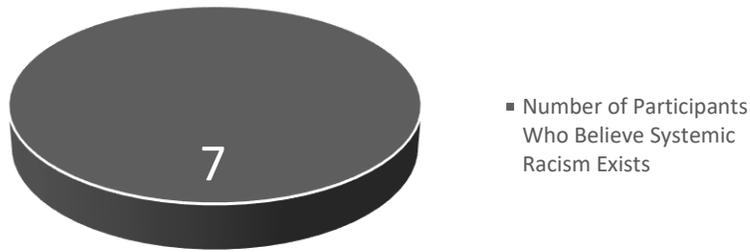


Figure 4.1 *Participants Who Believe Systemic Racism Exists*

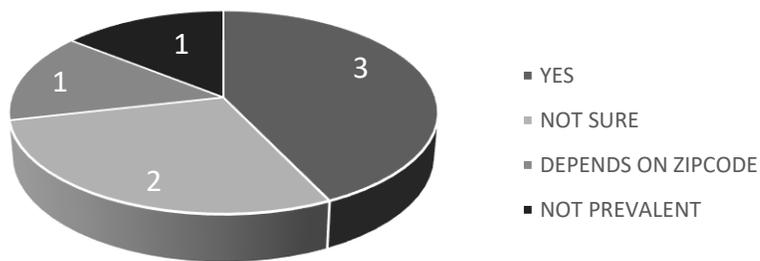


Figure 4.2 *Participants Who Believe Systemic Racism is Prevalent in Schools*

Intersectionality

Through continued analysis of my data, I began to understand that we must consider multiple lenses through which students experience the world, confronted with various manifestations of oppression and dominance. Intersectionality provides the structure to frame these multiple lenses. For example, nationwide data indicate BIPOC experience poverty at higher rates than White people, and this gap has widened during the pandemic (NCES, 2020). Additionally, my ECAS data indicate the existence of

stereotypes related to parent values toward education and the erroneous “culture of poverty” (Payne, 2005).

Intersectionality provides a more accurate lens to view our students and avoid multiple stereotypes and biases that impact our perceptions and attitudes toward our students. Where once, I had viewed my students only through a socioeconomic lens, I recognize the importance of the intersection of identities that contribute to oppression and privilege. As discussed by Crenshaw (1991), a singular view of identities that lead to oppression compromises the understanding and identification of multi-faceted structures that dominate and proliferate the marginalization of different groups. Focusing on one identify (racial, socioeconomic, ethnic, gender) results in further exclusion and leads to additional subjectivities (Collins, 2019). Understanding the implications of intersectional identities and developing equity practices and policies based on this knowledge will contribute to improving the outcomes for diverse students.

Equity literacy, much like the equity pedagogy dimension of multicultural education, focuses on the skills and knowledge educators must imbue to “become a threat to the existence of bias and inequity in our spheres of influence” (Gorski, 2018, p. 17). Gorski views equity through the lens of poverty and opportunity and focuses on diversity instead of culture, cultural diversity, or cultural competence. This is important to consider in this research since my participants focused primarily on shifting demographics in socioeconomic status. Additionally, culture as discussed in this action research includes socioeconomic status as an identity. In addition to intersectionality as a lens to view the levels of opportunity and oppression our students experience, my colleagues and I can borrow from equity literacy the knowledge and skills necessary to dismantle bias and

stereotypes that oppress our students. Once we have developed equity literacy, we can use these understandings to threaten inequity that leads to poor outcomes for diverse students in our setting (Gorski, 2018).

I asked participants to explain how they perceive the demographic changes at the research site during their tenure, which depends on the number of years they have been teaching at this site. Most respondents identified the primary demographic change as an increase in the number of students living in poverty and receiving free and reduced-price lunch and participating in other support programs. Race and ethnicity were regarded as being a “slight change” with “the more significant change in socioeconomic and single parent families.”

As I reviewed this data and considered my initial observations of the changing demographics in our district, I realized participants noted socioeconomic status more frequently than race or ethnicity. Figure 4.3 displays this data.

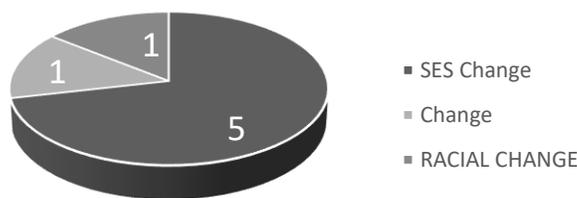


Figure 4.3 *How Have Demographics Changed?*

Demographic statistics support these perceptions. In 2019, the number of economically disadvantaged students was 37.1%, whereas in 2006, the number of low-income students was around 16% (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). This decrease in economic status resulted in a district professional development session entitled “Chocolate and Poverty,” sponsored by Milton Hershey School, a tuition-free private school. The session, which “addresses the characteristics and traits of students/families in poverty,” included “the ‘hidden rules’ among the classes, [and] the behavior patterns of many in poverty.” Afterward, the administrators guided us on a bus trip around the district to see where our economically disadvantaged students live. Many teachers were not aware that the living conditions of a growing number of students were a stark contrast to the living conditions of the middle- to upper-class students. The bus was not authorized to drive into one area where a cluster of our economically disadvantaged students lives in trailers and older homes. For many years, they were referred to as the “Bus 213” kids, a designation that fostered stereotypes of these children and their families.

Although Bus 213 no longer exists, the “Chocolate and Poverty” tour and the Bus 213 designation may have contributed to lingering deficit views, bias, and stereotypes, consistent with Payne’s (2005) concept of a mindset of poverty or culture of poverty that presumes people living in poverty have predictable and similar characteristics. This is evident in some of the ECAS responses. Participants discussed generalizations about people who are economically marginalized as “not as educated” and mentioned “the family structure being broken.” Other responses exhibit a common stereotype by presuming low-income parents do not value education. Gorski (2018) dispels this myth as

nonsense and explains how teachers judge parent valuation of education by their ability to be involved on site. Gorski argues that low-wage jobs prevent in-person involvement due to no paid leave, no childcare, and no transportation. One respondent stated,

I'm sure my bias comes from years of exasperation when my marginalized students don't take advantage of the education they are provided. I realize they are only doing what they learn (or don't learn) at home and I'm not sure how the cycle can be broken.

Through a review of studies to the contrary, Gorski (2018) debunks this myth, among others: that people experiencing poverty are lazy, substance addicts, linguistically deficient and poor communicators, and ineffective and inattentive parents (pp. 73-82).

Acknowledging and dismantling stereotypes are critical to the success of our students. Students and their families are aware of the stereotypes educators may hold, which impacts their full participation and achievement in school (Steele, 2010). This phenomenon is referred to as the stereotype threat hypothesis and causes people to perform below their potential (Spencer & Castano, 2007).

Some participants mentioned "slight racial change" or stated that there are more nonwhites than there used to be. Demographic data revealed that as the average socioeconomic status decreased at the research site, racial diversity increased. Due to the changing demographic categories over a span of time, the best way to view the demographic transition is to note the decrease in the percentage of White students. In 2004, 96.8% of the students were White, and in 2018, 87% of the students were White. This inverse relationship of socioeconomic status and diversity reflects a national trend (NCES, 2020).

During a diversity training provided by fellow teachers in the fall of 2020, several attendees shared misconceptions that also appeared on the ECAS. These misconceptions are prevalent in our community, such as the myth that the local housing authority recruits people from major cities to live in subsidized housing, thus ushering in drugs and crime. A local newspaper refuted this claim (Faher & Hurst, 2012), but it is still prevalent. One teacher observed that when multiple inner-city students arrive in the district at the same time, they maintain their “city” behaviors, and when they arrive singly, they are more likely to conform to the school behavioral norms. Another teacher referenced the ability of “these” students to assimilate into the culture of our school. What is the culture of a school experiencing shifting demographics during a very racially divisive time in America? What should it be? This action research does not attempt to answer these questions, but teachers’ perceptions are interrelated to the existing school culture.

Administrative Barriers to Equity

Administrative and curricular mandates pose a barrier between teachers who wish to develop a culture of equity and inclusion and the actualization of the vision. One ECAS response states, “All students and teachers are learning tolerance, resilience, and persistence as they continue to prevail through a very difficult curriculum that isn’t sensitive to their needs at all.” This indicates a level of frustration with the mandated curriculum. Since 2016, the district has adopted several scripted curriculum resources that have intensified the achievement gap. One scripted literacy resource was purchased without input and strict compliance to this resource was expected, for teachers have lost autonomy and agency. According to standardized test data, the scripted programs have not improved student outcomes.

Another respondent explained how administration may be a barrier to diverse students' success, citing "An overall lack of cultural awareness among the student body and school board. This tends to be a conservative district and not always open to pushes for increased diversity awareness." This action research is based on the phenomenon of shifting demographics at the research site and a widening achievement gap by analyzing teacher perceptions of this demographic change and the related constructs; therefore, I explored the relevancy of this perception on the district website. I was not able to locate any vision or mission statement, goals, or reference to The Equity and Inclusion Toolkit or district-level statements or initiatives available to the public that address equity and inclusion. A district Equity Plan for the 2020-2021 school year serves to meet the Title I requirement that assures that economically disadvantaged and minority groups are not taught by teachers who are not highly qualified at greater rates than their peers, yet the overall lack of publicly accessible data aligns with the perception that the district may not be "open to pushes for increased diversity awareness."

Administrators' limited response to the shifting demographics aligns with literature on this phenomenon. Turner (2015) investigated the interplay between political and organizational contexts, as related to demographic change, and found structural racism hidden within district leaders' meaning-making and policy responses. Turner argued district reactions to demographic change are either a limited response or an active response that involves altering curriculum and instruction, hiring new staff, and providing professional development related to the shifting demographics. However, active responses to growing diversity often fail to recognize the cultural and political challenges.

I share the perception that administrators in suburban districts with shifting demographics often enact a colorblind response. I had several exchanges with a former central administrator who declined to discuss the changing demographics with teachers as they struggled to balance the demands of new curricular resources. This administrator suggested that addressing the shifts would not alter the curriculum and providing a rigorous core curriculum for all students negated the need for discussions and changes to address increasing numbers of marginalized students. As I discussed earlier, the current comprehensive plan focuses heavily on data-based decision making and continued alignment to state standards. This small suburban district seems to be in the crux of balancing neoliberal educational policies with a need for a social justice agenda to address the differentiated outcomes among the student body.

Educators as Activists

“Often, people are waiting for a leader to come along. You don’t have to wait for someone else.”

—Bettina Love (2019)

Love’s statement reflects a major finding from this action research. The time is now for teachers to develop a social justice stance. We can no longer hope and wait for the next administrator to lead a social justice revolution by incorporating multicultural education and other equity pedagogies. As indicated in the previous finding, administrators in this suburban district are perceived as barriers to equity mostly due to race-neutral policies and practices. Nevertheless, through the ECAS and semi-structured interviews, I identified two colleagues who are willing to engage in further critical discourse. As one interviewee stated:

I'd certainly be willing to sit down and talk more about this topic. I think it's a difficult one in this district as I think there is some resistance (at various levels) to taking an honest/critical look at these issues.

The other interviewee exuded hope and excitement in sharing new understandings and participating in future discussions, exclaiming, "There is so much I don't know and feel all of my peers are in the same situation. I also believe we are all willing to learn!" My colleagues and I have the desire to enact change in our small, suburban district. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications of this finding in more detail.

Summary

As evident in Chapter 4, after being immersed in the data and viewing it inductively and deductively, I developed broader understandings guided by my research questions. The first question sought my colleague's attitudes and perceptions in response to the changing student demographics in our community. As I shared in this chapter, educators consider socioeconomic status the major shift at the district and associate several stereotypes with the families of their low-income students. Additionally, there is a perception that administrators are barriers to enacting equity and inclusivity policies that improve outcomes for diverse students. The second question elicited my colleagues' perspectives on what kinds of professional development might transform our community. This chapter provided some tentative responses: many educators have received minimal or no preparation to teach diverse students and they have minimal understanding of culture-centered equity pedagogies, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Since this action research reflects a hermeneutic phenomenology, my biases are present and add

to interpretation of data, both within this chapter and in my discussion of the implications in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes the implications of the findings of this critical action research, along with reflections on the methodology, implementation, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this critical action research study was to investigate the achievement gap at my small suburban school district. The critical perspective required a view of the achievement gap beyond the numbers, focusing instead on the perceptions and preparation of my fellow White, middle-class educators teaching in increasingly multicultural classrooms.

The achievement gap became evident as the district, just as most districts in Pennsylvania, enacted standards-based reform initiatives. While standards-based reform was underway, the district was experiencing a demographic shift and increasing numbers of students were non-White and/or economically disadvantaged. As a member of the support and data teams, I recognized the increasing number of students requiring support quickly outpaced our resources. Hypothesizing that the problem was related to the reading instruction and interventions, the team and I looked for interventions, trainings, and consultants to help diagnose and remediate this trend. I furthered my multisensory reading training by obtaining an additional certification in dyslexia and language-based reading disabilities. Many students responded well to small-group interventions, but these improvements did not always transfer into classroom gains. Our diverse students

consistently scored in the bottom third of achievement data and the number of students requiring learning support quadrupled within a few years and reached significantly disproportionate levels. As this trend continued, it was evident that the core curriculum was not reaching 80% of the students, which is the standard by which a curriculum is evaluated. In my continued search for answers, I enrolled in my doctoral program and decided to formally investigate this Problem of Practice through critical action research.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of White, middle-class educators in response to the changing student demographic in a suburban public school district?
2. What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban school experiencing increasing cultural diversity?

The major findings of this action research study reflect those of other studies conducted in suburban schools with shifting demographics, while some findings are more specific to this setting. As I explained in Chapter 4, the White, middle-class educators in my community are not fully prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms, citing administrative barriers to initiating equity pedagogies and exhibiting stereotypes and the manifestation of whiteness ideology, which further marginalizes diverse students and contributes to the achievement gap.

Chapter 5 will conclude this cycle of this critical action research by offering recommendations for praxis, reflections, and future actions related to multicultural education and the application of antiracist education.

Practice Recommendations

This study has several implications for different stakeholders in public education. The results of this study are not transferable to other settings; however, the process can be replicated to discover the perceptions of educators in various contexts. The importance of this study lies in initiating the critical discourse for change to occur in our schools. Parents, school board members, administrative teams, teachers, teacher educators, leadership developers, and parents may be interested in several key findings of this study.

Parents may be interested in the results of this study as it illustrates the need to bridge the cultural gap between home and school, and parents should be empowered to have a “seat at the table” when decisions are being made that impact the quality of education that their children receive. This study reveals how the Eurocentric canon is deeply ingrained in our public schools, inhibiting the development of a multicultural view. Diverse parents are the experts of their circumstance, which often differs from the White, middle-class worldview of the educators; therefore, parents of diverse students must insist their children’s identities are represented in all aspects of their educational experience. As discussed by Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) facilitates this link between home and school and these cultural frames of reference improve achievement for diverse students. Educators must recognize and seek out diverse families’ funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997) to enrich the curriculum and culture of the school. Educators cannot assume parents of diverse students are disinterested due to their unavailability and must create innovative ways to elevate their voices. It is educators’ responsibility to create opportunities for diverse families to contribute to the education of their children.

School board members and administrators may also be interested in this study, especially teachers' perceptions that district leaders are barriers to implementing equity pedagogies. This may reflect the heated sociopolitical environment of the United States currently and will require opportunities for critical discourse with all stakeholders and self-reflection to examine their systems. The teachers who responded to the survey are open to learning and implementing equity pedagogies but recognize the administration must provide opportunities for this work to happen. These opportunities may arise after critical self-reflection and a commitment from leadership to engage in a system review. Shiller (2016) dismissed the idea that political and educational leaders are unprepared for demographic shifts in their districts, arguing instead they are not willing to acknowledge it. To support political and educational leaders in this endeavor, the Pennsylvania Department of Education offers extensive guidance and comprehensive equity and inclusion resources for stakeholders to critically examine their systems and implement equitable and inclusionary practices. Districts must adjust their vision statements, policies, practice, and professional development plans to include the equity work that will positively impact their diverse students and develop a socially just citizenship. Consequently, universities and programs that offer leadership certifications and degrees may be interested in these findings as well. Leadership programs must evaluate their purpose and corresponding coursework to prepare leaders for multicultural schools. As discovered by Diem et al. (2016), educational leaders in the suburbs respond to demographic change in three ways: race-neutral policies, deficit perspectives, and colorblindness. Leadership development programs should explicitly counter these responses. As the country becomes more multicultural, future leaders must create a vision

of equity and inclusivity to advance historically underserved people and address the achievement gap. Educational leadership must be grounded in social justice pedagogies to prepare our schools for increasing diversity. These actions will contribute to an empowering school culture (Banks, 2020).

Teachers and teacher educators who recognize the importance of teachers as social justice activists may be interested in my findings as well. Equity work must start now because waiting for district leadership to recognize this urgency and act upon it will cause further harm to the HUS. Teachers can develop a double consciousness (Love, 2019) to navigate the fine line between social justice practices and standards-based reform prevailing in public schools. Helping teachers navigate this chasm can impact student achievement through bottom-up efforts. Situations such as the one present at my district where some teachers aspire to enact equitable and just practices but are met with administrative and political resistance require new strategies and methods to navigate this divide. As I have experienced and many of my colleagues have as well, this disconnect can be crushing. Blatant defiance of the standardized business model of education in the fight for social justice often results in disciplinary action or other retaliatory acts against teachers, yet continuous submission to neoliberal initiatives will harm the HUS. Scott (1990) explained three forms of political discourse: unwavering support and loyalty, obvious protest and opposition, and the strategic middle-ground that requires theatrics and hidden transcripts. Teachers are concerned about the repercussions of obvious opposition to the hegemony yet desire change. Reinforcing the adage, my study indicates there is strength in numbers: co-conspiracy offers an inviting methodology to increase the number of educator activists within our standardized, neoliberal system. In this context,

my colleagues and I can “conspire, scheme, and plot goodness” (Upton, 2020). Teacher-led groups of co-conspirators can address inequities if administrative barriers delay progress in dismantling structural racism.

Teacher educators also play a part in this process. They must prepare future teachers to balance the bureaucratic division in public schools and facilitate networking for new teachers to balance the demands of social justice and standards-based reform. My ECAS participants expressed limited knowledge and understandings of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist teaching. Therefore, professional development leaders and preservice teacher educators may act upon these findings through a critical review of their own teacher development plans and consider implementing equity pedagogies into coursework. It is significant to notice the limited number of responses to the ECAS as it can be indicative of a reluctance to discuss cultural awareness and related topics. Additionally, teacher educators must prepare future educators for diverse classrooms by facilitating intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) and purposeful placement of teachers into diverse settings to develop their cultural competence and activist spirit. Student teachers and new teachers should be placed with mentor teachers who are proven to implement equitable and inclusive practices in their classrooms.

In conjunction with the findings of this study, the events of 2020, and the continued oppression of the HUS, teacher preparation programs and professional development plans must include antiracist education as a guiding pedagogy to dismantle structural racism that plagues our educational systems. Antiracist education can teach the history of oppression and address the continuation of White influences on the education

of our diverse students. Antiracist education aspires to teach white students the history and the existence and continuation of systemic racism. According to Simmons (2019), antiracist teachers must make the following actions operational in antiracist classrooms: 1) Engage in vigilant self-awareness, 2) Acknowledge racism and the ideology of White supremacy, 3) Study and teach representative history, 4) Talk about race with students, and 5) If you see racism, do something. Antiracist pedagogy seeks to empower students of color, educate White students, and inspire educators to act.

Teacher educators, preservice teachers, and in-service teachers may also be interested in the discoveries I have made throughout this study regarding my own biases and contribution to the oppression of historically underserved students (HUS). As recommended by Simmons (2019), a vigilant self-awareness has forced me to understand and process my white privilege and notice the oppression in my white-washed environment. white privilege is a politically contested term that has many connotations, but in simple terms, white privilege is a built-in advantage for White people. It does not mean that someone has not worked hard or does not deserve the fruits of their labor, it means that if two people are in the same situation, the one who is White will have the advantage. The most challenging realization related to white privilege is considering those who do not have that same advantage, especially our students. Acknowledging white privilege is not racist; ignoring that it exists, however, contributes to systemic racism. The whiteness of the educational system cannot be denied, and all preservice and in-service educators should commit to uncovering their own implicit and explicit biases related to white privilege and be prepared to do something about it (Simmons, 2019). Matias (2016) deconstructs the racialized emotions of prospective teachers who desire to

teach in urban settings. The profession of teaching elicits feelings of care, yet authentic care rooted in ideology and practice may be lacking due to racial and cultural bias.

Additionally, Matias (2016) depicts a pedagogy rooted in discomfort where educators and students move outside their comfort zones and engage in discourse that evokes emotions that challenge beliefs, habits, and practices that sustain racism and inequities. This engagement is transformative and emancipatory.

Additionally, my experiences with advocating for diverse students should be considered. Self-reflective practice has provided an opportunity for me to recognize the damage my silence can cause for my students. In the past, I regularly advocated for diverse students in the context of my position and the practices that support them. Unfortunately, the leadership team viewed this adversely and frequently changed my teaching position. Over the course of several years, seven of my like-minded colleagues (allies) left the district and the ones who remained have been besieged by persistent questioning and confrontations from administrators. Several of my colleagues and I had been berated by the former superintendent for actions we took on behalf of our HUS. My situation was a result of a misconception, but damaging to my psyche, nonetheless. Currently, the environment is less volatile, yet several colleagues and I feel our voices have been silenced. I am painfully aware of how damaging that is to our HUS. Upon completion of this action research, I will be exploring avenues to promote social justice initiatives in the educational community. Social justice educators must be prepared to balance the expectations of standards-based reform with educational equity without the support of district leadership. We can achieve this by networking with other teachers and the families of our diverse students, viewing the system with a critical lens to expose

inequities that have become part of the Eurocentric dominance in education, and creating a classroom culture that counteracts that narrative. Social justice educators must be prepared for adversity until districts enact equity and inclusivity policies and pedagogies.

In addition, parents, educators, and policy makers must redefine achievement and dismiss the achievement gap conundrum until schools are equitable places where all students have opportunities for success. The banking model of education (Freire, 1972) continues to oppress those who lack financial capital. For two decades, policy, federal law, and funding have attempted to address the achievement gap, yet it continues to thrive with devastating consequences for individuals and the communities in which they live. Systems should shift to remediating the opportunity gap through equity and innovation, using various measures of learning instead of disconnected standardized tests (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Parents have insight into their families' worldview and should participate in the designation of achievement measures. This collective effort could make achievement attainable for all students.

Implementation Plan

Action research is a cyclical process, consisting of the following steps: identifying a problem, gathering background information, designing the study, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting, and implementing and sharing data (Mertler, 2017). The implementation phase is not a final stage, as more questions arise and reflecting on methodology may initiate future action research. I plan to revisit many facets of my study, yet some findings are ready to be shared and discussed further with educators and parents. Since my future plans include retiring from public education and working in a college, university, or consulting setting to prepare educators for diverse classrooms, my

implementation plans extend beyond the walls of my own classroom to hopefully network and collaborate with other educators. Additionally, I hope to promote social justice education well into my retirement by supporting families and teachers.

As planned throughout the course of this action research, I designed an Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP, Appendix A) for my setting, based on the finding that White, middle-class educators need opportunities to explore and implement equity pedagogies. The E-CAPLP addresses several key concepts, such as intersectionality, personal identities, whiteness, opportunity gap, double consciousness, and co-conspirators for justice.

Since I am nearing the end of my public education career and hope to move into teacher education, I also plan to develop a discussion board for educators and parents to seek co-conspirators to advance social justice education in their schools. Since the next several years may be transitional for me, I hope to garner online alliances that provide opportunities for critical discourse on social justice topics, providing myself and others with different perspectives to advance the achievement of diverse students.

In the near term, I plan to develop a protocol for home-school collaborations that focus on family funds of knowledge of our diverse students (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997) and flexible and innovative connections that accommodate diverse families. I will test and refine this protocol by visiting some of my students' parents to build home-school connections. Parent-teacher conferences occur most often for the students of our White, middle- to upper-class families, who can get release time from work. Therefore, educators must enter the communities of their students to build cultural understandings and connections. As explained by Myers (2013), "teachers must become part of a

family's network to learn from and with parents on how to best educate the children they share" (p. 44). Teachers will counter deficit views of parenting from this contact with diverse families. That said, teachers should be compensated for this time. Prioritizing these connections will initiate the much-needed collaboration with parents of our HUS students. It is imperative that educators include the voices of our diverse parents in our planning if we ever hope to eliminate the gap.

Reflection on Methodology

Mertler's (2017) action research protocol informed the design of this study. I followed a planning, acting, developing, and reflecting process. As I began the literature review to help me understand the local achievement gap, I stepped away from my past overreliance on statistical data to inform my understandings of student achievement and chose a qualitative design that would allow me to reflect on my own practice, while gaining insights into the perceptions and preparation of my colleagues.

The planning phase of this research study went through several iterations. As discussed previously, my position in my district changed four times in 4 years, which inhibited several early drafts of my research plans. During my time as a reading specialist and the ESL specialist, I began to design an ethnographic study situated around the perceptions and knowledge of my students' families. When I was moved from the ESL position, I no longer had regular, meaningful contact with these families to implement that intervention. Eliminating the voices of diverse families in my data collection was an exceedingly difficult decision. In the past, multicultural education has been unsuccessful when the voices of the nondominant cultures were not present in the planning. I had envisioned iterative funds of knowledge interviews to bridge the cultural gap between

home and school. Another plan involved investigating whether culturally relevant pedagogy would impact the achievement of students within a multi-tiered systems of support framework and would have enabled me to collect classroom data from my colleagues regardless of my position, thus allowing me to continue with my action research without further setbacks.

As I progressed through my doctoral program at the University of South Carolina and my dissertation in practice, I reacted to and reflected on my understandings and beliefs regarding the Problem of Practice I identified as the achievement gap in my suburban district. Action research has underpinnings related to social justice (Mertler, 2017), and this methodology provided the means for me to evaluate my understandings and beliefs and revisit my decisions during the development and execution of my study as I deepened my understanding of the inequities prevalent in schools.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the pandemic and the racial climate of 2020 affected my methodology. I hypothesized that if teachers were culturally responsive to their diverse students, achievement would improve. In May, George Floyd was senselessly murdered, and in June, I began a class on antiracist literature and discourse, which inspired considerable retrospection of my research design. This coursework and critical reflection on my practice and upcoming data collection confirmed that the achievement gap, which I had identified as the Problem of Practice for my study, was fundamentally related to structural racism. I doubted my initial hypothesis that culturally responsive teaching would bridge an achievement gap sustained by structural racism. Once I began analyzing data from the ECAS and semi-structured interviews, it was evident that antiracist education is important to the action plan, E-CAPLP, and my future research

plans. Multicultural education lacks the “teeth” of antiracist education and must be implemented with pedagogies that address whiteness ideology to create humanizing places for children to learn.

Critical action research provided the flexibility to respond to the educational shifts caused by the pandemic and the turbulent sociopolitical environment leading up to and continuing throughout my data collection. The social unrest continued at the start of 2021 as I finalized my dissertation. I recognized the need for White teachers to become co-conspirators to successfully dismantle structural racism in education. Antiracist education is indicated in systems with predominantly White, middle-class citizens, and their teachers must be more than not racist; they must be antiracist (Kendi, 2019).

Action research has empowered me to continue making decisions in the best interest of my students. Action research encourages teachers to take risks and change instructional practices as appropriate (Mertler, 2017). Since we live in a data-driven climate, the ability to gather my own data and connect it to theory adds to my professional growth and agency, which is the purpose of action research. Using qualitative data was also important to this action research for this reason. Since teachers are saturated with numerical data, qualitative action research provided the opportunity for me to examine teachers’ perceptions in their own words. Individuals have unique realities, and qualitative action research facilitated this type of data collection.

Additionally, action research allowed me to be a full participant. My action research reflects a hermeneutic phenomenology design because I was a full participant, and my biases are present. My use of literature, methodology, analysis, and implications illustrate my belief that teachers must take action to dismantle structural racism in their

own institutions, which is why I reached out to my fellow teachers to gather data on their perceptions on the Problem of Practice. My implementation plan can connect them with literature and resources to self-reflect on their own experiences in the quest to enact more equitable practices.

Most importantly, action research has provided an opportunity for me to grow individually and professionally and regroup from several stressful years. Reading and taking positive action have always been my best problem-solving tools. I am beginning to transform my thoughts and actions and share this process with others. Action research has improved my spirit and ignited my social justice activism.

Limitations

Action research also provided flexibility to address this study's limitations. My frequent position changes impacted my preparation leading up to data collection. The closure of school in March 2020, due to the pandemic, limited the participants I could include in my data collection. The murder of George Floyd had a profound impact on me, as I realized being a culturally responsive educator would not resolve the structural racism that continues to oppress our students. The divisiveness in our country during this election year also weighed heavily on me as a researcher. Teaching during a pandemic has been physically and emotionally draining, and HUS students are further marginalized. My colleagues have also been subject to these causes of fatigue, which is likely why the participation in this study was so limited, yet this volatile year also illustrates the need for humanizing pedagogies to support our diverse students and families.

Recommendation for Future Research

I would like to revisit my original action research plans to study how funds of knowledge interviews impact the perceptions of teachers and families in my community. By facilitating intergroup contact (Allport, 1954), such a project might reduce prejudice and stereotypes about our diverse families and positively impact the achievement of diverse students.

Additionally, I would like to conduct a more in-depth study on the perceptions White, middle-class educators have regarding white ideology and the impact it has on student achievement. As I finish this cycle of action research, I realize that the small number of respondents to the ECAS limits the implications; however, this small number of respondents, the assurances of confidentiality by the researcher, and the limited interest of my fellow educators and administrators in this study implicate the intimidation or even ambivalence some may feel when engaging in social justice discourse. Soon after I began data collection for this action research, the district conducted several diversity trainings that were met with resistance and ambivalence. Missing from these sessions were the voices of district administrators, unfortunately. We were not provided a rationale for these trainings and several teachers reacted with resistance. These conversations will be difficult and should be initiated with a strong vision for equity. This continual engagement in critical discourse creates opportunities for a “fusion of horizons” Gadamer (1960/1989) to spur antiracist work in education.

Conclusion

This action research was initiated to seek a deeper understanding of the achievement gap in a suburban district experiencing shifting demographics. Data

collection and analysis occurred in the fall of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative survey and interview data were collected from White, middle-class educators to gather their perceptions on topics related to the demographic change, multicultural education, and culture-centered pedagogies. Interpreting the data through a critical lens revealed aspects of oppression steeped in the whiteness of public education. Through this process, I realized the achievement gap is a construct of an inequitable system. I initially believed the insertion of multicultural education and culture-centered pedagogies had potential to close the gap. This action research study indicates that in small conservative suburban districts, teachers will have to navigate neoliberal reform with a double consciousness as they simultaneously co-conspire with colleagues, diverse students, and families to counter the hegemony present in public schools. The original idea of the E-CAPLP was to frame multicultural and culture-centered pedagogies in a broader sense, assuming that consensus existed among district educators for such professional learning opportunities. I still believe most of my colleagues do embrace such opportunities. The final E-CAPLP reflects the overall themes that would benefit a district-wide professional learning plan. I recognize the current reality that the politics of education in a conservative suburban district limits a full commitment to antiracist education at this time, yet educators like me can take action to dismantle the structural racism and limited opportunities for the HUS from the bottom-up. For the E-CAPLP to have impact and reflect the findings of this action research, it contains personal professional learning recommendations. Individuals can take immediate action as opposed to waiting for top-down policies or leadership to arise. The most remarkable implication of this action research is the impact it has had on me as a practitioner. I began this study thinking like

an interventionist and looking for instructional methods to address the achievement gap in my district. After engaging in the extensive review of literature, then a period of self-reflection as I processed the events of 2020, I recognize that my thinking aligned with deficit views of the HUS. Attempting to “fix” students within an oppressive system will never close the achievement gap, and silence is no longer an option. Let’s talk about it. In fact, let’s do something about it.

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APPENDIX A
EDUCATOR CULTURAL AWARENESS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
PLAN (E-CAPLP)

The major findings and associated implications that need to be addressed within the school district are as follows:

- Multicultural education is understood as a surface-level curriculum addition; therefore, it must extend beyond a surface-level application and guide all aspects of the system.
- Educators maintain a Eurocentric vision of education as opposed to a multicultural vision; therefore, oppression must be disrupted by educators in suburban schools by acknowledging other ways of knowing and experiencing the world.
- The Eurocentric vision of education is steeped in whiteness; therefore, whiteness must be addressed by educators in suburban schools as a form of systemic racism originating from the oppression of BIPOC.
- Educators lack consistent understanding of equity pedagogies that improve the achievement of diverse students; therefore, equity pedagogies must be intentionally addressed in professional learning opportunities.

- Educators in suburban schools have had little contact with diverse groups; therefore, intentional and sustained intergroup contacts must be pursued for students and educators in suburban schools to reduce prejudices.
- Educators assert that administrative and bureaucratic inaction is a barrier to implementing equity pedagogies; therefore, they must take a bold stance as social justice activists, demand equitable practices, and develop a double consciousness within their classroom to create counternarratives to the hegemonic Eurocentric narratives that proliferate in public education.
- Educators maintain stereotypes related to socioeconomic status; therefore, they must engage in funds of knowledge interviews to thwart the damage that stereotype threat has on the achievement of students lacking social and financial capital.
- Educators regard many student behaviors and attitudes as reflective of their socioeconomic status rather than a combination of cultural, social, or ethnic identities; therefore, an understanding of how the cumulative impact of intersectional identities leads to the oppression of diverse students must be contraindicated in academic and behavior policies, and practices in suburban schools.
- Educators are open to enacting social justice initiatives; therefore, district facilitated professional learning plans should include input by classroom teachers.

The major findings and associated implications that educators can pursue immediately without waiting for district-wide initiatives are as follows:

- Prepare for the emotions and discomfort of guilt, shame, and sadness when confronting issues of whiteness and white privilege. This is a necessary process for individual transformation and the operationalization of social justice actions
- Become hyper-vigilant of personal bias, deficit views, and stereotypes that you hold.
- Identify others who will co-conspire to enact antiracist practices and challenge oppression and domination.
- Examine your personal identities in depth.
- Read and follow authors who focus on equity and social justice.
- Develop a double consciousness to address the demands of standardized curricula and assessment policies with practices that critically examine curriculum and instruction and teach students to be critical consumers of such materials.
- Immerse yourself with intergroup contacts to learn and dismantle stereotypes and bias.

Table A.1 Recommended Actions for Educators

Educate Self and Others	Collaborate	Activate	Research Scholars
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergroup contacts • Confront whiteness ideology • Study personal identities • Intersectional identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergroup contacts • Parents as allies/co-conspirators • Colleagues as co-conspirators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consciousness • Say NO to structural racism and inequity • Anti-racist actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kimberlé Crenshaw • Cheryl Matias • Bettina Love • Dena Simmons • Ibram Kendi • Christine Sleeter • Paul Gorski • Gloria Ladson-Billings • Geneva Gay

APPENDIX B

EDUCATOR CULTURAL AWARENESS SURVEY

Consent Information

As discussed in my email, I am investigating the attitudes and perceptions of educators regarding the demographic shifts in our district and our preparation to teach in multicultural classrooms. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to explain your attitudes and perceptions regarding the demographic shifts, and the preparation that you have received or would like to receive to teach diverse students. The following survey is anonymous. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions you are not required to answer them. The survey is being conducted via personal email, as opposed to school email, to maintain your anonymity and confidentiality.

The last question of this survey requests your participation in a focus group, which will be conducted via Zoom, to discuss and identify professional learning opportunities that you perceive are fundamental to teaching in diverse classrooms. Participation in the focus group is voluntary and confidential. Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, I cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but I will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group. If you choose to participate in the focus group, I will ensure that your responses remain anonymous on the survey: you will be directed to another brief form to collect your contact information (name, email address, consent, and scheduling information).

The data collected are for the purposes of my research and do not belong to the district. The focus group will be conducted and recorded via the Zoom platform through my personal account, so I can accurately transcribe responses. During the focus group, we will further discuss attitudes and perceptions related to the demographic shift and create an Educator Cultural Awareness Professional Learning Plan (E-CAPLP). The E-CAPLP may be given to Mr. Mitchell to consider for professional development planning purposes if he requests it. Again, you will not be identified as a participant in the creation of the E-CAPLP.

Confidentiality will be maintained during the survey, focus group, and E-CAPLP creation. Your responses will be included in the written and oral presentation of my research, but your anonymity will be maintained.

The focus group will take place via Zoom and should last about 60 minutes. It will occur during the week of November 30, 2020. The session will be recorded via the Zoom platform so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by me and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at my home. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (bethdshoff@gmail.com) or my faculty advisor, (ECURRIN@email.sc.edu). This information is also included in the introductory email containing this survey.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate in the survey, please click *continue* to access the survey. When you are done with the survey, click *submit*. If you are willing to participate in the focus group, please click the *continue to focus group* link to provide your identifying information and scheduling information. You can also contact me at bethdshoff@gmail.com to express your interest in participating in the focus group.

Thank you very much for you input and support in the completion of this research study.

Personal Information

1. Please specify your ethnicity. Choose all that apply.
 - a. African American
 - b. Asian
 - c. Latino or Hispanic
 - d. Native American
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - f. White
 - g. Other (Please explain)

2. Please specify your gender identification.
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other

3. Please specify your age.
 - a. 21-30
 - b. 31-40
 - c. 41 +

4. How many years have you been teaching at your current location?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21+

5. How many years have you been teaching?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21+

6. While you were in college, do you recall instruction and experiences that developed your knowledge of other cultures and ethnicities? If yes, please describe.

7. Do you feel prepared to teach students with ethnicities, languages, or generally, other cultures that differ from yours? Please explain.

8. What learning opportunities do you believe would help you navigate the shifting student demographics in our district?

School and Classroom Demographics

9. How have the demographics changed in the school and in your classroom during the time that you have worked there?

10. What positive impact does a change in demographic (race, ethnicity, social) composition of your classroom have on you and other students?

11. What challenges does a change in the demographic (race, ethnicity, social) composition of your classroom create for you?
12. What is a significant barrier facing diverse students who attend your school (prior to pandemic)?
13. What is a significant barrier facing diverse students in your school during the pandemic and subsequent changes to instruction?
14. What recommendations would you give a diverse student starting school in your district?

Knowledge and Understanding Questions

15. What is your current understanding of multicultural education?
16. What is your current understanding of culturally relevant teaching/culturally sustaining pedagogy?
17. What is your current understanding of antiracist education?

Perception Questions

18. Do you believe that the non-White students at your school have an equitable opportunity to be successful?
19. What are your perceptions of *systemic racism*?
 - a. Do you believe systemic racism is prevalent in education? Explain.
20. What are your perceptions of *white privilege*?
 - a. What do you believe to be examples of white privilege?

Awareness

21. Are you comfortable discussing your own biases, deficit views, and cultural competence? If yes, please answer the following questions.

- a. Are you aware of any *implicit/explicit bias(es)* that you have toward groups of people who are socially, racially, or economically marginalized? Please explain.
- b. Are you aware of any *deficit views* that you have toward the above-mentioned groups of people? Please explain.
- c. Are you aware of ways that you exhibit *cultural competence*? Please explain.

Comments

22. Is there anything that you would like to share that was not addressed in the questionnaire? Please explain.

Focus Group

As discussed previously, I will hold a *focus group* to follow-up on some of these questions and seek your input on professional learning related to the changing demographics in our classrooms. I anticipate the group will meet via Zoom during the week of November 30, 2020. The data from this Educator Cultural Awareness Survey will guide the focus group discussion but you will be able to offer other suggestions not addressed in the survey. Are you willing to participate in a focus group that will address the following question?

What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class, monolingual educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban school experiencing increasing cultural diversity?

23. Are you interested in participating in the focus group?
- a. Yes – Submit my survey. *Please click this link to provide your contact information for participation in the focus group.*
 - b. No – Submit my survey.

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL

Dear Colleagues:

For those who may not know me, my name is Beth Shoff. I teach sixth grade English and writing at Westmont Hilltop Elementary School. Aside from being a classroom teacher, I have worked as a reading specialist and an ESL specialist in the district. Currently I am a student in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum Studies, and I would like to invite you to participate.

As you are aware, the demographics have shifted in our district from primarily White, middle-class students to a more diverse demographic. My research study seeks to investigate the attitudes and perceptions that White, middle-class, and monolingual teachers have regarding this changing demographic and related topics. I am gathering this data through an anonymous survey via Google Forms. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes. The surveys are needed by November 27th so that I can analyze the data prior to the focus group during the first week in December.

The final question in the survey will ask if you would like to participate in a focus group to discuss what professional learning opportunities White, middle-class, and monolingual educators perceive as fundamental to teaching in multicultural classrooms. We may also discuss related topics that are of interest to the participants. If you are interested in participating in a focus group, at the conclusion of the survey, you will

access another Google Form that will collect your contact information. The focus group is not anonymous; however, your confidentiality will be maintained. The focus group will require a one-hour time commitment and will occur via Zoom at a time during the first week in December. You can withdraw your interest to participate at any time prior to the focus group or during the focus group.

I appreciate your assistance in this research study. If you have any questions at any time, please contact me or my faculty advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Currin, at ECURRIN@email.sc.edu. The Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina can be contacted at (803) 777-6670 if you wish to discuss your rights as a research participant. Thank you for your time and participation.

With sincere thanks,

Beth Shoff

bethdshoff@gmail.com

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

LOGISTICS: meeting via Zoom for 1 hour

BEGIN RECORDING ON ZOOM

INTRODUCTION: (3 min)

SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me regarding my action research on the attitudes and perceptions of White, middle-class, and monolingual educators in a suburban district experiencing shifting demographics. As I discussed in the introduction to the ECAS, I am completing my degree from the University of South Carolina in Curriculum Studies. I would like you to help identify ways to prepare our district educators to teach in multicultural classrooms. What we learn today will help diverse students be successful in our classrooms.

Our discussion will be confidential. I will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in my description of this focus group. I will destroy the notes and the recording after I complete my study and publish the results.

Please introduce yourselves.

Do you have any questions about the study?

TOPIC 1: REACTIONS TO ECAS (10 min)

PROBE: Explain how you reacted to the questions on the ECAS?

- (a) How would you describe your feelings during the completion of the ECAS?
- (b) Do you have any questions or concerns about the questions on the ECAS?
- (c) How can the ECAS be improved?

TOPIC 2: PRESENT THEMES THAT WERE GLEANED FROM ECAS AND FEEDBACK (15 min)

SCRIPT: The following themes were gleaned from the ECAS that our staff completed: [WILL BE IDENTIFIED AFTER ECAS IS ANALYZED]

PROBE: Of the themes that were gleaned from the ECAS, what do you believe is most important to address through professional development at the district level?

PROBE: What professional learning opportunities/support would you like to receive in relation to the shifting demographics in our district that were not identified in the ECAS?

TOPIC 3: PERCEPTIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND OVERIDENTIFICATION OF DIVERSE STUDENTS IN DETENTIONS/SUSPENSIONS (10 min)

PROBE: Do you perceive a difference in the achievement of diverse students and the achievement of students in the dominant group?

If so, what reasons do you believe lead to the lack of academic achievement for diverse students?

PROBE: Do you perceive that diverse students get more discipline referrals than the students in the dominant group?

What reasons do you believe lead to diverse students receiving more discipline referrals than their peers?

TOPIC 4: RESEARCH QUESTION (20 min)

PROBE: What preservice and in-service professional preparation do White, middle-class educators perceive as fundamental to educating diverse students in a suburban district experiencing increasing cultural diversity?

FINAL THOUGHTS/WRAP-UP (10 min)

PROBE: Do you have any final thoughts about any of the topics discussed in this focus group? Is there anything that you would like to discuss that was not addressed?

WRAP-UP: Thank you very much for participating in this focus group.

APPENDIX E

ECAS DATA ALIGNED TO BANKS'S FIVE DIMENSIONS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Table E.1 *ECAS Data Aligned to Banks's Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education*

Dimension	Codes	Representative Quote(s)
Content Integration	Education for All Students (EAS)	Educating all students to understand all students as well as understanding cultural backgrounds and needs. Incorporating and being sensitive to all beliefs.
	Surface (S)	I just try to expose students to different cultures on a consistent basis and make use of positive language for other experiences and realities.
	Language Acquisition (LA)/Language (L)	communication barrier
	Curriculum (Cu)	All students and teachers are learning tolerance, resilience, and persistence as they continue to prevail through a very difficult curriculum that isn't sensitive to their needs at all.
Knowledge Construction	Curriculum and Instruction (CI)	As a teacher, we face challenges such as how to adjust when you are stuck within the constraints of programs and instructional practices mandated by the administration.
	Background Knowledge (BK)	behavioral concerns, lack of background knowledge, perceived judgement
	Assessment Bias (AB)	the white biased-nature of the tests we give.
	Socioeconomic Change	I have more lower income families but

	(SEC) and	culturally not much different
	Low Income (LI)	I don't think they have changed dramatically, but I do feel demographics have changed...especially regarding students from low income families.
	Racial Change (RC)	I would say, off the top of my head, that there are more non-whites now that before.
Equity Pedagogy	Minimal Understanding (MU)	little to none
	Communication (Co)	Teachers have learned new ways to communicate with families!
	Discussion Group (DG)	I try to have conversations with small groups of students when a racially charged situation occurs in our district. Students seem more open to these conversations when in small groups.
	Instruction (I)	Careful selection of topics to cover in class to provide culturally relevant teaching Exposing all students to academic rigor, a high-quality education and engaging them in challenging, deep thinking.
	Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT)	Educating the teacher so that he/she can educate the student
	Teacher Education (TE) and Teacher Preparation (TP)	none minimal until teacher preparation programs change and until teachers are given resources to help combat it, the prevalence [of systemic racism in education] will continue.
	Support from Teacher (ST)	I am here for you and come see me anytime to let me know how I can best help you. Maybe a building walk-through and some insight to how routines and procedures work. Explicit directions and explanations.
Prejudice Reduction	Believes Systemic Racism Exists (BitE)	I do think that it exists but I'm not sure I'm aware of specific examples.

Recognition of White Privilege (RofWP)	I have conversations with non-white friends of mine about systemic racism. I understand that as a white person, I may not know how it feels to be judged immediately based on what I look like. Personally I think it is an issue that needs addressed. I ask people about experiences they've had and it is disturbing.
Lack of Representation in AP and Gifted (LofR) and Special Education Enrollment Increase (SEI)	Lack of access to pre-K programs and early intervention as well as an over identification of diverse students in learning support or emotional support or a lack of representation in AP courses or gifted programs.
Behavioral (B)	behavioral concerns, lack of background knowledge, perceived judgement
Chance to Succeed (CtoS)	I think nonwhite student have a chance to succeed, but I don't think our District fully understands the complex racial history of our nation and how that plays out today.
Tolerance (To)	Increased tolerance and acceptance
Value other Views (VV)	Generally, I would classify a multicultural education as one that addresses and values experiences and realities that lie outside of the white heterosexual male experience.
Awareness (Aw)	in this area we are not culturally diverse and racism is evident but perhaps only because of ignorance
Cultural Awareness (CA)	An overall lack of cultural awareness among the student body and school board. This tends to be a conservative district and not always open to pushes for increased diversity awareness.
Cultural Mismatch (CM)	Needs that children might have that I don't understand
Cultural Differences	I think the [demographic] change has made

	(CD)	me aware of issues I had little understanding of
	Building Respect (BR)	challenge of building respect and teaching it, gaining understanding, helping others accept differences
	Bridging Cultural Differences (BD)	It can, occasionally, create some awkward interactions when someone says something that is unfortunate. This is usually do to a lack of cultural awareness/understanding.
	Bias Reduction (BR)	helps other students learn about their peers without immediate judgment
	Assimilation (ASSM)	We want them to “be like us” rather than them selves.
	Personal Beliefs (PB)	Parents imparting their racist views on their children knowing you are treating a child differently
	Microaggression (MA)	I often avoid people of color when in a store or have noticed myself crossing the street when a person of color is walking towards me. I have often caught myself generalizing that people that are economically marginalized are not as educated as affluent people.
	Deficit Views (DV)	I’m sure my bias comes from years of exasperation when my marginalized students don’t take advantage of the education they are provided. I realize they are only doing what they learn (or don’t learn) at home and I’m not sure how the cycle can be broken. I believe I am quicker to judge a students behavior early on if they are a different culture. I have often caught myself generalizing that people that are economically marginalized are not as educated as affluent people.
Empowering School	Administrative Support (AS)	We have an administration that does not understand our changing demographics and

Culture	Parental Support (PS)	<p>doesn't seem to want to learn. There are many students with emotional needs that we can't just dismiss and place somewhere else as we have in the past.</p> <p>I think nonwhite student have a chance to succeed, but I don't think our District fully understands the complex racial history of our nation and how that plays out today. An overall lack of cultural awareness among the student body and school board. This tends to be a conservative district and not always open to pushes for increased diversity awareness.</p> <p>Participation of parents in the education of their child poses a challenge. When the parent doesn't value education; the child doesn't.</p>
	<p>Community, including Extracurricular Activities (EA), Criminal Justice System (CJS), Impacts Society (IS), Depends on zip code (ZC), Food Insecurity (FI), Employment (EMP), Housing (H), Resources (R), and Technology (T)</p>	<p>Technology, food service socioeconomics-poor or no internet access, support from parents while students are learning at home</p> <p>participate in class; join a group/club/team</p> <p>Get involved in extracurricular activities</p> <p>It's (systemic racism) very real and has a large impact on society. It's unfortunate that so many are willing to dismiss it.</p> <p>Funding, expectations, etc. are all tied to demographics and location. If you follow the trail back, location is tied to housing segregation and similar policies. They are inseparable at this point.</p>
	Activism	<p>Making students aware that racism exists and how to identify racist practices and how to address and change those</p>