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The Tale of Two Pandemics: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in A Blended Learning Environment Amidst COVID-19 and Racism Pandemics

Kayla Hostetler

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THE TALE OF TWO PANDEMICS: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN A
BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AMIDST COVID-19 AND RACISM
PANDEMICS

by

Kayla Hostetler

Bachelor of Arts
University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, 2010

Master of Science
Walden University, 2012

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College of Education

University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Mary Styslinger, Major Professor

Gloria Boutte, Committee Member

Julia Lopez-Robertson, Committee Member

Lucy Spence, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my former, current, and future students. You have taught me and continue to teach me what it means to be a teacher and a better person. You continually make teaching much more than a career, you make it a calling and a blessing.

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ABSTRACT

Due to the sudden spread of COVID19 in March of 2020, schools in the United States were scrambling to figure out ways to educate their students and at the same time keep them safe. In many cases schools switched to online learning or at home packets. During the same school year on May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer. The video tape of his murder sparked protests across the country. His death showing how racism continues to plague American society. Students and teachers across the country were trying to process all of these events and navigate the educational system with little to no guidance. At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, COVID19 and systemic racism were two issues that still permeated American society. Due to the health and safety threat of COVID19, many schools selected to remain in virtual or blended learning models. Given the context of the dramatically changing school environment and the increased visibility of systemic racism, this study sought to understand what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy was situated in a blended learning environment. In addition, the study sought to understand students' perspectives and thoughts on their experiences using culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. Much of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy did not occur within in a blended learning environment and does not include students' perceptions and thoughts on their experiences.

Guided by critical literacy theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, qualitative case study methodology was used to gather data about what happens within the context of

the study and students' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy and a blended learning environment. Data was collected through observations, field notes, classroom artifacts, student surveys, and semi-structured interviews. From coding analysis, six themes were developed: academic achievement, cultural competence, critical consciousness, building relationships, student voice, and blended learning. The findings of the study are presented through a detailed description of each case study. Furthermore, a detailed discussion and implications are provided to support educators, administrators, school districts, and higher educational institutes that have teaching programs in challenging them to include culturally relevant pedagogy within blended learning environments and to include youth voice in decision-making processes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRP..... Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Problem Statement

The United States is currently experiencing two pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines a pandemic as a disease that is prevalent over an entire country or world. In the beginning of 2020, COVID-19, a new viral disease spread rapidly across the world and the United States. Similarly, racism, a long-present social disease continues its spread across the world and the United States. Ending these two pandemics requires both our individual and collective efforts.

The spread of COVID-19 in the United States began in February, 2020. COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by infection with a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms of COVID-19 include: fever, chills, cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle body aches, headaches, loss of taste and smell, sore throat, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. People at higher risk are those over sixty-five and those with underlying health conditions (Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

On March 16, 2020 the school district in which I teach, like many across the country, moved from face-to-face teaching to a “distance” approach due to rising COVID-19 numbers. This transition occurred without any advance notice. Teachers scrambled and quickly adapted, using video conferencing on different online platforms and sending home printed homework packets. Students did not know they would not

return to school. Stressed students attempted to complete school work from home. Anxious parents struggled to find childcare and work from home. Overwhelmed teachers attempted to balance home lives with their work lives, while worrying about their students. Many struggled with the loss of social interaction and the loss of family members. Events transpired rapidly. On March 16, 2020 there were 4,226 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 88 confirmed deaths in the United States. In the county where I teach, on March 16 there were 23 confirmed cases and 2 confirmed deaths (Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

On July 27th, 2020, there were 4,099,310 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States. Over 145,013 people have died from COVID-19 in the United States. A state in the southeastern United States where this study takes place, had 80,856 confirmed cases and 1,436 confirmed deaths. The school district where I teach had 1,244 confirmed cases and 23 confirmed deaths (Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Despite the state increase in local cases from March until July, on July 27, 2020 a decision to re-open schools was made by the county school board using a blended model. As a teacher I was informed that the school board made this decision after reviewing the state's department of health and environmental control guidelines and the state's education guidelines. After reviewing the guidelines provided by state agencies the school board reviewed feedback on surveys from parents, teachers, and community members.

The school board offered a plan that gave parents the choice between an all virtual school or a two day per week in person blended model. The blended model had schools opening at a 50 percent capacity. Students attended two consecutive days and then

received work to be completed at home for the remaining three days of the school week. On days that students were working from home, teachers could only assign thirty minutes of work, per subject. The school district provided laptops for all high school aged students and offered hot spots to students that did not have internet at home. These circumstances made teaching this academic school year, an unprecedented context for students and teachers. Thus, the context of this study was extremely unique. This study took place not only amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, but also a racism pandemic.

On May 25, 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer. His death was captured on a video which went viral across the country. George Floyd begged for his life for eight minutes, as officer Derek Chauvin applied pressure to Floyd's neck. Floyd's murder sparked outrage across the country and inspired numerous memorials, protests, and movements. By June 13 over 2000 cities in the United States held protests in response to this injustice. As of October 2, 2020, the city in which this study takes place, has held ten protests, marches, and demonstrations led by the local Black Lives Matter Chapter, local NAACP chapter, and Next Generation Youth Organization. George Floyd's death brought to light an ugly truth that many Americans already knew, that there is a racism pandemic within the United States. More specifically, George Floyd's death along with: Breonna Taylor, Atatianna Jefferson, Aura Rosser, Ahmaud Arbery, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Michelle Cusseaux, Freddie Gray, Janisha Fonville, Eric Gardner, Akai Gurley, Gabriella Nevarez, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson, Trayvon Martin, and countless others, demonstrate the reality of how prevalent systemic racism exists in policing systems. In 2018, African American citizens had a 2.8 times higher death rate from police

brutality compared to White citizens. African American victims were also more likely to be unarmed when attacked by police (DeGue, Fowler, & Calkins, 2019). In 2014 in the small town where I teach, a Black couple (Elijah Pontoon and Lakeya Hicks) was pulled over by police and searched alongside of a highway. Elijah Pontoon was cavity searched alongside the road and Lakeya Hicks' chest was exposed by police officers. The case was taken to the Supreme Court, and a \$150,000 settlement was made (Schechter, 2019).

The disease of racism continues to plague the systems, structures, institutions, and policies within the United States, policing being only one example. It is present within health services, education, wealth gaps, housing, justice system, immigration, employment, media, etc. Systemic racism affects African Americans and other people of color in every facet of life. It has been an established pandemic in the United States for centuries. The death of George Floyd has brought this pandemic to the nation's attention, sparking debates and action across the country.

The uprisings across the nation united individuals. However, most students were processing information they were receiving from social media and news outlets from home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students were often unable to engage in critical discussion and evaluate sources. For many teachers, the district created packets for students to complete prohibited their ability to address the current events as they were occurring. Teachers could not require additional work, just optional activities. As a result, students, parents, and teachers were surrounded by trauma at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

As teachers transitioned into the new 2020-2021 school year, into a new context and environment, they were faced with great obstacles deriving from both pandemics.

They were confronted with a completely new teaching and learning environment and context. Teachers had to focus on keeping students safe and healthy, both physically and mentally. They had to learn how to use a completely virtual or blended learning environments for the first time. They had to help students process the injustices that they continually experience and witness. Teachers interacted with students and parents who recently experienced trauma from both pandemics while often experiencing trauma themselves. Students interacted with peers and teachers, who were also experiencing hardships and trauma. Students were forced into new learning environments without preparation and often the resources needed to be successful. Students that chose blended learning environments had to learn new routines and distancing measures.

As a teacher and a researcher, beginning this school year amidst two pandemics, I wanted to create a curriculum approach that honored all of my students within this new teaching context of blended learning. I wanted to provide curriculum that helped provide a platform for students to feel welcome, safe, think critically, share their voices, and potentially engage in social action. I decided after reviewing the theories in-depth and reviewing previous research studies that during this unstable school year that a combination of critical literacy theory and culturally relevant pedagogy could help me meet my goals for the school year.

Each one of these theories is powerful on its own but combined, they were transformational for students who found themselves in a time of turmoil amidst two pandemics. Critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy scaffolded and blended together into a classroom context helped students move from self-awareness, to critical consciousness, to finding their voices. Critical literacy allowed students to begin to

understand themselves, by analyzing why they respond to certain texts in certain ways. Cultural competence in culturally responsive pedagogy helped students honor and take pride within their identities. Once this level of awareness was achieved, students learned to question texts and their world, helping students become aware of inequities within their societies and question bias. Critical literacy helped students read the word and the world, provided them with the context needed to move to action and challenge existing structures. Critical consciousness is one key component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Once students were able to think critically and read the world, they could begin to move to taking action to make changes to society,

These theories served as the frameworks for my qualitative case study. I crafted instruction grounded in critical literacy theory and the founding principle of cultural competence from culturally relevant pedagogy, CRP, to help students connect with a text and understand how their experiences and beliefs shape their response to texts. I created lessons that helped students become text critics, to focus on whose voices are present within a text and whose voices are missing. Critical literacy theory helped students understand bias that is present within a text and consider how authorial, societal, and political context shaped the text. It promoted reflection and transformation. It provided students with an opportunity to create their own texts and share their truths. Finally, once students engaged with critical literacy theoretical concepts, I taught lessons grounded in critical consciousness. These lessons helped students identify power and privilege, and find their voice. However, my students at the end of the study did not engage in social action. Scaffolding and time working with theoretical concepts is needed for high school students to be able to reach a place where they are able to act against systems of

oppression. Students first need to understand themselves, reflect, and think critically before being able to act. Layering and blending critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy is one way to help students move from self-awareness to finding their own voice.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Literacy Theory

"Dialogue cannot exist, however,
in the absence of a profound love for the world and its people."

-Paulo Freire (1972)

Many factors of background and culture (i.e., race, religion, socioeconomic status, language, sexual orientation) shape transactions, and student responses to text can reveal beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes that derive from certain ideologies. Critical literacy focuses on the social, cultural, and political forces that influence the creation and interpretation of texts and readers. A critical literacy approach prods teacher to guide readers to reflect on, discuss, and write about the insights that text offers about their world and their relationships to others. Bishop (2012) states that "critical literacy is built on exploring personal, sociopolitical, economic, and intellectual boarder identities" (p. 52). Critical literary helps readers stop and think about how their beliefs shape their interpretation of the text they are reading. It also encourages readers to question their own beliefs when responding to a text.

Critical literacy focuses on a need to question, instead of passively accept, a text. Readers ponder an author's intent, understand sociocultural influences, and comprehend with a critical edge (McLaughlin & DeVogel, 2004). In order to adopt a critical stance,

readers must move beyond their own interpretation and search for the author's underlying messages and assumptions. Readers need to understand the text's purpose in order to avoid being manipulated by it. Critical literacy encourages readers to question who is writing the text and contemplate who is deciding what is included and excluded within its pages. A critical stance raises questions of whose voices are represented, whose voices are missing, and who gains and who loses by the reading of the text. The goal of critical literacy is for readers to become text critics in everyday life. Critical literacy accounts for multiple perspectives and interpretations. Focusing on voices of power and promoting reflection, transformation, and action are all key components of critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVogel, 2004).

In the field of education, critical literacy theory can be directly tied to Paulo Freire. Freire's (1970) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers many insights to oppression in education through a critical theory lens. At the heart of Paulo Freire's critical literacy pedagogy is the idea that naming the world becomes a model for changing the world. Freire sees thinking and feeling, along with action, as aspects of all we do to make sense of the world. For Freire, literacy instruction should be based on students' ideas, experiences, and words (Lazar, Edwards, & McMillon, 2012). Teachers should co-construct knowledge through dialogues. Freire argues that reading from a critical stance requires not only reading and understanding the words of a text, but also "reading the world" and understanding a text's purpose so readers will not be manipulated by it (Freire, 1987). When reading the world, critical readers comprehend beyond the literal level and think about the function of the text. Reading from a critical stance requires both the ability and the deliberate inclination to think critically about information sources, to

meaningfully question their origin and purpose, and to take action by representing alternative perspectives. Bishop (2012) links critical literacy to readers' agency stating:

Critical literacy is a kind of literacy about structures, structural violence, and power systems. Critical literacy uses texts and print skills in ways that enable students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate and actively seek out contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions (p. 52).

The goal of critical literacy is for readers to become text critics in everyday life, to interrogate the historical and contemporaneous privileging of and exclusion of groups of people and ideas from mainstream narratives.

Giroux (1998) further argues that critical literacy is not just about learning to read and write and to validate students' experiences; it is about drawing from students' lived experiences and helping them use the tools of literacy to transform society around social justice goals. Giroux (1988) emphasizes the necessity for the teacher to understand that in order for the students to gain knowledge from the curriculum playing out in today's classroom, much more is needed than for the teacher to stand and impart what they believe to be true. Giroux (1998) continues his argument about knowledge acquisition stating, "knowledge is not produced in the intentions of those who believe they hold it, whether in the pen or in the voice. It is produced in the process of interaction, between writer and reader at the moment of reading, and between teacher and learner at the moment of classroom engagement" (p. 18). Power is in the promotion of deep and meaningful dialogue. It is when we allow ourselves and our students to question, to listen to each other, and to learn more about ourselves and the world in which we live that

critical literacy emerges. Luke (2012) states that critical literacy learners become teachers of their understandings and experiences, and teachers become learners in these same contexts. In classrooms, this might entail democratic conditions where authentic exchange can occur around social and cultural issues (p. 7). Giroux (1987) explains Freire's approach to critical literacy as a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency on the other. He argues that critical literacy is not merely a technical skill to be acquired, but a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom. Critical literacy is fundamental to aggressively constructing one's voice as part of a wider project of possibility and empowerment. Giroux (1987) states that to be able to name one's experience is part of what it means to "read" the world and to begin to understand the political nature of the limits and possibilities that make up the larger society (p. 7). Anderson and Irvine (1993) further develop this idea stating, "the importance of critical literacy being grounded pedagogically in a politics of difference offers learners, regardless of their particular classed, raced, or gendered subjectivities, opportunities to become 'border crossers'." Critical literacy, then, is learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (p. 82). Thus, when readers engage in critical literacy they are able to read the word and the world and work towards transforming the world.

The development of critical literacy skills enables readers to interpret messages in the modern world through a critical lens and challenge the power relations within those messages. Teachers who facilitate the development of critical literacy encourage students to interrogate societal issues and institutions like family, poverty, education, equity, and

equality in order to critique the structures that serve as norms as well as to demonstrate how these norms are not experienced by all members of society (Coffey, 2008). Critical literacy is a way to use texts to help students to better understand themselves, others, and the world around them. Critical literacy is committed to a notion of changing an overall system. Critical literacy is “simultaneously committed to both critique and change” (Prasad, 2005, p. 52). It focuses on the oppression and exploitation of different groups. At the core of critical literacy are the “deep concerns with both material and symbolic domination and a concomitant interest in emancipating oppressed groups from domination” (Prasad, 2005, p. 56). Critical literacy attempts to understand how agents working within established structures of power participate in social construction of literacies, revealing their political implications (Bishop, 1990, p. 53). Critical literacy articulates that there are multiple realities and that knowledge can be gained through the interactions between people and their experiences, especially the oppressed. Knowledge can be gained from the interactions of those who are oppressed and those who are not. Critical literacy theory is a way reader can gain knowledge and move to change overall societal systems.

Recent scholarship on critical literacy emphasizes that “reading the world” is understanding the social and historical factors influencing social justice and injustice (Bishop, 1990, p. 55). Critical literacy requires both teachers and students to focus on the naming of and a willingness to reflect upon the role that language and texts play in the construction of the self and the social. Provenzo (2005) states that critical literacy asks questions that critically interrogate, interpret, and contextualize the ways in which people can be empowered and disempowered. Provenzo (2005) asserts that all learners should

ask the question about who speaks in a culture, who defines literacy, and whose knowledge is included in the creation and definition of curricula and learning communities. Critical literacy challenges students to consider what is present, what is missing, and what is possible. Luke (2012) states that critical literacy melds social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourse work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests. Morell (2004) states critical literacy is:

The ability to challenge existing power relations in texts and to produce new texts that delegitimize these relations: a consciousness of the relationship between the dominant culture's use of language, literacy, and social injustice; the ability to not only read words but to read the world into and onto texts and recognize the correlation between the word and the world; the ability to create political texts that inspire transformative action and conscious reflection. (p. 57)

Critical literacy is a theory helps students deconstruct texts during the two pandemics they currently face. Critically literacy helps students to name the world, see its patterns, designs, and complexities. Given our current context of living in two pandemics, critical literacy simultaneously can help students create their own text to help rename the world, reshape, and redesign it. Luke (2018), in reference to public schools in current contexts, states, “in a world of ideological distortion, of unclear relations between the public and private, of deliberate falsity and lies, of battles over ‘alternative facts’ and ‘false news,’ that nothing less than a fully realized critical literacy will do” (p. 24).

Cultural Relevant Pedagogy

“Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is an approach that empowers students, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes”

-Gloria Ladson Billings (1994)

Paired with critical literacy theory, culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied as a pedagogical approach in classrooms to help empower and give strength to students and teachers during this troubling time. Ladson-Billings (1994) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as a pedagogy “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 16-17). Ladson-Billings explains that culturally relevant pedagogy is “a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 160). Critical literacy in the same way encourages the deconstructing of power, values and attitudes in texts and positions texts as a form of empowerment for some social groups (p. 78). Ladson-Billings (1992) states that a primary goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to empower students to examine critically the society in which they live and to work for social change (p. 314). In order to do this, students must possess a variety of literacies. Critical literacy gives practical expression in English classrooms to the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, through counter-narratives, social action, performance poetry, dance, music, and other forms (Lopez, 2011, p. 79). Both critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy can be blended together within the classroom to empower students and assist them in examining society critically.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a term created by Ladson-Billings (1994) in her book *The Dream-Keepers*. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that culturally relevant pedagogy is “the use of students’ cultural referents in teaching that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, thereby enabling them to engage in the meaningful learning of knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Culturally relevant pedagogy stresses that all students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy (Ladson-Billings, 1994). When effectively enacted, culturally relevant pedagogy can prepare students to be active participants in a democracy and change society. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy uses student culture in order to maintain the culture and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant pedagogy demands students: experience academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness, which empowers them to challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Academic Success. Culturally relevant pedagogy requires that all students are held to high expectations for academic success. Culturally relevant educators know that all students can be successful and culturally relevant teachers are committed to every students’ success. The focus of academic success is on excellence and not end of the year tests. Ladson-Billings (1994) defines academic success as evidence of student learning, what the students actually know and are able to do. Academic success focuses on having high expectations for classroom interactions founded on mutual trust and respect. Academic success includes modeling content, scaffolding skills, and clarifying challenging information for students. It encourages teachers to model unseen thinking by

using think aloud. Academic success encourages collaboration amongst students and clearly outlining expectations. It requires planned activities where students can experience success. Academic success encourages teachers to be available to students before and after school hours. It focuses on motivating students to achieve their best.

Cultural Competence. Cultural competence can be defined as helping students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to other cultures. Cultural competence focuses on helping students validate and take pride in their own culture and identity. In addition, cultural competence helps students learn how to navigate between their home and school. It bridges students' home lives to their school lives. Cultural competence asks teachers to draw on the strength of local communities and family members. It is the reshaping of prescribed curriculum. It is creating and teaching content that is not included in Eurocentric curriculum. Cultural competence is teaching the history of different groups before European contact and conquest. It is providing students with primary source materials and asking for guest speakers in the community with experience. Cultural competence asks teachers to have students create cultural artifacts to share with members of the class. It asks students to write their stories and share their experiences. It is honoring students' home languages. Cultural competence asks teachers to have diversity in the visual presentation of the classroom. Cultural competence encourages teachers to do their own research and develop personal relationships with students. It includes incorporating students' cultural norms within the classroom space, such as call and response. Cultural competence helps students learn about and take pride in their home culture.

Critical Consciousness. Critical consciousness focuses on helping students find ways to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities. Critical consciousness also requires the teacher to recognize sociopolitical issues within themselves and understand the cause before incorporating these into teaching. Critical consciousness asks teacher to select texts with critical perspectives, provide students with counter-narratives, and allow opportunities for students to create counter-narratives. It employs critical literacy skills to question and deconstruct texts. Critical consciousness uses dialogue and open-ended discussion within the classroom. It allows students to discuss controversial topics. It asks teachers to share power in the classroom, to let students make decisions about classroom policies, curriculum, and assessments. Critical consciousness asks students to engage in social justice work.

Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy encourages teachers to use constructivist methods to develop a bridge connecting students' cultures to academic skills and concepts. It builds on students' knowledges and cultural assets students bring with them into the classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy engages students in critical reflection about their own lives and society. It requires teachers to allow students to have a space to learn about their own culture and other cultures. Culturally relevant pedagogy asks teachers to explicitly unmask and unmake oppressive systems through the critique of discourse of power. It asks teachers to work in active pursuit of social justice of all members of society. Culturally relevant pedagogy draws on the foundational concepts of critical literacy. It seeks to empower students and engage them in advocacy.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research study was to understand what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated within a blended learning environment. This study sought to uncover students' experiences and perceptions with culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics.

Research Method

Qualitative research seeks to make sense of actions, narratives, and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). Patton (2002) states that qualitative data describes the experiences of people in-depth. The focus of my research was to understand the experiences of situating culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was needed for my study.

Robert Yin (2019) argues that a case study is preferred when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. Yin (2019) acknowledges that case studies can be used when the understanding of a particular problem, issue, concept, etc. can be instrumentally useful. The context of teaching during two pandemics in a blended learning environment is a contemporary phenomenon. Understanding how CRP can be implemented within these contexts and understanding students' perceptions and experiences can be useful for educators and those in academia to learn from. Two main research questions guided this study:

- What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?

- What are students' experiences with and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

Researcher

Ten years ago, I graduated college and moved from a small town in a northeastern state to a southeastern state. I grew up in a low-income household and was the first to graduate college in my family. I was excited to take my first teaching job and took the first offer I received. I had no experience teaching and had no knowledge about the cultures of the students I was going to teach. For my first five years of teaching, I taught English at a small rural low-income school. The school's population was 80 percent African American, 15 percent White, and 5 percent Latinx. I could relate to the students' income struggles in many ways, however I still did not understand their cultures. I was a White woman from the Appalachian mountains that had little experience living in the South and interacting with others from different cultures than my own. I noticed quickly that students did not engage with the texts that were on the required reading lists. I would ask the students what they wanted to read and they would tell me that they wanted to read books that meant something to them. They wanted to learn skills they could use. I spent most of my first-year teaching encouraging these students, engaging them with texts that were counter-narratives (although I did not know this term at this time), providing students with opportunities to volunteer within their communities, and learning about their culture. Although I was unaware, these were my foundational beginnings with critical literacy theory, social justice theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

In my spare time, I spent hours after school working with students and listening to their stories and needs. I would not go home until around seven each night. Many of these

students stayed to have a place to access the internet to complete their school work, and many stayed to have a mini-community to talk with. I went to almost every school game, band concert, etc. I went into the community spending time at churches, beauty shops, festivals, etc. I attended family gatherings such as BBQ's when invited. I was in frequent communication with students' parents and families. All of these experiences and conversations opened my eyes to the many privileges I have and was blind to as a White female. In addition, these close relationships and open dialogue showed me the injustices that many of my students faced.

At the end of my fourth year of teaching, I decided that I wanted to pursue a doctorate in education. During my coursework, I took courses that focused on critical literacy theory, social justice theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy. These courses challenged my thinking and shaped my teaching practice. They made me aware of my own identity and how my experiences and privilege shaped my instruction. The courses gave me strategies for applying critical literacy, social justice, and CRP to classroom practices. They gave me space and time to reflect on my teaching practices and its impact. My studies provided me with opportunities to meet and speak with Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billing, the founder of culturally relevant pedagogy. It gave me the opportunity to learn from and work alongside educators associated with the Center of Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAAS) at the University of South Carolina. These experiences all shaped and continue to shape my educational practice.

After teaching and becoming a community member in the small rural school, I transferred to a large suburban school within the same district. I made this transfer because I was driving forty minutes each day to work and I decided that I wanted to have

a child at this point in my life. This is the school that I am currently teaching and where this study takes place. The school's population is 48 percent African American, 40 percent White, and 2 percent other. The school has a 60 percent free and reduced lunch rate. Unlike, my first teaching position I had a general understanding of my students' cultures and backgrounds when I began teaching at this new location. I started working at this school knowing the importance of building positive relationships, using culturally relevant pedagogy, and applying critical and social justice theory to classroom practice.

While teaching at my current school, I was approached by a community member, Dr. Lillian Reeves, and asked if I would start a club to mentor youth who wanted to be advocates in their community. I agreed and with the help of eight students at my school and Dr. Reeves, we formed South Carolina's Next Generation group. This experience of mentoring these amazing students and the connections I have made with Bread Loaf school of English and maven Dixie Goswami has impacted my thoughts and teaching practice. These out-of-school experiences centering the youth as leaders and changemakers, has shown me the very importance of listening to youth's voices and providing them with opportunities to make active change in communities. Bread Loaf's teachers' network has connected me with teachers who are youth advocates across the country. It has connected my students to classrooms in the Navajo Nation, Louisville, Kentucky, and Lawrence MA. It has given me the opportunity to allow my students to conduct social justice research projects with students in different states. It has introduced me to new concepts such as food and sports literacy.

All of my experiences shape who I am as an educator and as a researcher. I am a teacher committed to advocating for social justice and liberation for my students. My role

as a researcher in this study, is not separate from my role as the participants' teacher. My research is focused on the practice of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics. This may become challenging as students bring trauma from the pandemic with them into the classroom. As John Lewis stated in a tweet in June, 2020, it is important to "not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Luke (2018) challenged those in the field of academia to get their hands dirty. He challenged those in academia that have power to use it. Luke (2018) stated that now, in this current political context, is the time to double down. I am dedicated to teach my students using theories and strategies that will heal, empower, and move them to action. I am hopeful and optimistic that they learn and grow from our experiences together.

Significance

This study's context was uniquely situated within two pandemics, happening simultaneously across the United States. The study sought to understand what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy was used within a blended learning environment. This was a new context to study the effects of culturally relevant pedagogy on students' thoughts, perceptions, and actions. The study results were provided to the school district to share how CRP was successful within a blended learning environment. This study adds evidence that culturally relevant pedagogy can be effective for all students in all contexts. The study documents the experiences of students within this unique context/phenomenon.

In addition, this study shared student voices with those in academia, urging academics to begin to consider the importance of putting students' voices at the center of their studies.

Assumptions and Limitations

A major assumption of this study was that all students would experience success in using culturally relevant pedagogy. An important tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy is academic success. Those who study and use culturally relevant pedagogy believe that all students can and will be successful. Educators who practice culturally relevant pedagogy find ways to ensure students will succeed. Therefore, there was not a plan for what would happen if students were not successful. This is because I believe that all students are successful in many ways within the classroom and different contexts of learning.

A limitation of this study is that the context was very specific and subject to changes at any time. Due to the study taking place during two pandemics, the school year and structure were not definite and had the potential to change at any time. Face-to-face classes in the spring of 2020 suddenly shifting into online learning lead to students experiencing a different type of education. Students were forced to become more independent learners. One week after this study ended, students shifted from blended learning into full-time face to face instruction. The introduction of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended context, provided a space and a way for students to learn how to critically analyze events that shape their lives in a more independent manner.

Definitions

Terms and definitions that were pertinent to the study are defined below.

Blended Learning: Blended learning is a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. Blended learning requires students to learn in part online and with some elements of student control over time, pace, place, or path. Blended learning also requires students learn in part in a face-to-face, or brick and mortar classroom with the supervision of a teacher (Tucker, 2020).

Critical Literacy Theory: Critical literacy interrogates society by critiquing injustices and inequities such as racism, sexism, classism, and gender inequality. The intent of critical literacy is to build cultural competence, liberation, and critical consciousness (Morrell, 2004).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Culturally relevant pedagogy is a comprehensive teaching approach that empowers all students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy has three core tenets. These tenets include an emphasis on (1) student learning and achievement, (2) the affirmation of students' cultural competence, and (3) the facilitation of a sociopolitical/critical consciousness that facilitates students' understandings and critique of inequities within educational and social institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Distance Education: Distance education is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. It is a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various strategies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication (Tabor, 2007).

Oppression: Oppression is the combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing (Young, 1990).

Conclusion

This study was conducted in an unprecedented time in the field of education as two pandemics, COVID-19 and racism, were waging war on our nation. Students were placed in new schooling structures and were trying to navigate these new educational pathways. This study’s purpose was to collect data on what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy was used within the students’ new school structure of blended learning. It sought to understand and listen to students’ perspectives on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy within blended learning. Ultimately, the study sought to uncover if culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment provided equity and voice for students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Prior to the start of this study, I reviewed the existing literature within the field of education. Due to the two pandemics facing the nation, my inquiry focused on two bodies of literature: culturally relevant pedagogy and blended learning. After reviewing the literature, I noticed that there are many terms that describe culturally relevant pedagogy. There are numerous studies that focus on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies. Many of the studies share findings that suggest cultural pedagogy centers on: academic success, cultural competence, critical consciousness, positive relationships, and collaboration. I organized the literature review of culturally relevant pedagogy with the subheadings, academic success, cultural competence, critical consciousness, positive relationships, and collaboration. After an extended review of the literature focusing on blended learning, I did not find many studies that incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy or take place within an English classroom. I found few studies that fit the blended learning context of my study, where students will be face to face two days and learning at home via online platforms the remaining three days. I was able to uncover articles focusing on blended learning pedagogical strategies. However, these articles were not academic studies. After reviewing the limited amount of studies available, I found two concepts that emerged across the blended learning studies: student achievement and

collaboration. These two concepts also connect to academic success and collaboration found within culturally relevant pedagogy.

Cultural Pedagogy Studies

Culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994), culturally responsive (Gay, 2000), and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012) are approaches that are often used interchangeably. All three terms use pedagogical approaches that require educators to understand and incorporate the diverse backgrounds of their students within their classroom content. The approaches also share the foundational concept that students need to learn and know about their own cultural values and norms, and preserve the language and linguistics of their culture. The terms share the belief that students should learn about cultures other than their own. The terms require teachers to relate classroom content to students' cultural contexts. However, these cultural pedagogies are much more than just relating material to students' cultural context. This study focuses on implementing specific practices and strategies to help students experience academic success, develop/maintain cultural competence, and develop/maintain critical consciousness. Therefore, culturally relevant pedagogy, as defined by Ladson-Billings will be the term adopted for use within my study.

Academic Success

Many studies focused on cultural pedagogy have found that academic success is a critical feature of cultural pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted a seminal three-year study in 1989 with eight elementary classroom teachers. The study took place in a community in Northern California. The intent of the study was "to document the practice of highly effective teachers of African American students" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.

179). The teachers were selected from African American parent recommendations. The parents identified the teachers as successful teachers of African American students. The teachers were also recommended by their administrators. Ladson-Billings' study found that all of the teachers who were considered effective teachers of African American students shared some similar traits. One of her key findings was that all of the teachers in her study demanded, reinforced, and produced academic excellence in their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). One teacher in her study, Ms. Lewis, helped her African American male students find academic success by drawing on issues and ideas they found meaningful. Ms. Lewis positioned the boys as academic leaders in the classroom. Ms. Hillard, another teacher in Ladson-Billings' study, positioned every student as an author within her classroom. Ms. Hillard scaffolded the teaching of writing to ensure that all students could create successful publications. She used the writing process to show students that writing is an ongoing process with multiple drafts. This scaffolded the students' writing to ensure they were successful. Ladson-Billings discovered that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to attend to students' academic needs and to help students choose academic success.

Similarly, a study conducted by Lopez (2011) found that academic success was a critical component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Lopez's study focused on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in a twelfth-grade writing craft class in Ontario. Lopez (2011) conducted collaborative action research with one teacher to help the teacher build cross-curricular understandings and increase student engagement through culturally relevant pedagogy and critical literacy (p. 76). The study was conducted at a large suburban high school with over 1600 students. The teacher

volunteered to participate in the study and developed the focus area of the study. The teacher had taught at the school for five years and had ten years of teaching experience. The majority of students in the class were White; there were some Black and South Asian students.

In Lopez's (2011) study, the teacher began by having students read spoken word poetry and critique them by writing down responses in their journals. She wanted to obtain initial reactions to the poems. She had students first write in their journals, share in small groups, and then with the whole class. In another activity, the teacher asked the students to anonymously write down words that described the people and experiences in the performance poetry they had read and place them in a basket in the middle of the room. The students wrote down words such as misfit, urban, low income, and Black. She then used the following questions to deconstruct the words that the students wrote anonymously: "How are they different from me? How are they like me? What do I need to learn? What do I need to unlearn?" (Lopez, 2011, p. 84). Students talked about emotions that the poetry evoked. The teacher had students work through a deconstructing phase of the poetry. In the deconstructing phase, students examined the position of the author, their own biases and assumptions, and relationship to their own experiences. The students in Lopez's (2011) study all received high scores on their spoken word poems. Lopez's (2011) study revealed that the teacher knew the academic needs of her students. They experienced academic success due to the intentional scaffolding by the teacher with the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Likewise, in an action research study conducted by Stormer, Brown, and Stroud (2017), a teacher focused on developing a unit in culturally relevant pedagogy to teach

argumentative writing. The teacher was a first-year teacher who taught in a title one school in Kentucky. The students were eighth graders who were 89 percent White. In the study, the teacher introduced finding textual evidence to support claims through poetry explication. She had students watch a Powerade commercial featuring Derrick Rose, a professional basketball player. In the background, the poet Tupac Shukar was reciting his poem, “The Rose that Grew from Concrete” (Stromer, Brown, & Stroud, 2017). After watching the commercial twice, students were handed the hashtag graphic organizer. With a model of the graphic organizer displayed on the document camera, the teacher engaged students in discussion about the themes included in the poem. She followed the discussion with quick writes that required students to relate the content to their own lives. Stormer, Brown, and Stroud (2017) found that academic success was a crucial part of culturally relevant pedagogy. Experiencing success kept students engaged in the content. Like Lopez’s study, the teacher in this study ensured that students would be academically successful by scaffolding instruction using culturally relevant pedagogical strategies.

A study by Stairs (2007) conducted with two White female teachers in an urban high school in Boston, also found academic success to be a key component of culturally responsive pedagogy. The students in the study were 43.6 percent African American, 39.7 percent Hispanic, 8.2 percent White, and 5.1 percent Asian. 75 percent of the students received free lunch. The teachers in this study used culturally responsive strategies to teach poetry. The teachers began the unit by instructing students to turn to a partner and work together on the handout's questions about a poem. They incorporated rap lyrics into analyzing figurative language. The teachers played jazz music for students and taught a mini-lesson on the Harlem Renaissance. The teachers used culturally

responsive pedagogy to scaffold the learning for their students to ensure that they experienced academic success. The teachers started their lesson using rap lyrics, a part of the youths' culture, and built upon it to make connections to poetry to ensure academic success.

Academic success was found to be a key element of many studies focused on cultural pedagogy. All students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy (Ladson-Billings, 160). Academic success builds students' confidence, keeps them engaged in lessons, and helps them strive for academic excellence.

Cultural Competence

Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies all require that students maintain cultural integrity and develop cultural competence. Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning. In Ladson-Billings (1994) study, she found that all eight of the teachers acted as bridges from the content of their classroom to the students' culture. For example, one teacher, Ms. Hillard, taught poetry and aligned it with rap music. Ms. Hilliard was familiar with the rap music that is part of African American youth culture. She asked her students to bring in lyrics from the songs. Students were encouraged to perform the songs and as a class, they analyzed the lyrics focusing on figurative language terms. This task scaffolded students' learning, to help them become academically successful using figurative language. Ms. Hillard's teaching strategy also maintained the students' cultural integrity by bringing in lyrics that are part of their culture. Ms. Hilliard is an example of how academic achievement and cultural competence can merge. Another teacher in Ladson-

Billings' (1994) study, Ms. Winston, created an artist or craftsperson in residence program within her classroom. She allowed parents to enter her classroom and share their cultures with students. For example, one mother was an artist residence who taught students how to make sweet potato pies. The program allowed students to learn from each other's parents and affirmed cultural knowledge. The teachers in Ladson-Billings study positively incorporated students' cultures as part of their curriculum, thus developing students' cultural competence.

Similarly, Lopez (2011) found that students started to connect their experiences to the world through the spoken word poetry lessons. The teacher in Lopez's (2011) study was able to build a bridge from the classroom content to the students' lives, permitting students to draw from their experiences to create spoken word poetry. Students were building cross-cultural understandings and viewing oppression in multiple ways by listening to and reading spoken word poetry from different contexts. Lopez (2011) found that at the end of the unit, White students in the class could better understand how people of color experience racism in their everyday lives, building their cultural competence. She found that performance poetry gave students permission to bring themselves into the writing process, validating and affirming their cultures.

Epstien and Gist (2013) conducted a study to examine how three culturally relevant teachers of low-income students of color promoted racial literacy within the contexts of secondary humanities classes. They asked colleagues and former pre-service teachers to nominate experienced teachers who were academically rigorous, included people of color as literary authors and historical subjects, affirmed students' cultural identities and scaffolded students' cultural knowledge and practices to teach academic

content, concepts and skills (Epstien & Gist, 2013). They interviewed and selected three teachers for their study. They conducted formal interviews with the teachers at the beginning, middle and end of the school year and informal interviews throughout the year.

Epstein and Gist (2013) found that teachers developed students' cultural competency by having them explore and embrace the multiplicities of their own (and others') identities. One teacher in the study began the year by having students define themselves racially and/or culturally. Ms. Vega deconstructed the term for the students and then followed the conversation with having the students watch the first part of the PBS documentary, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. After the video Ms. Vega had students write about how the documentary challenged their concepts of race. Ms. Vega intentionally scaffolded her lesson to build students' cultural competence on their concepts of race.

A multiple case study conducted by Olan and Richmond (2017) details the stories of two beginning English teachers' use of young adult literature through a lens of culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants in this study were two White females, both 25-35 years old, one teaching in a midwestern rural setting, and one teaching in a southern urban setting. Both participants were beginning teachers who had attended secondary methods courses in which they crafted stories about their experiences with YAL and canonical texts in and outside the secondary classroom setting (Olan & Richmond, 2017).

In the study, the teachers selected young adult literature that reflected their students' lived experiences. The study found students responded more fully to books

whose characters and plots resonated with students and their life experiences (Olan & Richmond, 2017). The teachers in the study built students' cultural competence by selecting texts that mirrored students' experiences, giving voice to their backgrounds. The valuing of students' voices is part of building students' cultural competence. The study also found that one teacher's choice to bring in graphic novels helped her ESOL students to break through the barriers of the English language, identify with characters in similar life circumstances, and connect to their own lived experiences through images (Olan & Richmond, 2017). The selected texts connected to students' experiences and affirmed their cultures.

Likewise, Stairs' (2007) study used literature to develop students' cultural competency. In Stairs' (2007) study, the teachers provided opportunities within their lessons for students to engage with difficult concepts in Langston Hughes poetry by connecting Hughes ideas with the personal experiences of students. After making these connections to Hughes' literary pieces, the students then crafted their own poetry about their lived experiences. In an excerpt from one student's poem, the student compared going to school with a "screaming child wrapped up in a sheet" (Stairs, 2007). The student shared she preferred the safety of school compared to the world she faced daily outside the school's doors. The creation of her poetry maintains and validates the student's experiences. Stairs' study showed the importance of teachers using students' lived experience to engage in the class's content. Validating students' lived experiences is an important aspect of maintaining cultural competence.

Likewise, an action research study conducted by Burton (2019) reinforced the importance of maintaining cultural competence. Burton's (2019) study was conducted at

a South Los Angeles charter high school. The school's population was 95 percent African American students. Burton's (2019) study focused on using culturally sustaining pedagogy to teach Shakespeare. Burton understood that a Shakespeare unit needed to be located where the students live and draw upon their linguistic and cultural knowledge. He began the unit with reading Sonnet 130. He modeled for the students how to read the text together. He had them read the text to each other and then write it in their own home language. Class members then shared their favorite lines to produce a collaborative paraphrase. One group began with the line, "My sidechick's eyes are life less" and went on to affirm, "I'd rather listen to Kendrick than listen to her" (Burton, 2019, p.112). Burton's study found that allowing students to use their home languages within a classroom led to academic success and maintained cultural competence. The use of students' home language validates their cultures, maintains and develops cultural competence, and works to sustain the students' cultures.

Critical Consciousness

Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies require student to develop critical consciousness or the ability to critique social norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 163). Ladson-Billings found that all of the teachers in her study required students to engage in the world and with others critically. Several of the teachers in her study had students compose letters to the newspapers about the inequities they faced with funding for textbooks. Instead of just complaining about the inequity, the teachers had their students think critically about the issue and act to make the community aware of the inequities in textbooks that existed. Students in Lopez's (2011) study developed critical consciousness

deconstructing spoken word poems and their journaling. Students challenged the status quo in the construction of their own spoken word poems, many calling out issues they faced. The students engaged in critical consciousness by questioning and critiquing existing social structures.

Similarly, in the Stromer, Brown, and Stroud (2017) study, the teacher in their study included a section in the hashtag organizer that required students to make real world connections to the texts they were reading. Many of the students focused on a line related to colonization in the reading excerpt to make real world connections (Stromer, Brown, & Stroud, 2017). The students brought up opposing beliefs and worked through their issues in a discussion. This activity focused on calling existing paradigms into question. Through discussion and writing exercises, students' emotions were evoked. Instead of the teacher inserting themselves into the discussion, students began dialoguing with peers (Stromer, Brown, & Stroud, 2017). The students engaged in critical consciousness through the use of peer discussion. In another lesson the teacher had students watch a Youtube video titled "How English sounds to Non-English Speakers" (Stromer, Brown, & Stroud, 2017). After the discussion she had students write a personal definition of the term "otherness" in their journals and had them think-pair-share. Before they could have a whole class discussion, she read an excerpt from the book, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*. Students again used their hashtag graphic organizer to support and find textual evidence on their thoughts of otherness. The teacher then asked students to place themselves in the shoes of the protagonist from the excerpt that she read (Stromer, Brown, & Stroud, 2017). By stopping the lesson and asking students to consider the consequences of immigrants returning to their homelands, the teacher

awakened students' sociopolitical consciousness, a key component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Stromer, Brown, and Stroud (2017) found through investigation of immigration, students began to reflect and recant on their thoughts about the issue. Likewise, in Stairs' (2007) study, the teacher used Hughes's texts to have students place themselves in Hughes's context. Students recognized elements of racism in Hughes's neighborhoods and were able to relate this racism back to existing issues in their communities (Stairs, 2007). The teachers used cultural competence while invoking critical consciousness to reflect on students' perceptions of different social situations.

In an action research study conducted by Walsh (2018), students engaged in critical consciousness through the use of youth participatory action research (YPAR). Participants in Walsh's (2018) study were fifteen immigrant students enrolled in an action research course. They met for one and a half hours, twice per week for fifteen weeks. Throughout the course, Walsh scaffolded students' learning using their cultural knowledge to ensure academic success (2018). Walsh introduced students to the concept of critical ethnographic research and guided them through creating and implementing a research proposal. Walsh (2018) found that through the use of scaffolding methods to ensure academic success, students were able to select research topics that critique social norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain inequities. Students were able to create a statement of purpose for the class. Walsh's students selected their own critical issues to research and explore. Their critical conscious thinking was demonstrated in their purpose statement they created for the class. Their statement included: "we are a research collective that investigates issues faced by immigrant adolescents, documented and undocumented in New York City. We seek to understand these issues at all levels: the

systems, ideologies, and deeply held values and beliefs that created them; the attitudes, goals...” (Walsh, 2018, p. 129). Walsh (2018) discovered that critical consciousness was a key component of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Positive Relationships

Many of the studies focused on cultural pedagogy share a similar finding that teachers in their studies built strong positive relationships with their students inside and outside of the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1994) found that all of the teachers in her study described their students as family. The teachers in her study worked to create a community of learners within their classrooms. Ms. Hilliard defined her relationships with students as “extended family” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 67). Ms. Hillard created family groups within her classroom. In these groups, students were responsible for monitoring each other’s academic work and personal behavior. Family members were always permitted to give one another academic assistance. Ladson-Billings (1994) also found that her teachers demonstrated connectedness with all students and their relationships extended beyond the classroom. One teacher, Ms. Devereaux, would regularly invite students to her home for dinner or Saturday lunch. Many of the teachers expressed that early in the year they tried to learn as much about their students as possible. They acknowledged birthdays with a card. They used simple acts of kindness with their students, which is often devoid in school experiences. Ladson-Billings (1994) found that building meaningful relationships with students was a key component of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Zhu (2020) conducted a critical race counter-narrative study with a female African-American educator in a South-Western urban school. Zhu (2020) collected data

through multiple interviews with the teacher, wherein the teacher narrated her experiences. In the study, the teacher disclosed her personal growth experience with students, showing her vulnerability and building a classroom community (Zhu, 2020). She shared with her students that she grew up in a single parent household. The teacher shared she never went hungry, but she remembered many times when the lights would be turned off. She shared that her mother was on social welfare. Her experience connected to many of her students' lived experiences. She created emotional connections and authentic, caring relationships with her students. She held all of her students to high expectations and showed them small acts of kindness throughout the school year. The actions of the teacher in Zhu's (2020) study reinforces the concept that building strong positive relationships with students is a key underpinning of culturally responsive pedagogy.

A study conducted by Howard (2010) examined students' perceptions and interpretations of instructional practices used by four elementary-school teachers who were identified as culturally responsive teachers for African-American students. Data were collected through observations and interviews with the students. The study was conducted across four urban elementary schools located in a large city in the northwestern area of the United States. A purposeful sample of seventeen students was used for the study, ten girls and seven boys. The study revealed overwhelmingly students preferred teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes towards them. Students preferred teachers who set up a family like classroom approach. One student in the study stated the following about her teacher:

She is a good teacher because she cares so much about us. She tells us every day [that] she cares, and she puts a lot more effort into the kids who don't want to do it [learn]. She tries to help everybody. She tries to make sure kids get the right idea of what they should be learning. Because a teacher who cares makes sure that the kids learn instead of going to school to play, and school is supposed to be about learning. (Howard, 2010, p. 138)

The student explained that having a teacher who cares and builds relationships with students helps to ensure academic success. Howard's (2010) study found that all the students in his study identified an important aspect of culturally relevant teaching as building positive relationships within the classroom.

Collaboration

Lopez's (2011) study stressed the importance of collaboration and having critical friends to help the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy to be successful. Lopez (2011) became a "critical friend" of the teacher in her study to help her implement and engage in culturally relevant pedagogy. Lopez (2011) discovered that culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be done alone; it requires collaboration. She found that teachers need a critical space to engage inquiry and urgency for centering culturally relevant pedagogy (Lopez, 2011). She found that culturally relevant pedagogy takes time and cannot be viewed as a list of strategies (Lopez, 2011). Lopez proposed to higher education institutes that teachers must be valued as equal partners when collaborating to center culturally relevant pedagogy within classrooms.

Olan and Richmond's (2017) study found collaboration as an important aspect of the successful implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. The teachers in their study

sought out professional development to continue to develop their teaching practice with the assistance of a mentor. The teachers also continued to communicate about their teaching practice with their education professors after graduating. The teacher had critical friends she often engaged in dialogue with about teaching using culturally relevant pedagogy. In Stairs' (2007) study the teachers worked together to develop a plan of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy within their classrooms. The teachers became critical friends and assisted one and another through listening, questioning and collaboration (Sagor, 1992).

Blended Learning

Tucker (2020) defines blended learning as “a formal education program in which a student is engaged in active learning in part online where they have some control over the time, place, and pace and in part at a brick-and-mortar location away from home.” At its simplest definition, blended learning is a mix of face to face learning with a mix of technology. Staker and Horn (2012) define blended learning as a convergence of online delivery of content and instruction and traditional instruction. Blended learning environments support the facilitation of human interaction through real-time collaboration, virtual communities, instant messaging, etc (Bonk & Graham, 2012). Blended learning can provide students with more resources, more time, and extended information. To truly blend learning, teachers need to interweave classroom and virtual educational media. It's crucial for students to see that the work they do in the online space drives the work they do in the classroom so they recognize the value of the online conversations. The classroom instruction and the at home instruction must clearly align, and students should see the connections between the two. A review of research studies

currently published on blended learning did not uncover any studies directly connected to culturally relevant pedagogy. However, several studies have been conducted that found results related to some principles of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Student Achievement

Research studies on blended learning have found evidence of increased student achievement. The Idaho Digital Learning Academy survey administered to Idaho teachers resulted in positive feedback from teachers related to student achievement. Over 50 percent of teachers reported seeing an increase in the academic ability of students. Nearly 68 percent of teachers noted that students took more responsibility for their learning when engaging in blended learning (Werth et al., 2013). Approximately 54 percent of teachers saw an improvement in homework and test scores of students from blended learning environments. In addition, Braveman (2016) found that integrating e-books into early childhood programs provided measurable results for students' reading competencies (Braverman, 2016).

A qualitative study in a high school setting conducted by Yapici and Akbayin (2012) focused on comparing the achievement of ninth grade students in a traditional classroom and those participating in a blended learning model. The results of the study revealed that those who participated in the blended learning classes received high scores on their posttest than those students participating in traditional instruction (Yapici & Akbayin, 2012). In the study, students were also given an attitude survey to understand their attitudes towards blended learning. The study shows that students in the blended learning class indicated that they were more prepared for class and were able to learn at

their own pace. Blended learning also permitted revision of their work, self-assessment, and self-inquiry (Yapici & Akbayin, 2012).

Eryilmaz (2015) conducted a fourteen-week study to measure the effectiveness of a blended learning environment on 110 students who were enrolled in an Introduction to Computers Course at Atilim University in Ankara, Turkey. Throughout the study, students enrolled in a blended learning environment were asked to evaluate the course. The aim was to measure the effectiveness of the blended learning environment in comparison with the other environments. Eryilmaz (2015) concluded that the blended learning environments had many positive effects on student learning. In the blended learning environments, learners seemed to be more actively involved. Learners appeared to use existing knowledge to create new knowledge through various activities. The results indicated that students' opinions of the blended learning environment were more positive than that of the traditional face-to-face approach. Eryilmaz (2015) concluded that in light of the opinions expressed by the participants in the study, educational blended learning environments are valuable in increasing learning, increasing attention and increasing student motivation.

Camahlan and Rulery (2014) implemented an action research study in blended learning focusing on improving student's writing skills. Sixteen seventh-grade students from a small school in the midwestern United States were assessed with a writing sample applying the new skills they learned. The study included a pre-assessment and post-assessment to measure growth during the two-week study. Participants in the study were divided into two groups based on their pre-assessment scores. Group A was given instruction using the blended learning approach. Group B was given traditional face to

face instruction. The results of the study indicated an increase in performance using the blended learning model (Camahalan & Ruley, 2014).

In the studies above, culturally relevant pedagogy is not mentioned or discussed. However, the studies found that blended learning has the potential to increase student achievement, which can connect to the concept of academic success within culturally relevant pedagogy. A key part, but not the only part, of academic success focuses on what the students know and can do. Many of the above studies on blended learning demonstrated students were successful in demonstrating their learning through what they knew and did.

Collaboration

In addition to academic success, one study has a connection to another tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy which is collaboration. Strayer (2012) conducted a study comparing two groups of college level statistics students. One group of students received instruction online using a blended learning classroom method while the other group participated in traditional face-to-face lecture. His study found that the learners who participated in the blended learning class were more receptive to collaboration (Strayer, 2012). Students in the blended learning class reported that they valued working with partners. The traditional class students did not mention collaboration as a key component of learning (Strayer, 2012). Strayer's study did not investigate or mention culturally relevant pedagogy. However, collaboration is important to culturally relevant pedagogy and Strayer's study shows that collaboration may be an important aspect of blended learning.

Conclusion

Ladson-Billings' (1994) study twenty-six years ago demonstrated that teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy positively affect students' education. Numerous studies have been conducted using culturally relevant pedagogy that have found incorporating students' cultural knowledge within the classroom yields educational success. The studies have also discovered that cultural pedagogies help students develop critical consciousness that prepares students to be active members in society. Research studies have named important elements and underpinnings of cultural pedagogies, such as academic success, cultural competence, critical consciousness, collaboration, and building relationships. Overall, studies in cultural relevant pedagogy overwhelmingly show the importance and need of intentionally including students' cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices within the classroom.

However, there is a gap in the literature documenting the effects of using culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. I was able to find no academic studies that used the term culturally relevant pedagogy or cultural pedagogies when researching blended learning. Blended learning studies reveal that a blended learning environment leads to increased student performance. This loosely connects to the concept of academic success in culturally relevant pedagogy. Blended learning studies also suggest that students in blended learning environment are more receptive to collaboration with peers. Collaboration is a key concept found across studies focused on culturally relevant pedagogy. Although culturally relevant pedagogy was not directly described within the blended learning studies, elements of culturally relevant pedagogy were present within the study's findings.

Of the studies conducted in high school English classes, students' voices are missing from the discussions. Students' work or writing excerpts are often shown or quoted as examples, but students' direct insights on culturally relevant pedagogy are often missing. Their insights are often missing from academia. In addition, there are no current studies published that take place amidst the two pandemics occurring in the United States focused on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). In addition, I was not able to find a single study available on using a blended approach focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy as a founding principal. There is a gap in the literature on studies that connect culturally relevant pedagogy to social action using a blended teaching approach

My study adds to the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy in three ways. It adds to the gap in the literature of culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. I began the year by deliberately incorporating activities that build strong classroom community. I used reader response journals to have my students reflect on their responses to a text and why they responded in a certain manner, reflecting on their identities. I used counternarratives to build students' cultural integrity and engage them in critical literacy. I used additional culturally relevant strategies to develop students' academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. After students developed academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness, I implemented approaches to help move students towards social action. However, social action was not achieved. In addition, my study centers on listening to my students' thoughts, experiences, and insights on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. This study shares their voices with academia. Finally, my study adds to the literature of teaching during two pandemics.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) emphasize that qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. Qualitative researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable for gaining new insights. In contrast, quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people. Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Quantitative researchers often report their finding in statistical measures or methods. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research derives from a process orientation toward the world, and an inductive approach, focusing on specific situations or people and places with emphasis on descriptions rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2013). Patton (2002) states that qualitative data describes the experiences of people in-depth. Qualitative research seeks to make sense of actions, narratives, and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). Qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study because I sought to understand a specific social experience within my classroom. I wanted to understand students' perspectives and actions and the way they intersect. In addition, qualitative inquiry aligns with my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Ontological Beliefs

Grix (2002) defines ontology as what is out there to know about and what a person believes exists. Allison and Pomeroy (2000) state that ontology “is concerned with the nature of reality” (p. 92). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what a person believes constitutes social reality (Blaikie, 2000). Mason (2002) states that understanding your ontological perspective “asks what you see as the very nature of the essence of things in the social world” (p.14). Simply, ontology is how an individual views the world.

There are numerous factors that shape and inform my ontological perspective. Growing up in a low socio-economic class, living with a drug-addicted mother, being a victim of abuse, and living in a small-town shapes how I perceive reality. Having a college education from a liberal arts school also influences my perception of reality. Living in the South, but not being born and raised in this region, affects my experiences and views. Being a mother impacts my perceptions. My views about reality are also shaped by the fact that I am a White, heterosexual female. My experiences as a White female interacting with a police officer, are very different from those of my adopted son, Jockaize’s, an African American male, interactions with a police officer. During my last encounter with a police officer, I was speeding. I was going 15 mph over the speed limit. He pulled me over and politely gave me a warning and told me to have a nice day. Jockaize was speeding 10 mph over the limit when he was pulled over. He was asked to step out of the car. He was questioned if he had drugs on him, and his car was searched. Jockaize was given a \$200 dollar fine. We both had different experiences, and these experiences shape how we view the world. I believe that all of our experiences are valid

and are realities. A key understanding of my ontological perspective is that there can be multiple realities.

My professional experiences also shape my ontological perspective. I have worked with children in numerous capacities since I was sixteen. I have worked with children of all ages, socio-economic statuses, religions, disabilities, sexual orientation, and races. I have taught English at a school that was composed of mostly upper socio-economic class students. I taught three-year-old preschool, at a school located in the heart of a northern city. My first English teaching job entailed teaching at a school with a 97 percent poverty rate. I also have taught life skills at a detention center for juveniles. For five years, I have taught English at a larger, suburban school, with a population of almost 50 percent African American students and 50 percent White students.

My experiences outside of the South have added depth to my ontology. I have been privileged to travel to numerous countries and work with children in these countries. For example, I spent some time in a middle school in Beijing, China. I mentor a group of youth activists in my southern state and work with youth from Boston to the Navajo Nation. These experiences have allowed me opportunities to interact with a wide variety of people and different cultures. Interacting with such a variety of people has helped me understand another key component of my ontological beliefs, which is that there are multiple perceptions of the world. In my professional experiences, I have chosen to focus on accepting and respecting differences in humanity and at the same time finding commonalities that bring us together.

Each person's experiences or perceptions are just as valid as another person's experiences or perceptions. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2013) state that we construct

knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society. My ontological belief is that what exists – reality – and what is out there to know about is based upon people's experiences or perceptions and formed through interactions with others. Reality is constructed by individuals and their intersections of identities. My ontological view implies that my research should be dialectical and allow for the perceptions and experiences of my students' to be shared.

Epistemological Beliefs

Mason (2012) defines epistemology as a person's theory of knowledge, which should concern the principles and rules by which someone decides whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated. My epistemology is transactional and subjectivist. I believe that knowledge can be gained through interaction between people and that knowledge can only be known through experiences by the self. I believe that in research studies, the researcher and the participants co-create findings through their interactions (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2013). Therefore, my epistemological belief in relation to research is that the researcher should recognize their role in the process and remember that each person's reality is just as valid as another's. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2013) state that we gain an understanding of reality or what exists through interpreting a participant's perceptions. My personal, professional, and interdisciplinary background all have provided me the privilege to work with a diverse group of people, who have shaped my belief that we often come to know about reality through listening and understanding others' perceptions. My epistemological beliefs guide my study because I believe findings should be co-created through the researcher and the participants' interactions. My study focused

on sharing my students' voices and perspectives of their education during the two pandemics.

Paradigm

Paradigms refer to a type of cognitive framework (Schwandt, 2007). Paradigms include ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Paradigms can be defined as general perspectives (Schwandt, 2007). The critical paradigm examines “social arrangements through the lenses of power, domination, and conflict” (Prasad, 2005). There are multiple realities and within these realities are issues of power and oppression. The critical paradigm is focused on the oppression and exploitation of different groups. At the core of the critical paradigm are the “deep concerns with both material and symbolic domination and a concomitant interest in emancipating oppressed groups from domination” (Prasad, 2005). The critical paradigm is committed to a notion of changing an overall system. Critical paradigms are “simultaneously committed to both critique and change” (Prasad, 2005). My ontological belief is that there are multiple realities, those who are oppressed and those of the dominant group. My epistemological perspective is that knowledge can be gained through the interactions between people and their experiences. Knowledge can be gained from the interactions of those who are oppressed and those who are not. Focusing on the voices of oppressed students in schools can allow the exchange of realities and create a knowledge base that can change the educational system.

Methodological Implications

As mentioned, I believe there are multiple realities and knowledge can be gained through interactions between people, and knowledge can only be known through experiences by themselves. I believe that humans operate in a world that is based on a

struggle for power. This set of beliefs grounds my understanding of interactions of privilege and oppression that can be based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, etc.” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2013). There are multiple realities, and these are influenced by power. Knowledge is produced from interactions and known through experiences. The knowledge that is produced can change existing oppressive structures and remove oppression through empowerment (Merriam, 1991). These foundational ontological and epistemological beliefs imply that the methodology of my research study should be dialectical and students’ thoughts and beliefs should be valued and shared. My research seeks to empower the oppressed and support social transformation. Qualitative research “focuses on the cultural, every day, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 11). Qualitative inquiry is reflective and is oriented towards change.

Therefore, qualitative research aligns with my ontological and epistemological beliefs. Qualitative inquiry allows opportunities for multiple realities to co-exist and knowledge to be co-created and intersectional. Qualitative inquiry provides an opportunity to work alongside and with participants. It creates an opportunity for research findings to share the perspectives of participants.

Case Study

Case studies require reflective and focused efforts. Case studies do not “study everything going on in the site, but focus on specific issues, problems, or programs” (deMarrais and Lapan 2004). Yin (1994) defines case study as “a phenomenon in within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). I selected case study methodology because of the specific

and particularity of the problem and context of the study. Instruction in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics, after a traumatic previous school year, is a specific phenomenon occurring in a real-life context.

Merriam (1998) states that qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent (Merriam, 1998). My study focused on the particular situation of culturally relevant pedagogy being implemented in blended learning environment during two pandemics. Case studies “concentrate attention on the way a particular group of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation” (Shaw, 1978, p. 2). Yin (1994) observes that case study is a particular design suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context. Due to the numerous variables of the study (culturally relevant pedagogy, blended learning, COVID19, and systemic racism), a case study was an appropriate selection of methodology. Due to the complexity of the many contexts of my study, it might be impossible to separate the different variables. Case studies focus on a rich “thick” description. One of the study’s research questions focuses on learning students’ perceptions and experiences, and this relies on thick descriptions of and from the participants and researcher through multiple data points. Case studies present documentation of events, quotes, samples, and artifacts (Wilson, 1979, p. 448). Case studies are heuristic, illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known. The purpose of this study was to understand what

happened in this specific context of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment during two pandemics. The study sought to discover new meaning and add to existing knowledge through descriptively rich triangulated data. Stakes (1995) stresses the importance in case study research of clearly defining the unit of study, the case. Smith (1978) defines case study as a bounded system. Merriam (1998) states that “a case can be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal: a program, a group such as a class, a school, a community” (p. 27). The defined case of this study is seven students from my third period English IV Honors class. The seven students from my third period English IV Honors class were bound together by the time period in which the class occurs. They were also bound together by the context of the blended learning environment during two pandemics. My research questions focused on student’s perceptions and experiences when culturally relevant pedagogy was implemented in a blended learning environment, thus the unit of analysis for the study was the students. The students were the unit of analysis in order to focus on their perceptions/experiences and the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Context and Participants

The study took place at a suburban high school in a southeastern state. The school was selected using convenience sampling. I, the researcher, am a teacher at the high school. The school’s racial demographics were 53 percent African American, 45 percent White, and two percent other. The school had a 60 percent free and reduced lunch rate. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for this study. I selected one of my classes whose demographics reflected the overall school’s racial demographics most closely. Students were given a permission form to participate or opt out of the study (see

Appendix A), and parents were given a permission form to allow their child to participate or not within the study (see Appendix B). I gave the students a survey (See Appendix C) at the beginning of the school year, where they were able to self-identify. The participants in the selected class self-identified as the following: eight identified as Black, seven identified as White, two identified as Hispanic, one identified as Indian, and one identified as bi-racial. The students also self-identified their pronoun preferences. Eight of the participants identified their pronouns as she, her, hers, nine of the participants identified their pronouns as he, him, his, and two of the participants identified their pronouns as they, them, theirs. After selecting the class that reflected the overall schools' demographics closely, I selected seven students to focus on for the case study. Purposeful sampling was used to select the seven students for the case study. Students were selected to mirror the school's demographics and to make sure each demographic that the students self-identified were represented within the study. In addition, most of the students selected to participate in the study were those who are from racial groups that are minoritized. All of the students, except Bryan, indicated that their racial identity or sexual orientation caused them to be minoritized by traditional educational structures. In accordance to the critical paradigm, the study sought to highlight the perceptions and thoughts of students who are often oppressed by the educational system. Students selected for the case study selected their pseudonyms and helped craft their descriptions below. They read their descriptions several times and member checking was used to ensure they were described accurately.

Baljeet

Baljeet often enters the classroom with a smile stretching across his face. Baljeet's mother is an immigrant from Sierra Leone. His father is an immigrant from India. Baljeet identifies as Indian and male. Hindi, Krio, and English are all spoken within Baljeet's home. The school district identifies Baljeet as an ESOL student; however, Baljeet does not apply that label to himself. He stated that "both of my parents speak fluent English and I grew up with them speaking English to me more than any other language." He added that every year he has tested out of the ESOL accommodations, but he still is required to take a test. Baljeet is not fluent in Krio and explained that he can speak conversational Hindi. Baljeet has attended a local public school since kindergarten. Baljeet's mother works at UPS and his father is self-employed. He stated that he generally enjoys school but often feels disconnected from the content covered in class. He pays attention in class, but often wonders why he is learning certain concepts. Baljeet expressed that the pandemic has been difficult for his family because his paternal grandparents are in India. He is very concerned about their well-being and safety. Baljeet is an 11th grader who plans to graduate high school and study chemical engineering.

Trey

With curly locks of hair completely covering his eyes, Trey often enters the classroom right after the bell rings. Trey identifies as a Black male. He has lived in the town the school is located in his entire life. He attended a Catholic private school from kindergarten until eighth grade. After eighth grade, he convinced his parents to enroll him in public school. He stated that he was one of two Black children at his private school,

and he disliked it. He noted when he transferred to public school, he was upset to find that he was still one of a few Black males in honors and AP courses. Trey's father is a chiropractor in the local community, and his mother works at the practice as well. Trey is the oldest child in the family and has a younger sister. Trey explained that he likes school when the classes are engaging. He loves acting and his parents sent him to acting school when he was a middle school student. He stated that in school there are very few opportunities to get up and move, except in gym class. Trey emphasized that the pandemic was financially difficult on his family. His father's practice had to shut down at the beginning, and he could tell his parents were worried. His mother also contracted COVID19 and was very ill for three weeks. Trey stayed at home, taking care of his mother when she was ill. Trey is an 11th grader and plans to become a lawyer after graduation.

Calico

Calico is often seen draped in a large pride flag they wear as a cape. Calico identifies as White and transgendered. Calico uses the pronouns they/their/theirs. Calico's mother is employed as a secretary at a local Catholic church. Their father works at the local hospital as a director of information services. Calico attended a private Episcopal school from kindergarten until eighth grade. After eighth grade, they enrolled in public school. Calico asked to be called by their chosen name, but requested that when speaking with their parents that I use the name their parents assigned and use "she" pronouns. Calico is a gifted artist. They often are seen doodling in the margins of assignments and creating portraits of class members to give to them. They are also a member of the local youth theatre. Calico stated that although they enjoy theatre and appear outgoing, they are

very uncomfortable in school. They are often worried about their safety and being judged by students and teachers. They explained that during the pandemic their anxiety levels became increasingly high, and they sought medical treatment. Calcio is an 11th grader who plans to study fine arts after high school and eventually study politics.

Stoney

Stoney identifies as a Black female. She attended her local public school from kindergarten. Her parents are divorced, and she lives mostly with her father. Her mother is a nurse's aide at a local nursing home, and her father works at a local factory as a machinist. Stoney is the middle child, out of three children. Her older brother lives with her father. Her younger brother lives with her mother. Stoney stated that she is often quiet in her classes because most of her friends aren't in her honors class. She expressed that she feels she can't often relate to the other kids in the classes. Stoney is on track to graduate a year early from high school. She emphasized that she wants to get out of high school and start her future. Stoney stated that complete virtual learning was difficult for her at the beginning of the pandemic. She did not have internet access at home, and many of her teachers expected her to login to meetings. She had to use her cell phone, and it was not easy to do. Stoney explained that starting this school year, the year of the study, the school district provided her a hot spot. Stoney is an 11th grader who plans to graduate high school and go to nursing school.

Tanashia

Always carrying a journal, Tanashia often selects the front and center seat in the classroom. Tanashia grew up in New York City. She moved to South Carolina at the end of her tenth-grade year during the pandemic. Her family moved to be closer to her

father's parents. This school year is the first time she was in a classroom in South Carolina. She identifies as a bi-racial female and bi-sexual. She has a White mother and a Black father. Tanashia expressed she has spent a lot of time adjusting to the differences between living in New York City and in a small town in South Carolina this school year. She stated that she is shocked at how the classes are different from what she is used to in New York City. She explained that in New York her class sizes were larger, and the curriculum seemed different. Tanisha stated that as a child she moved a lot, all within New York City, but she switched schools often. In elementary school, she attended four different schools. In middle school, she attended three different schools, and in high school she attended three different schools. Tanashia emphasized that with all the moving and the pandemic, she suffered with depression this year. Currently, she is a 12th grader who does not have plans after graduation because she is fearful about how the pandemic will affect her financial stability.

Andrea

Andrea identifies as Hispanic. Spanish is spoken in her home. Andrea states that her parents only spoke Spanish when she was younger, and now they speak some English. Andrea attended local public schools starting in kindergarten. Her parents are immigrants from Mexico. Her father works in landscaping, and his mother is a housekeeper. Andrea is the youngest of four siblings. She stated that school was hard for her during the sixth grade because she was separated from her siblings and was temporarily homeless. She lived in a local children's shelter for two years. Andrea is both fluent in Spanish and English. She, too, states that the school identifies her as an ESOL student; however, she does not label herself with those terms. She explained that she

speaks both English and Spanish fluently and outperforms many English speakers in English class. Andrea currently ranks number one academically in her graduating class. She emphasized that the pandemic was financially straining on her family. Her parents were laid off from their jobs for an extended time period. Andrea shared that she and her brother worked at fast food restaurants during the pandemic to help their family. She is an 11th grader and plans to become a social worker in her future.

Bryan

Bryan began the year as a reluctant participant in class. Bryan asked when receiving his self-identifying handout, “Why are we doing this? Don’t you know what my race is?” At the beginning of the school year, Bryan also stated, “there is no such thing as privilege. Everyone is given the same opportunity.” Bryan identifies as a White male. He attended a private Episcopal school from kindergarten until 8th grade. His father is forestry consultant, and his mother works as a hospice nurse. Bryan explained that he struggled in middle school because his mother was diagnosed with cancer. She has made a full recovery, but during that time frame he lost interest in school. The pandemic was terrifying for Bryan when his mother contracted COVID19. She was hospitalized and placed on a ventilator. This was the second time in his life that he believed he might lose his mother. Bryan’s mother recovered from COVID19. But there was a time frame where he could not speak to or see his mother and had to wait for the nurses to give his father an update. After graduating high school, Bryan, a 12th grader, plans to attend a military college and major in Biology.

The participants were all students within my English IV honors class. The school district for this study had a required curriculum that teachers must minimally cover for

English IV honors. The course's main focus is British literature, beginning with Anglo-Saxon poetry. The course context added an additional layer of difficulty in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment, as the required readings for the course do not include texts by authors who are not White. Despite the additional restrictions from the school district, as a teacher I dedicated myself to using culturally relevant pedagogy and texts within my classroom. I developed thematic connections from the required texts to incorporate counternarratives into the lessons.

Demographically, I differ from most of my study's participants. The majority of participants were not White and are between the ages of 14-15. I am a thirty-year-old White female. I taught the participants, and this gave me power over the participants, as they knew I could write them up or refer them to the principal. They also knew that I held power over their grades within the classroom. Participants' demographics may have limited my research. As mentioned earlier, many of the study's participants may not have had positive experiences with a middle class heterosexual White female teacher in their past experiences. This could have caused them to withhold certain ideas. In addition, I am not a member of the African American, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic cultures; my research could be limited by my misunderstandings or lack of knowledge on cultural practices. During the study I was aware of the power I held as a teacher and White heterosexual person. This knowledge and awareness, that many students were not comfortable the first day of class led me to begin the school year focused on building strong relationships with students.

Pedagogy Prior to Study

My study began at the second nine weeks marker for our school district. This was due to the date of receiving final approval to conduct the study from the school district. After approval was granted, I began collecting data with the implementation of our second curriculum unit. The district curriculum for English IV Honors required the reading of *The Canterbury Tales* and the mastery of the literary concepts: archetype, characterization, and literary criticism. The school district was operating on a blended learning model. Students in my third period English IV class were split between attending school on different days. One group attended school on Monday and Tuesday (Red Group) and worked virtually Wednesday-Friday. The second group attended on Wednesday and Thursday (Blue Group) and worked virtually Friday-Tuesday. Fridays were available for students to Live Stream with their teachers, if they needed assistance. Participant were all from the blue group. A breakdown of each group's demographics is referenced below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Student Groupings for Blended Learning Days

Red Group	Blue Group
10 students 6 Black 3 White 1 Hispanic 5 She, Her, Hers 4 He, Him, His 1 They, Them, Theirs	9 students 3 Black 3 White 1 Hispanic 1 Indian 1 Bi-Racial 3 She, Her, Hers 5 He, Him, His 1 They, Them, Theirs

The district provided laptops to all high school students. Students had the opportunity to request a hot spot from the district office for connectivity. My students at the beginning of the school year all but one student indicated on their “Get to Know Me” surveys that they had internet connections and personal devices. On virtual days students used Schoology, the district’s learning management system, to access assignments and content. Training was provided for students during the first quarter on how to use and access Schoology. Most students indicated that they used Schoology in previous school years. The class Schoology homepage is below in figure 3.1.

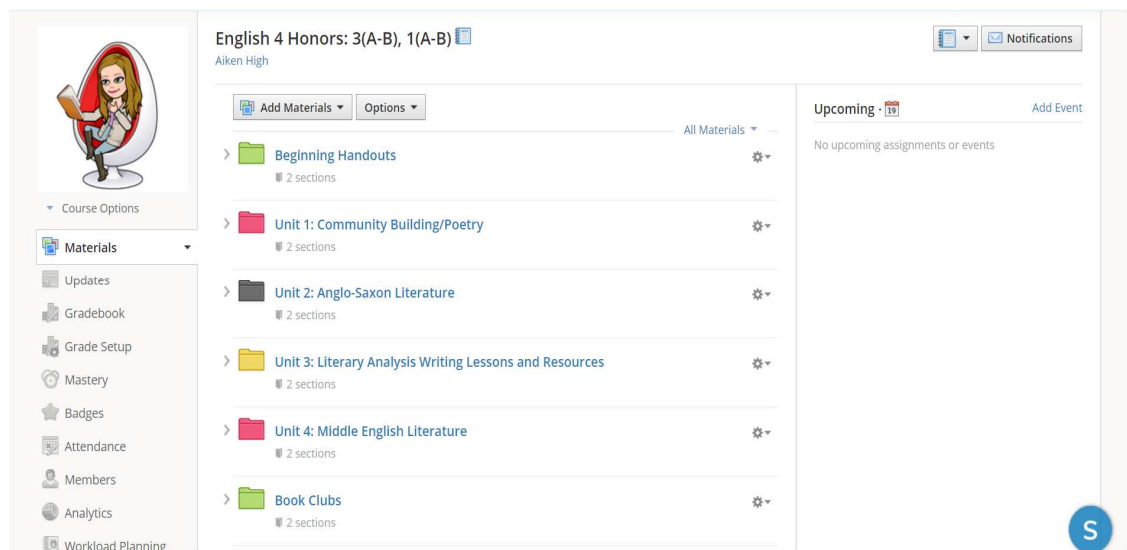


Figure 3.1 View of Schoology Homepage for Students

Given the requirements from the district and the context of working in a blended learning environment, I intentionally constructed a unit of instruction that centered culturally relevant teaching practices at its core within a blended learning environment, while still attending to the restrictions of the district curriculum. Prior to the study, I focused on building relationships with students that made them feel welcome within the classroom. Our first four weeks of school focused on identity poetry. Students were given

examples of poetry written by other youth from previous school years and crafted their own “Where I Am From” poems, “Raised By” poems, and “We Wear the Mask” poems.

This unit provided students an opportunity to share their lives with each other. As the teacher in the room, I always modeled and shared my own poetry as examples. This helped students learn more about me. During this time, I also made sure to contact every student’s parent or guardian to open a line of communication. I provided them with all of the materials they needed to be successful in class. For example, I got donations of binders, tablets, pens, highlighters, sticky notes, etc. I worked to ensure that students whose grades started to slip, were redirected and listened to what they needed to help become successful.

After students felt comfortable within my classroom, I transitioned into our first required text from the district curriculum. The required text for the first quarter was “Beowulf” an Old English story of a Geat larger than life hero. For this unit, I focused on a thematic idea of Heroes vs. Villains. I paired the text with other core texts such as *All-American Boys* and “When Ure Hero Falls.” *All American Boys* is an American young adult novel that tells the story of the heroic actions of two youth when faced with experiencing and witnessing police brutality. “When Ure Hero Falls” is a poem by Tupac Shakur that explains the emotions of seeing your hero fall from grace. Students engaged in self-reflection journals while working on this unit. They also participated in a privilege walk and story circles. In the story circles, they each told about experiences they had interacting with police, who their heroes were and why, and if they have ever not stood up for someone who was in a bad situation. We ended the unit with a Socratic Seminar and reflection paper.

During this unit, I noticed that many of my students were complaining about how it was very difficult for them to be successful in the blended learning environment. They were communicating that they were stressed, and they were not enjoying school. I also noticed on their blended learning days that many of them were not turning in their assignments. They kept telling me that other teachers were assigning them a large amount of work that they could not complete on the days they were working from home and virtual. At this point, I asked them to anonymously write down on a sticky note what they did on their blended learning days (Figure 3.2).

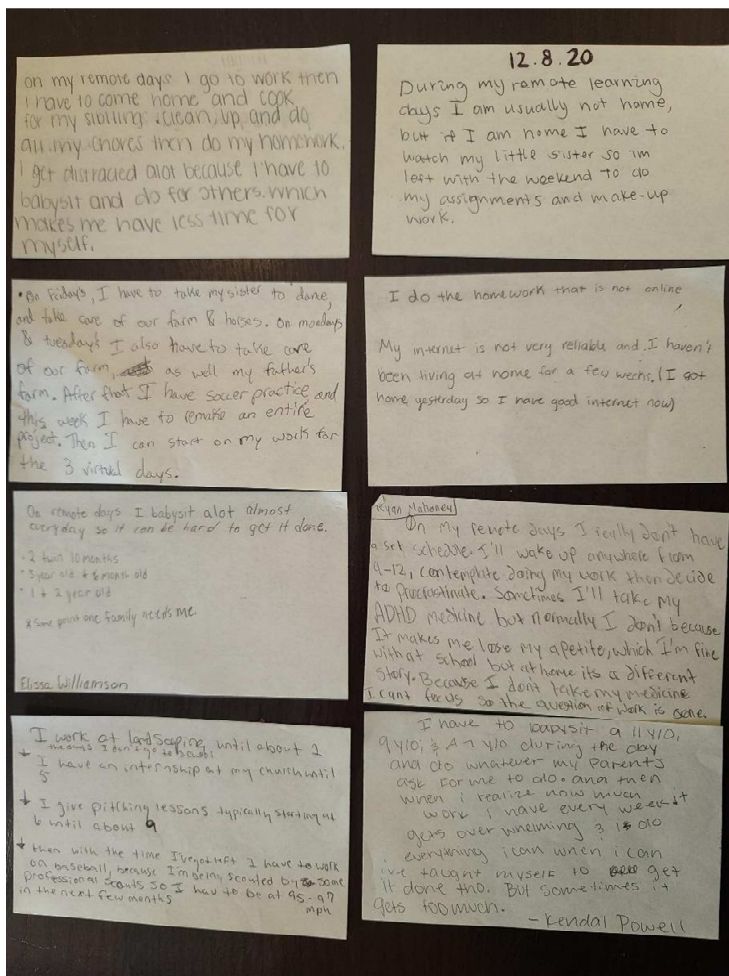


Figure 3.2 Students Sticky Notes on Home Days

I discovered from this activity that many of them had jobs and siblings to care for. I spoke with them the next day and then asked them to write down on a sticky note what they wanted to learn from English class. I asked them to tell me what skills they needed me to teach. After reviewing the sticky notes, I created a class chart of skills they requested, and I promised to make them my main focus for the rest of the school year (Figure 3.3).

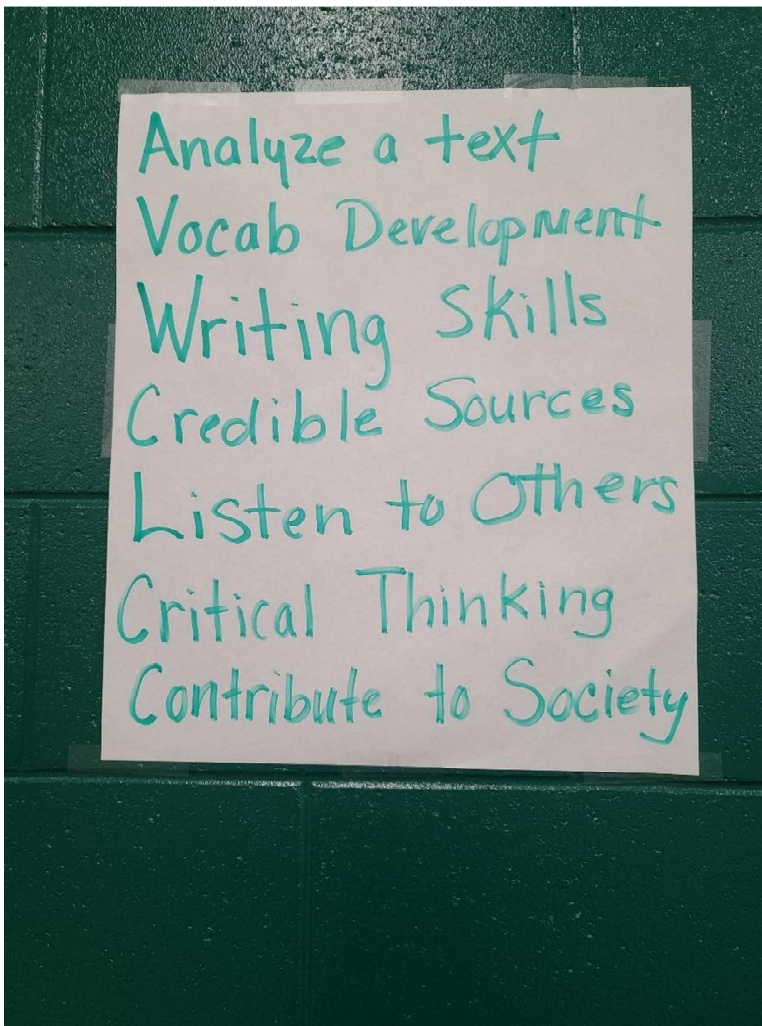


Figure 3.3 Class Chart of Skills Requested by Students

I also promised to only assign them two days of blended learning work instead of three.

We made a classroom agreement, that they would work hard to be completely engaged

and present during class time, and I would lighten their work on blended learning days. This conversation happened at the end of quarter one, two weeks before I began my research study.

During the study, given the requirements from the district and the context of working in a blended learning environment, I intentionally constructed a unit of instruction that centered culturally relevant teaching practices at its core within a blended learning environment, while still attending to the restrictions of the district curriculum (Table 3.2). Table 3.2 shows an outline of the curriculum presented to the students. The first column of the chart names the assignment provided to the students. The second column identifies which core tenant of culturally relevant pedagogy the assignment connects too. The third column shows how blended learning was infused into the assignment. The final column connects the district requirements or if the assignment relates to the overall theme of the unit.

Table 3.2 Unit Plan for Study for Middle English Literature: Journeys and Storytelling

	CRP	Blended Learning	District Curriculum/Thematic Connections
Middle English Flipgrid Vocabulary (Appendix G)	Academic Success (Scaffolding Content and movement) Collaboration	Flipgrid-video creation using technology	Vocabulary Terms Provided by District
This Just in Scripts (Appendix H)	Academic Success (Scaffolding Content/Acting) Collaboration	Videos of Background Content Script or Video Posted to Blog	Middle English Historical Context
Dating Profile for Character	Academic Success (Scaffolding/Acting) Collaboration	Flipgrid-Video	Characterization
Reading <i>Canterbury Tales</i> General Prologue Wife of Bath Tale Chosen Tale	Academic Success (Scaffolding/Shared Reading/Paired Reading/Independent Reading/Doodle Notes/Student Choice)	Audio of Text Available	Required Text Archetypes Characterization Social Commentary
Speed Dating (Appendix I)	Academic Success (Scaffolding/Movement/Acting) Collaboration	Reflection Blog	Characterization
Family Story Telling Assignment (Appendix J)	Cultural Competence Collaboration Community Involvement	Audio Recordings Website	Storytelling
Character Ornament (Appendix K)	Academic Success (Art Representation of Character)		Characterization
Critical Consciousness Questions (Appendix L)	Academic Success (Scaffolding/Modeling of Questions) Critical Consciousness	Blogs	Societal Commentary
Literary Lens (Appendix M)	Academic Success (Scaffolding using Ms. Muffet Example) Critical Consciousness	Video Practice Analysis of "The Office"	Literary Lens
Book Clubs (Appendix N)	Academic Success (Student Choice) Cultural Competence Critical Consciousness Collaboration Student Choice	Blogs	Archetypes Characterization Literary Lens Storytelling Journeys Social Commentary
Guest Speaker: Natalie Daise (Appendix O)	Cultural Competence Community Involvement	Zoom Meeting Reflection Questions	Storytelling Journeys Social Commentary

I used the district required text as a starting place to develop thematic connections that transcended genres and time periods. I focused the thematic unit on: storytelling, journeys, and societal commentary. This thematic focus provided opportunities for me to include counternarratives into the curriculum, through book clubs, (see Table 3.3). Each book was selected for its connection to the themes of storytelling, journeys, and societal commentary.

Table 3.3 Book Club Novels

Beah, I. (2008). <i>A long way gone: Memoirs of a boy soldier</i> . Sara Crichton Books.	A memoir of Ishmael Beah's journey as a boy soldier in Sierra Leone. The novel focuses on storytelling, his emotional/physical journey, and societal commentary.
Saenz, B.Al. (2012). <i>Aristotle and Dante discover the secrets of the universe</i> . Simon Schuster Books for Young Adults	A coming of age story, focusing on two young men that discover important truths about themselves. The novel focuses on issues of Mexican American identity and sexuality.
Dimaline, C. (2017). <i>The marrow thieves</i> . DCB.	This is a near-future dystopian tale of a young man of North American Indian descent finding his way through a hostile world.
Farish, T. (2012). <i>The good braider</i> . Marchsall Cavendish	A young adult novel written in verse focusing on a young girl's fight to survive the violence of a war in Juba and then conflict within her own family as she assimilates into American culture.
Nazario, S. (2009). <i>Enrique's Journey</i> . Random House Trade Paperbacks.	A story of a Honduran boy's journey to reunite with his mother. The novel details his journey through hostile environments and corruption.

In addition to the planned curriculum, events that transpired in the country during the second quarter added impromptu lessons into the study. The insurrection on the Capitol resulted in an impromptu class story circle, where students shared their thoughts and concerns. Amanda Gorman's poem during the inauguration of President Joe Biden sparked a lesson on spoken word poetry as an example of a counternarrative and societal commentary.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research encompasses varied methods for data collection, including conducting interviews, keeping field notes during class observations, and collecting documents particular to the study for further analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Patton

(2002) further explains that a researcher's findings in a qualitative study emerge from three specific types of data: "in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents" (p. 4). Patton asserts that data in qualitative research should focus on depth and details. Numerous forms of data collection took place during this study in order to achieve data saturation focusing on depth and details. In order to select appropriate data collection tools, strategies must derive from the nature of the research questions (Check & Schutt, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Research Questions

Maxwell (2013) states that research questions will have an influence on and should be responsive to every other part of a person's study. In qualitative research, researchers often begin with certain goals based on their theoretical knowledge and experiences. Maxwell states that qualitative researchers often don't develop their final research questions until they have completed a specific amount of data collection and analysis (p. 73). Drawing from my experiences as a high school English teacher for ten years, my theoretical knowledge, a past pilot study, and my goals for this study, I developed the following research questions:

- What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?
- What are students' experiences and perceptions with culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

Focusing on the above research questions, I collected data using observations, field notes, classroom artifacts, surveys, and interviews. See Table 3.4 below, as a reference for data collection methods that aligned with each research question.

Table 3.4 Research Questions Data Collection

Research Question	Data Collection Methods
What happens when CRP is situated in a blending learning environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations, lesson plans, and field notes from lessons • Classroom artifacts • Student surveys • Semi-structured interviews with students, audio-recorded and transcribed
What are students' experiences and perceptions with CRP in a blended learning approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student surveys • Semi-structured interviews with students, audio-recorder and transcribed

Observations and Field Notes

Schwandt (2007) defines observations as a method of gathering data about human experience, characterized by events, actions, meanings, norms viewed from the perspective of the people being studied; attentions to detail; events and details can only be understood when they are set in a particular social and historical context; social action is regarded as dynamic; efforts are made by the observer to avoid premature imposition of theoretical notions on the participants' perspectives (p. 211). Observation refers to looking at a setting purposefully. Observations allow teachers to view the school, the classroom, or specific individuals in settings and to see things we may unconsciously miss in the often-chaotic dynamics of teaching. The purpose of each observation will be to obtain a first-hand account of what happens during the incorporation of culturally responsive pedagogy within my classroom. Observations allow researchers to be aware of nonverbal behaviors, gestures, and body language (Good & Brophy, 2007; Wragg, 2012). The purpose of the observations was to capture students' reactions and interactions—reactions that helped me decipher students' responses to culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Field notes are a kind of evidence in which researchers base their claims about meaning and understanding. Glense (2011) states that field notes are raw data or notes made in the field based on observations and conversation. They are filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; it becomes a place of ideas and reflections. Field notes contain hunches and notes about patterns that seem to emerge. It also becomes a place for exploring the researcher's personal reactions. They should be descriptive and analytical. They capture action in the classroom. I kept a journal of field notes during the entire study to help capture descriptions, activities, conversations, and actions. My field notes were structured with four major areas: jottings, description, analysis, and reflection (see Appendix D).

Field notes were recorded during and following teaching. I took notice of what I heard from students' reactions to CRP and the blended learning context. The jottings focused on dialogue and students' body language. In the virtual context, the jottings focused on written discussion posts. The description was a detailed account of everything that I observed and remembered from the observation. The analysis was written following the description. It focused on making connections from the observation to the research questions and other related points. The analysis looked for themes across multiple observations that occurred. It watched for the effects of CRP within a blended learning environment. It was a place to write out questions or concerns for the following observation. Finally, the last section of field notes was dedicated to reflection. The reflection section was written after the observation. It focused on what I learned and connected to my personal beliefs and identity. It focused on what was it like for me to be doing this research. It focused on what felt comfortable for me and what felt

uncomfortable. It answered: in what ways did I connect to the participants, and in what ways I did not connect to the participants? It was a place to reflect on my teaching practice in relation to the implementation of CRP and a place to think through improvements.

Classroom Artifacts

Glense (2011) states that artifacts are the material objects that represent the culture of the people and setting the researcher is studying. When researchers read an artifact, they try to get at the stories that surround it and which it embodies (p. 88). More specifically, in the field of education, artifacts are physical documents and records that allow teachers researchers to construct a layered and contextual understanding of their topics (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Systematically collecting classroom artifacts provides teachers with the opportunity to look within and across documents to analyze them in new and different ways. Through looking at student work over time, claims can be made that could not occur when viewing a single piece of student work in isolation (Dana & Yendol-Hopey, 2009). I collected students' classroom artifacts throughout the entire study. Artifacts from both face-to-face instruction and blended learning days were collected. Students' journals, discussion posts, videos, essays, flipgrids, reflective pieces, and projects were collected.

Surveys

Surveys can be used to gather data about people's opinions, perceptions, and attitudes (Flick, 2014). Surveys provide students a space to share their thoughts and opinion about teaching techniques or strategies, a unit, or their knowledge about particular subject matter (Dana & Yendol-Hopey, 2009). Surveys are one of the most

common and efficient ways to gather information (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The students completed an open-ended survey (see Appendix E) to share their perceptions about the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment.

Interviews

An interview is the process by which a researcher and a participant engage in conversation focused on questions related to the research study. Interviews are important to obtain information about that which cannot be observed: feelings, thoughts, intentions, behaviors from previous points in time, situations where an observer is not present, and respondent emerging worldview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) explain that the use of interview as a data collection method “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1). Qualitative interviews provide opportunities for researchers to understand phenomena in ways that would be difficult otherwise (Weiss, 1994).

Interviews were conducted with all of the participants, to capture each student’s thoughts and perspectives (see Appendix F). The semi-structured interview format was used so that the students could provide more detailed information to set questions, while also allowing for some spontaneous questions or comments (Flick, 2014). A key goal of the study is to empower all students to share their voices; interviewing all of the students gave them a space to share their experiences and perspectives. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Patton (2002) states that researchers record interviews to preserve the data for analysis. He also suggests that they take notes, just in case there is a technical malfunction during the interview. I recorded the interviews and took notes

during each interview. Each interview was transcribed and coded. Semi-structured interviews of all students provided insight into students' thoughts and perceptions.

Data Analysis

Data were organized in a number of ways. Transcribed interviews were word-processed and kept within a password protected folder on my personal lap-top. Field notes were kept within a researcher's journal, which was stored each evening in a locked cabinet within my classroom. Surveys were gathered from students and stored in a locked cabinet. All classroom artifacts were photocopied or a picture was taken of the artifact, so participants were able to keep their artifacts. Digital classroom artifacts were transcribed when they were audio/video, printed and added to the classroom artifact binder. Copies of tangible classroom artifacts were kept in a binder, and the binder was locked in a cabinet within my classroom. The data were organized into two categories: teacher data and student data. The teacher data included the field notes and observation notes. Student data included surveys, interviews, and classroom artifacts.

When engaging in analysis, I first focused on understanding each case in detail and then on discovering common themes across cases, cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1994). To code and analyze both the teacher and student case study data, I engaged in two coding cycles. I used protocol coding for the first cycle of coding. Saldana (2103) states that protocol coding is the gathering and coding of qualitative data according to a pre-established system. I used the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, as pre-established codes. Saldana (2013) explains that "protocol coding is appropriate for qualitative studies in disciplines with pre-established and field-tested coding systems if the researcher's goals harmonize with the protocol's outcomes (p. 45). Since my research

questions focused on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, I coded the data looking for these pre-established tenets. I created a color-coded chart using the foundational tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy to initially code the data (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Color-coded Data Chart

Academic Achievement
Cultural Competence
Critical Consciousness
Building Community
Collaboration
Social Action

During the second cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding for the teacher and student data. Saldana (2013) defines descriptive coding as the summarization of the main premise of the main topic. Descriptive coding allowed me to look for early patterns and themes within the data that may not relate to the preset protocol codes. My research questions sought to understand what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is placed in a specific context of blended learning. Descriptive coding allowed for the emergence of new themes and ideas related to culturally relevant pedagogy. After a first round of descriptive coding, a list of emerging codes was created (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Descriptive Codes

Communication	Reflection
Community Involvement	Student Voice
Emotional Concerns	Classroom Environment
Laughter/Fun	Materials Provided
Technology Enhancement	Acting and Movement

I engaged in a second round of descriptive coding. Following subsequent rounds of coding, analytic memos were written to help further reduce the data and deepen my own understanding. These memos helped me combine similar ideas and codes from the protocol and descriptive coding.

During the third cycle of coding, I used In Vivo coding with the student data. Saldana (2013) states that In Vivo coding refers to an actual phrase or word found in the qualitative data. I focused on words and phrases that were repeated from multiple students' surveys and interviews (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7 In Vivo Codes

"Gives me more access"	"She always encouraged/pushed us"
"Technology Helped"	"She worked with us"
"Critical Consciousness made me think harder and question ideas"	"Made me feel like I had a voice"
"Technology helped us get feedback quickly"	"Now I question everything that I read"

One of my research questions sought to understand students' perceptions and reactions to culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning context. In Vivo coding allowed the opportunity for my students' voices and thoughts to emerge in the coding of data.

After engaging in In Vivo coding, I revisited all of the case study data sets. Cross-case analysis enhances generality or transferability to other contexts. A goal of cross-case analysis is to deepen understanding and explanation. An advantage to cross-case analysis is a more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Saldana 2013). A case-oriented approach was used. Yin (2018) states that one case should be studied in detail, then successive cases are examined to see if patterns match the previous cases. Saldana (2013) describes cross- case analysis as comparing the codes and sub-codes between each case's data set. I used analytical memos to combine codes from the protocol, descriptive, and In Vivo coding looking for similarities, patterns, and differences across the cases. Using the analytical memos, I created a final set of codes

(Table 3.8). I then took both the teacher and student data and coded it with the final codes.

Table 3.8: Final Codes

Academic Achievement
Cultural Competence
Critical Consciousness
Building Relationships
Student Voice
Blended Learning

After each round of data coding, participants were asked to review the codes and the coded data. They gave their feedback on the data and helped to create the codes for different rounds of coding. This process helped to develop the trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness

Numerous measures were used in this study to enhance the study's validity, including member checking. Reilly (2013), member checks give participants opportunities to correct errors and challenge what they perceive as flawed interpretations or misrepresentations. They allow participants to give additional or clarifying information. Participants should be given the chance to review all data, analysis, and final products resulting (Mills, 2013). In this study, member checking was used throughout this study to give students the opportunity for input at each stage to help ensure accuracy. After each interview, the audio-recordings were transcribed, and a copy was given to each student. Students checked the transcripts for accuracy and were encouraged to provide any clarification or additional information.

Data was triangulated through the use of different methods within my study. Staines (1990) states that triangulation is the use of different methods to check findings.

For example, interviews can provide researchers with detailed information from participants. An interview paired with observations can enable researchers to draw inferences about perspectives that they couldn't obtain solely in an interview (Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, interviews can be used to check the accuracy of researchers' observations. I triangulated my findings by making sure that each finding was supported by multiple pieces of data from multiple method collections.

Conclusion

A qualitative researcher seeks to make sense of actions and narratives and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2011). A case study seeks to collect a rich detailed description of a particular case or cases. My study occurred within the unique context of teaching during two pandemics in a structure new to both the teacher and student. The study aimed to understand what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy was situated within a blended learning environment and the nature of students' experiences and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy in this context. A case study methodology was selected to provide an opportunity to share a detailed description of students' thoughts and experiences during the study. Students who are often oppressed by the educational system were purposefully selected to make up the majority of the cases, in order for their stories and experiences to be shared with their school's administration team, school district, and academia.

This chapter included an overview of my study's research design, methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis strategies. Chapter Four will describe in detail the research findings for each individual case. Chapter Five presents the findings of the cross-case analysis, a discussion, implications for teaching practice, and implications for

future research. In addition, chapter five will conclude with each student's final insights for educators and academia.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study explored what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy was implemented in a blended learning environment and sought to understand students' experiences and perceptions of this implementation during two pandemics. This study focused on seven students experiences during their blended learning phase of the school year. It is important to note that I am serving as the students' teacher and as the researcher for this study. Although member checking was used in this study, I am the interpreter of these findings. Glesne (2011) stated that researchers are "interpreters who draw on their own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions, and collected dated to present their understanding of the other's world" (p.157). This study sought to answer the following questions:

- What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?
- What are students' experiences with and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

This chapter is divided into seven sections, a section for each case. The following data were used to comprise each case: quizzes and test grades, This Just in Script, "Canterbury Tales" speed dating assignment and reflection, "Canterbury Tales" blogs, book club

blogs, family storytelling assignment and reflection, guest speaker reflection, “The Office” reflection, critical lens essay, digital communication charts, initial interviews, student surveys, field notes, final follow-up interviews, and their final requests/thoughts to be shared with this study.

Baljeet

Baljeet was very proud of his grades throughout the study. He often stated to me with a smile that spanned across his face, “Ms. H, I’m doing awesome in English.” His mother emailed me numerous times often stating, “Thank you for working with Baljeet. He loves your class and is doing so well.” Table 4.1 shows that Baljeet made all *A*’s on his tests and quizzes during the study.

Table 4.1 Baljeet’s Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	94%
Middle English History Test	100%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	93%
Canterbury Tales Test	97%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	92%

In addition, to having high averages on his tests and quizzes, Baljeet also performed well on student projects and papers. At the beginning of the unit after a class lecture and watching multiple videos, students were asked to demonstrate their knowledge of the historical content. Students created a news broadcast script or a news broadcast video in their home language (Appendix G). Baljeet did very well on this project. In figure 4.1,

Baljeet's script shows that he understood the importance of Feudalism in Middle English society, a key concept to the district's required curriculum.

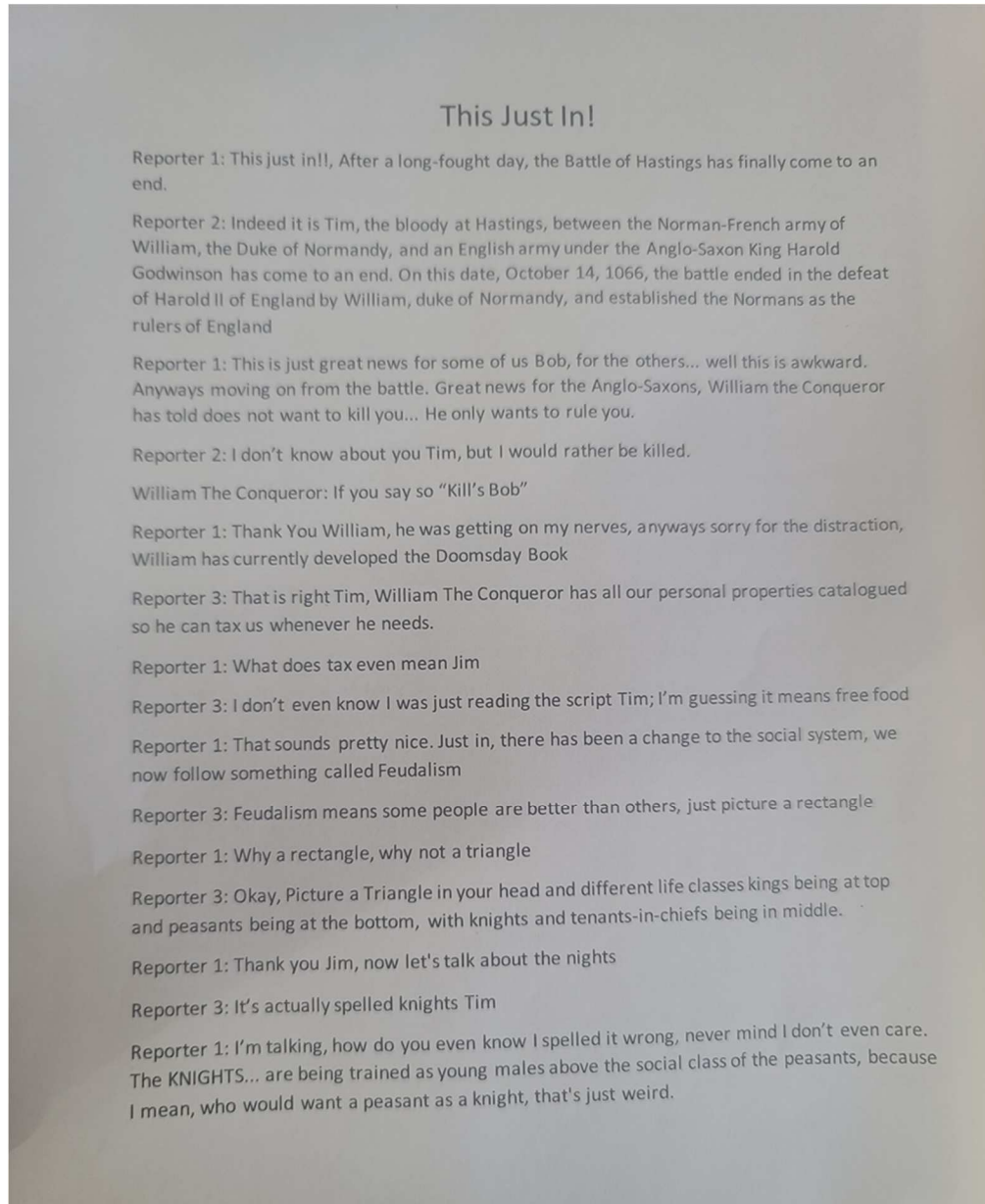


Figure 4.1 Baljeet's This Just in Script

In the script above, Baljeet explained that Feudalism affects the citizen's positions within the society, a piece of background information that is important for understanding the

required main text, *The Canterbury Tales*. Another successful project for Baljeet was *The Canterbury Tales* speed dating assignment (Appendix H). The assignment required students to pay special attention to their chosen character in the “General Prologue” and read their character’s tale. During the speed dating activity, students became their character and only responded as their character. Baljeet selected the character of the Nun, Madame Eglantine. He arrived at school in a black dress, brown long wig, and cross necklace. He had wiped oil on the corner of his mouth and used a handkerchief to dab at the oil. He also had a leash, two stuffed plush dogs that he would continually pretend to throw food to them to eat. Baljeet spoke as the Nun saying, “Glory to God” and “I love my dogs.” In addition to showing his own mastery of his character, Baljeet was able to correctly identify all of his classmates’ characters. In a discussion, when asked how he knew Bryan was the Miller, he responded, “I knew he was the Miller because he constantly interrupted people, like he did in the story.” Baljeet demonstrated multiple times his mastery of the class content and his ability to question the texts.

Baljeet demonstrated the ability to question texts and point out inequities in his blogs about *The Canterbury Tales* and in his book club blogs. In response to *The Canterbury Tales*, Baljeet wrote:

Chaucer gives power to wealthy Christian men in his text. He stereotypes women making it seem like all of them are the same. For example, there are more men telling stories than women. Only two women have a tale and they are far from perfect characters. The Wife of Bath is portrayed as being very friendly with men. He refers to Turks as heathens several times when the knight is talking. It clearly shows that he valued Christianity.

Baljeet, in his blog response explained that the author is focused on giving voice to Christian men and that others are not given a voice. In another response, Baljeet begins to question the purpose of a text. Students were asked to watch an episode of the television series "The Office." As they were watching, they were asked to select a critical literary lens through which to view the show and jot down evidence to use for analysis through their selected lens. Baljeet wrote:

Multiple times African American and the Indian characters are mistreated. First none of them have a manager position. Only white men are the bosses or the assistants to the bosses. At one point, Michael the boss class his workers slaves. I have watched this show before and never even noticed. I know the purpose of the show is comedy, but for some reason it doesn't seem so funny now.

Baljeet shared that he is questioning the validity of the purpose of the television show. He questioned if the humor is appropriate.

During the study, students were given a choice of five texts to read that had thematic and archetypal connections to *The Canterbury Tales*. They were grouped into book clubs based on their selected text and were required to write a weekly response on Schoology. Baljeet picked the novel, *A Long Way Gone*, by Ishmael Beah. Baljeet questioned and discussed inequities within his novel on his blogs. Baljeet wrote:

Something that caught my attention right away was the change in Ishmael's personality. He adapted to the lifestyle he was forced into and he now lives by the saying "kill or be killed." This can be caused by all the drugs they forced him and the boys on, they believe that the drugs will turn them into men, and the soliders feed it to them like its candy until they get addicted to it and then rely on

them. The boys also started watching rambo movies "voilent movies" and in chapter 14 Isameal says "as if we had just returned from intermission." He said this after having to go to war in the middle of a rambo movie and coming back like it was a intermission. The movie seems to alter reality, kinda sorta like the drugs do as well. At this point of the story Ishmeal seems like he has no power over what he wants to do, almost like he's powerless. They are disempowered by all the drugs they were forced upon, that they all rely on at this point.

Baljeet shared the inequities that Ishmael and the other boy soldiers face. He showed that they have no power, and the drugs they are forced to take keep the boys disempowered. He highlighted how the soldiers control Ishmael and the other boys.

In addition to reading his book club text critically, Baljeet made personal connections with his text. Baljeet wrote on his survey, "the book *A Long Way Gone* connected to my culture directly. My mom fled from Sierra Leone when the wars were happening. So many of Ishmael's stories I knew and the foods."

Baljeet expressed as similar connection in one of his book club blogs, writing:

In this section the part that stood out to me was when Ishmael's friend came home early from school, because the rebels attacked. They attacked and everyone was trying to find their loved ones. As the gunfire intensified people gave up looking for their loved ones and ran out of town. This feeling of hopelessness of find the ones you love in such a scary situation stuck with me. It made me think about what my mom went through, the things she doesn't tell us.

Again, Baljeet made connections to his mother's story and his life. During the research study, I created assignments that provided opportunities for students to share and learn

more about their cultures, affirming their home cultures within a blended learning environment. One key assignment was the family storytelling assignment (Appendix I). Students were asked to record a story by a family member who was important to them. The stories were uploaded onto our class website for all members to hear and share. The students had to submit a reflection explaining why they selected the person to tell a story, connecting the importance of storytelling in the canonical text to their own lives. Baljeet was eager to share his mother's story. In his story his mother stated:

I give permission for this voice memo to be recorded and transcribed for his class and Ms. Hostetler's study. I wanted to talk about um when I was a child and where I was brought up. I was born in Africa, in Sierra Leone from a small town. Um. I always tell Baljeet this story because there are so many things that I have taken for granted here. One of the things I remember very clearly to this day is the riots. One time I was caught in between the riots. My father owned a store and I was going from school to the store and I was in the car and there were riots in the town. I remember very clearly the violence and the brutality. The way people were hitting each other and destroying everything. It was very scary. To this day there are so many little things that I remember and it just makes me feel that what we have, we have to appreciate and realize how important safety is and security here in the US, where in Africa there was none. You know having houses and being secure. Over there the only kind of security we had were guard dogs. We had to have guard dogs. There were no alarms. The police was very unreliable. We made sure we had eight German Sheppards that were trained from when they were puppies to be guard dogs. I remember when these riots were going on we got

home and my father sat, we had gates. The gates were locked. On the table he took out his guns and had them there. He just sat there waiting for the rioters to come, waiting to defend us. To defend his family. We were lucky that they didn't come to our house. I tell the story so that everything that we have now is appreciated. Ok. Thank you.

Baljeet's mother shared a story about her experiences as a child. Baljeet explained why he selected his mother to share her story. In his reflection Baljeet wrote, "I chose my mom to tell her story because it makes up a large part of who I am. She survived a terrible situation and was able to make her way to the United States, so I could have a better life. She lived through some hard times and made it for me to never have to experience that." Baljeet often mentioned his mother's story after the family storytelling assignment. Some of his classmates were surprised when he shared his story. They were not aware of his mother's experiences. Bryan stated in an interview, "I had no idea that Baljeet's mom had such a traumatic experience before she came to the US. I have been friends with Baljeet for years and didn't know." Baljeet connected his mother's story and his cultural background to other aspects of the class.

A Zoom guest speaker affirmed Baljeet's culture. Ms. Natalie Daise, an artist and professional Gullah storyteller joined our class via Zoom to share stories from her Gullah culture and share the importance of storytelling. Ms. Daise's speaking cost was covered by donations from community members from a Donor's Choose project. Baljeet felt a direct connection to his culture during her storytelling and presentation. He wrote on his Guest Speaker Reflection (Appendix J), "Her story about magic and charms during war made me think about my mom's stories she would tell me that the soldiers in her town

used old magic and created vests with charms with safety and protection. That she believed old magic would help win the war.” Baljeet directly connected Ms. Daise’s story about three brothers in Sierra Leone to his mother’s stories about old magic and the war she escaped.

Baljeet experienced academic success during this study and made connections between the content to his lived experiences. In addition, Baljeet expressed that he felt successful in the class because he was given choice and a voice:

Ms. Hostetler: How was academic success encouraged during this study? If it wasn’t encouraged, explain why you think it wasn’t.

Baljeet: Well, I think part of it was I could pick some stuff. This was the only class I was ever given a choice to pick a book that I wanted to read. That never happened in any other class. It is always what the teacher gives us. I liked that I got to pick; it made me actually read it. Plus, the books sounded interesting. I also read two others from the list on my own, just because other kids were talking about them. Plus, you listened to us too.

Ms. Hostetler: What do you mean by, I listened to you?

Baljeet: Like when you listened to us complaining about the amount of work teachers were given on home days. It was too much, and you, like, changed it for us. You listened to what we said and then changed what we did. I don’t think I ever had that happen before.

In his interview, Baljeet expressed that having a choice in what he read and being able to express his concerns were important to his success.

Baljeet directly addressed his perceptions of blended learning and culturally relevant pedagogy in his interview:

Ms. Hostetler: Could you explain to me what culturally relevant pedagogy and blended learning means to you?

Baljeet: Well, culturally relevant pedagogy to me is including your culture in what you are doing in the classroom, like the family storytelling assignment and using books that connect to different people in the class.

Ms. Hostetler: Ok, thank you. What about blended learning?

Baljeet: I think blended learning was hard at the start of the year, but it got easier. I had to understand how to use the different systems. But, I think it helped me learn more.

Ms. Hostetler: How did it help you learn compared to not having blended learning before?

Baljeet: I like the use of videos and blogs. I think they helped me a lot. Like when you had videos of the content from that Mr. Osborne guy, that was helpful. Plus when we did Flipgrids and I could watch other students' examples first.

Ms. Hostetler: How were the blogs helpful?

Baljeet: They let me think about what I read and see my other classmates' responses. Like everyone responded, so everyone got to share what they thought.

In class not, everyone would speak.

In his interview, Baljeet defined culturally relevant pedagogy as including your culture in the classroom. He shared that blended learning helped him see examples of the content and learn from his peers. He explained that blended learning also gives all students a

chance to respond, noting that in classroom discussions not everyone shares, but on their blogs, everyone responded. During the study Baljeet communicated directly with me through 23 emails, 0 Schoology messages, and 19 text messages. He would contact me about his grades, assignment details, and to check in on how I was feeling when I was quarantined with COVID19. He demonstrated a comfort using digital communication to contact his instructor.

Baljeet, in his follow up interview when asked if there is anything else he would like to share, responded:

This year was crazy and stressful. You made it less awful in your class. But one thing that I think you should continue to do is use Schoology and make sure that students have choices in what they read. I like that the books we were given a choice to read were not super old. We read so many boring books in school. It is nice to have choice and some interesting books.

Baljeet's final request was to share the importance of student choice and for teachers to select texts that are interesting to the students.

Trey

Trey, who was often quiet during the beginning of the school year, excelled academically during the study. Trey's father would often email me stating, "Trey is doing very well in your class. Thank you for the weekly email recaps about class." Table 4.2 shows that Trey received high grades on all of his quizzes and tests.

Table 4.2. Trey's Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	96%
Middle English History Test	97%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	100%
Canterbury Tales Test	100%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	98%

In addition to being successful on tests, Trey did very well on his projects and essays.

Trey was the Pardoner for his Canterbury Tales Speed Dating activity. He came to school in a red robe, made a long golden cross staff, and wore a red hat which he used to pull back his hair that often covered his eyes. Trey wore a large golden cross necklace. He often asked during the speed dating activity, "Have you sinned? I can wipe that away for you for a small fee." Trey laughed and smiled during the speed dating activity. In his reflection he wrote, "I like acting, so this was a lot of fun. I liked becoming a character." In addition to being successful academically, Trey demonstrated the ability to think critically about texts and events.

Trey selected the novel, *Marrow Thieves*, for his book club text. In his final blog, Trey identified the inequities present within the text. Trey wrote:

The last part of the book we see that the indigenous people start to find their way in their dystopian society. The failed mission to rescue Minerva affects each character's future while also causing sadness and sorrow. They end up burying Minerva which causes Rose and Frenchie to cut off their braid, this shows us that they

are showing their respect while also letting go. (212-213) I saw that the council and the youth council that Bullet recommends is a good thing for the indigenous people to connect with one another and their past. It also shows that they can pass on their knowledge, language, and culture to the next generation of children. As the story comes to an end Frenchie learns an important lesson, that as long as there is people who dream he will be okay. This story overall teaches us the importance of family and friendship while also showing how important it is to dream and to continue to have hope for the future even when times get tough. It also shows us even though it is dystopian, Native Americans genocide is still happening in different ways today. The author doesn't set this in the past. She put it in the present for a reason.

Trey expressed concern for the inequities that Native Americans still face within the United States. He alluded that the author places the story in the present to show that Native Americans are still facing inequities. Trey's blog response demonstrated his ability to think critically about a text.

Trey also showed his ability to think critically about a text with his notes on "The Office". During the study students were asked to watch an episode of "The Office" and take notes on the episode focusing on the use of two literary lenses. After they took their notes, they were asked to write a reflection on what they learned.

After I charted out all the examples of messed up stuff in the show. It made me mad. I never watched this show before. So, I don't know if they are trying to say something more. If they are trying to point out problems to show they are a problem or if they are playing into the same ideas.

Trey questioned the show's purpose. He questioned if their intent was to highlight the inequities presented or if the show is part of the problem, recycling stereotypes.

During the study, an interesting observation occurred relating to Trey's interactions. Trey was often quiet in class discussions. He would sit and listen to his classmates' responses without responding. However, on blog posts he was very active. He would be one of the first to post his blog and often respond to all of his peers' posts, when he was only required to respond to two or three classmates' posts. Although, he was often quiet in class discussions, when Trey did speak it demonstrated his ability to think critically. The day after the assault on the capitol, we had class. Tanaisha asked if we could discuss what happened. Trey demonstrated his ability to think critically about events happening around him during the discussion:

Tanaisha: Can we talk about what happened? Like openly. I feel like all the teachers are acting like nothing happened.

Mrs. Hostetler: Absolutely. We can't pretend it didn't happen.

Tanaisha: As a biracial person, I am having a hard time. I am hurt. I am disgusted. I'm disgusted by the difference between the BLM protestor treatment and the treatment of the rioters yesterday. If they were Black people they would have never made it to the capitol without being shot. Where were the police?

Trey: The same place Miley Cyrus is when Hannah Montana performs.

Trey's comment revealed to the class in a very clever allusion that he believed the police were involved in the capitol riot. They were participants in the assault. He questioned the actions of the police officers during the assault and pointed out the inequities when being compared to the BLM protests.

In addition to making connections with current events, Trey made connections between his own cultural identify and the guest speaker, Ms. Daise, as demonstrated in his guest speaker reflection:

The art of storytelling is very important in African American culture because it passes down for generations. My family loves telling stories over and over again.

They told me the same story Ms. Daise told about the African woman flying away with her baby on the back.

Trey connected Ms. Daise's presentation of storytelling to his own culture. He shared that the stories in his family are passed down generations. Trey shared a story that his father often tells for his family storytelling assignment. In Trey's family story his father stated:

I give Trey consent to use this story. This story is about my father. There was a tree that was rotten. It was an area he was trying to develop on some property. He did not have the equipment to remove the stump. But he got up every day and dug around this tree for probably over a year trying to get the stump up. Finally, one day a gentleman pulled up with a backhoe connected to his truck. He said, "man I seen you out here every day for probably a year trying to dig up this stump. I had to stop cause I got to help you." So, he pulls off the backhoe and rips the stump up in ten minutes not even. Puts it on the back of his dozer and hauls it off. My father is so thankful. He offered a little bit of money he had. Turns out the guy wouldn't

take it. All he wanted was a pack of cigarettes and a case of beer. So, moral of the story is don't give up even if you look kind of crazy doing some of the things you need to do in life. You never know when help is right around the corner.

Trey's family story demonstrates the importance of perseverance and continual hard work. Trey shared in his survey his enjoyment of the family storytelling assignment. Trey wrote:

I really enjoyed the project where we recorded our families story. It was cool to hear everyone elses story and get to share our own. I liked that we got to share who we are with everyone in a different way. I chose my dad because he always tells me the story about my grandpa. He loves telling it because he wants me to know never to give up.

Trey stated that he liked sharing who he was with his classmates and learning about his classmates' cultures.

In addition to having the ability to share his culture, Trey indicated that student's choice and voice were important aspects of the study. In his interview, Trey identified choice and having a voice as an important part of the course:

Ms. Hostetler: How was academic success encouraged during this study?

Trey: By all the options we got.

Ms. Hostetler: Could you give me some examples?

Trey: I liked I had a choice for what I could read, it made me actually want to read it.

Ms. Hostetler: Is there anything else?

Trey: We got to choose the character's tale we read and dressed up as.

Ms. Hostetler: Great, anything else?

Trey: I also liked when we choose as a class what we wanted to learn.

Ms. Hostetler: Can you tell me more about that?

Trey: We made that list of what we wanted to learn and at first I thought you were just asking, I didn't think you would actually stick to that list.

Trey's interview revealed that having a choice in what he could read was very important to him, along with having input on what was covered within the course.

Trey communicated through digital platforms regularly during the study. During the study Trey sent 32 emails, 7 Schoology messages, and 11 text messages. His communication often expressed his concerns and worries. In one email Trey shared his concerns about COVID19, he wrote, "I am really scared. COVID cases are rising and the school board is talking about opening five days a week. I'm not sure I can handle this. What will happen if we open five days a week?" In another email communication Trey wrote, "I'm over-whelmed. I was out for 14 days. How am I going to get caught up in all of these classes? Plus like my mom was really sick from COVID19 and I was so worried. I didn't do anything during my 14 days out but help take care of my mom." All of Trey's electronic communications centered on concerns over his physical safety and his academics suffering because of COVID19 quarantining. Trey was quarantined for 14 days of the study.

Despite his worries, Trey indicated that the blended learning environment was particularly helpful, during the uncertainty of the COVID19 pandemic. Trey stated in his interview:

When I was quarantined the first time I was really worried about how I was going to stay caught up on work. I wasn't sick and knew missing 14 days would hurt my grades. However, the online set-up you had really helped me. Like when we had the Socratic Seminar, you had me join live with Teams. I was able to hear and speak with the class like I was there.

Trey shared in his interview that blended learning helped him stay connected to the class even though he physically could not be present. He still had access to all of the class handouts, videos, files, and could live stream into the classroom if he wanted to do so.

In Trey's final follow-up interview he could not define culturally relevant pedagogy. When asked, he stated, "I really don't know." However, when asked to his thoughts on the blended learning environment he stated:

The blended learning was really helpful for me. I was out a lot and it kept me on track. I also really like being able to write out my responses on a blog or when we could respond on video. I prefer that to classroom discussion. I like to have more time to think, you know.

Trey, in his interview, explained his perception of the blended learning environment. He shared that he found blended learning helpful and easier to use. When asked in his final interview if there is anything else he would like to share, Trey responded, "I think that even though people are overloaded with tech stuff, that the way we used the website was very helpful. I really liked how we did both. I think teachers should consider that even when we go back to five days a week." Trey's statement revealed that he sees value in having both a technology and face-to-face component of courses. His final thoughts were asking teachers to consider a balanced approach of technology and in-person instruction.

Calico

Calico entered the classroom each day wearing a different rainbow or Trans flag cape. They were often concerned about their academic performance during the school year. They would often email me messages asking about their work. Despite Calico's concern about their work, they performed well in class (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Calico's Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	100%
Middle English History Test	100%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	98%
Canterbury Tales Test	100%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	100%

Calico made all *A*'s on their quiz and test grades. In addition to making all *A*'s on their quizzes and tests, Calico also received all *A*'s on their projects and papers.

One assignment that Calico excelled at was the Chaucer speed dating assignment. Calico is a member of the local community theatre and was very excited about the speed dating assignment. During class when the assignment was introduced, they stated, "We get to act? I love acting. I can't wait to become a character. We actually performed *The Canterbury Tales* before in a youth production." Calico became the Franklin for the speed dating activity. They arrived in a blue hat, red bathroom robe, a fake gray beard, wig, and riding a stick horse. Calico was heard saying during their speed dating exchanges, "I like to host parties with lots of food and wine." When asked in their

interview about an activity that you learned from, Calico referenced the speed dating activity, stating, “the speed dating thing made me really learn about a characterization. I studied my character in and out. I had to know not just what he looked like, but how he would talk and act.” Calico shared that the act of performing their character required them to master the concept of characterization. They had to know their character so well that they could respond as their character when asked any questions.

In addition to experiencing academic success, Calico demonstrated multiple times the ability to question a text and identify inequities that exist within a text or event. During a classroom discussion following the reading of “The General Prologue” from *The Canterbury Tales*, Calico questioned the text and author:

Calico: It’s like Chaucer is woke about social class issues, but then says “heathen Turk” in the text.

Bryan: Yes, probably because England was super Christian and tried to Christianize places. It shows his religious bias.

Calico: It is just frustrating. He’s like, social class is bad, but if you’re not male or Christian than you don’t matter. Like with the Knight, he makes his son a party body with nothing to worry about. Like rich kids are spoiled brats. But, then only has like two female characters and no characters that are any other race than White. He continually goes on about social class.

Mrs. Hostetler: Why do you think that is?

Bryan: I think it is a bit because of the time period and the fact that he is British.

Tanaisha: I think time period is a factor. But, it is also kind of like he can’t see outside of his own issues. It’s kind of like some White people today that focus on

social classes as the biggest issues. They don't see race as an issue for some reason. They just think that social class is the reason for problems. Like I have heard some of my White family members say we don't get money and we haven't had everything handed to us. They don't get it. They don't understand how being White gives them advantages even though they struggled.

Calico questioned Chaucer's bias and pointed out inequities within the text. Calico explained that gender and religious prejudice exists within the text.

Calico continued to question Chaucer and his text, especially when they discussed "The Wife of Bath's Tale":

Tanaisha: Chaucer is sexist.

Andrea: He makes the Wife of Bath loud and outgoing, but he is still sexist.

Mrs. Hostetler: How do you know he is being sexist?

Calico: He is straight stereotyping women in that whole part the Wife of Bath says that women can't keep a secret. I can keep a secret.

Again, Calico expressed that the author is biased towards women within his text. They point out how he stereotypes women by having the Wife of Bath state that women cannot keep secrets. Beyond gender inequities, Calico began to question race within the text.

Calico continued to question Chaucer within her blog on *The Canterbury Tales*, writing, "Chaucer leaves out the perspectives of people that are not White. It makes me question why their perspectives are left out." Calico's reflection demonstrates that they began to think about perspectives that were missing from Chaucer's text and question why the perspectives were missing.

Calico successfully questioned texts and discussed inequities throughout the study. In their blog reflection on the episode of the “The Office”, Calico wrote:

A Marxist lens is present throughout this entire episode. Especially when Dwight and Andy fight for second in charge. Dwight said he is older and wiser. Andy kept trying to assert his power by stating “I’m a director.” It is sad that all the men were fighting for the power and the female characters don’t hold any manager positions.

In their blog, Calico identified power struggles within the text and the inequity that no women within the show have manager positions. Calico continued their analysis and critical thinking of texts with their book club. Calico selected *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Universe* to read for their book club. In a blog response, Calico demonstrated their analysis and critical thinking about the text, writing, “At the end of the novel Ari discovers who he really is, but that doesn’t mean he won’t face hard things. As we saw through Dante, as a gay male of color there will always be people who question and stereotype him.” In this blog, Calico is able to identify that gay men of color will face stereotypes and inequities during their lives. They were able to understand that although the main character of their novel has discovered his true identity, he will still face injustice.

Calico expressed that their book club book was an important part of their experience within the class, multiple times during the research study. In an interview, Calico stated, “I normally hate reading because we always have to read some old text that we don’t want to read. I loved my book club book. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Universe* wasn’t old or irrelevant. I could relate to the characters and their journeys.”

Calico shared that their book club book was important to them during the study. On their survey Calico wrote, “I was pumped! I never got an option to read a LGBTQ book in school as part of a class. I felt like my community was getting represented.” *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Universe* was a book that Calico felt represented part of who they were. They stated multiple times that they could relate to the character and felt represented by having the book as an option to read. In their survey, Calico continued to share that they felt accepted through items that represented who they are. Calico on their survey wrote, “your room is the only room that I know of that proudly displays a Trans flag. This meant a lot to me. I felt my culture would not be disrespected.” Like the text, the Trans flag displayed within the classroom helped Calico feel respected and represented.

Another activity that Calico expressed affirmed their identity was when they got to share their family story. In their reflection they wrote, “I loved sharing my creepy family story. It was cool to share part of our family stories that we hear all of the time. It was like sharing part of what makes me, me, with my classmates and everyone did it. We don’t ever get to know each other like that.” Calico explained that sharing their family story helped express part of who they are with their classmates. Calico’s reflection demonstrated that they understand that family stories shape parts of their identity. The story Calico selected for their mother to share was about their brother seeing a ghost. In their family story, Calico’s mother stated:

This is a story about Calico’s great grandfather and her brother. So, when Michael was about two years old he had an imaginary friend he played with in the back yard. Um. He played music with him and his name was Wilson. We had no idea

where he got Wilson from. We thought he got it from watching the Tom Hank's movie with the volleyball. Um, but he played with Wilson every day in the backyard. We asked him where Wilson would go when he came, in and he said that Wilson would go into the woods and he would play the banjo. So um, Michael, had his friend for about six months, and um, one day he was over at my mother in-law's house and she had just put a picture in the frame of her father on the table. And Michael walked up to the frame and he said, "hey you have a picture of my Wilson." And she stopped and looked at him and said, "what do you mean?" He said, "that is my friend Wilson that plays music with me. He wears overalls, big glasses, and big hat." She said, "that's who plays in the backyard with you?" He said, "yep that's my Wilson." We had no idea that was his Wilson. His name was Robert Wilson, but he went by Bob. It was a couple months later that my uncle died and Michael said, "Wilson went away." We believe that he was here, waiting for his son to take him to heaven.

Calico's story demonstrated a part of their background that believes in spirits. In their reflection, Calico wrote:

I picked this story my mom tells because it is a cool story, but also shows that my family and I believe in spirits and the fact that there is an afterlife. My mom is very Christian and heaven is important to her and me. We don't agree on everything about the path to heaven, but we do believe in an afterlife.

Calico explained that they selected this story because it shared part of who they are. It demonstrated that spirituality is an important part of their family dynamic. Calico often expressed the importance of sharing lived experiences within the classroom.

In their follow up interview, Calico was asked directly to explain culturally relevant pedagogy. Calico defined culturally relevant pedagogy as, “allowing the experiences and lives of the students into the classroom. One example is when we did the book club books. You taught us the required stories from the district, but then you connected it to books that represent so many kids in many different ways.” They perceive an important aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy as the curriculum connecting to the students’ lived experiences. They referenced the books clubs, again noting the importance of students being represented and reflected within texts. When asked to explain or define blended learning, Calico responded, “blended learning to me is just using technology with the stuff we do in class.” On their survey when asked about technology, Calico wrote, “Technology did not make a difference to me in how I learned. I could do with or without it.” During the research study Calico sent 13 emails, 1 Schoology message, and 11 text messages to me, the instructor. Their emails often shared when they were going to be absent from class and asked for clarification on assignments.

When asked in an interview if there was anything else that Calico wanted to share or say, they responded, “I loved the way we did things this school year, I wish we did this more in all my classes.” Although, Calico’s final request was not extremely detailed, they asked for more classes to emulate what occurred in this study.

Stoney

Always determined to improve her ability, Stoney made sure to take the front seat of class on her in-person learning days. Stoney received all A’s on her quizzes and tests during the research study (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Stoney’s Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	96%
Middle English History Test	94%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	98%
Canterbury Tales Test	98%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	98%

Stoney also received all *A*'s on her projects and papers. She was persistent in re-writing her essays to improve her writing ability. For example, on her literary lenses essay for her book club text Stoney received a 94% on the first submission of her essay. She continued to submit her essay and make revisions three additional times. She stated in class that she wanted to improve her writing, and she knew she had to keep revising to get better at writing.

During the speed dating project, Stoney was the Knight. She created her own costume using a pillow case, markers, and cardboard. She entered the classroom in character. She told stories of her crusades during her speed dating exchanges. She was able to answer all questions in a chivalrous manner. In her reflection she wrote, "I enjoyed the speed dating lesson because of the opportunity we had to dress up like a character from the novel. I liked making a costume and becoming a character. I had to know my character in and out. I read his tale and the prologue multiple times." Stoney explained that she had to master the content and characterization in order to become the Knight. She shared that she read the text multiple times to achieve mastery of the content.

Stoney demonstrated that she was able to question and identify inequities within texts. After watching an episode of “The Office” Stoney detailed some gender inequities within the show. In a class discussion Stoney stated, “Females were not even an option for Michael’s number two in the show. Only White men were his options. Not to mention how much they were sexualized within the episode.” She explained that women were not given any positions of power and were unfairly sexualized within the episode. Stoney was also able to identify inequities within her book club book (Figure 4.3).

Throughout *The Marrow Thieves* the lens of Marxist criticism is seen frequently. The main character Frenchie goes on a journey of survival after being separated from his family. These events took place due to Frenchie being indigenous. He was automatically apart of the lowest class because he was being hunted and had to stay away from the recruiters. Frenchie found his way along with many others that have lived in the woods not being able to live a normal comfortable life. The whites in the society's goal is to get their dreams back. The indigenous and other raced people are not seen as humans but as the potential solution to the government's experiments.

After Frenchie was found by the campers everyone had a story to tell. The leader, Migg told of how the schools that were used came to be. As he told his stories he described on how the indigenous downfall progressed "But we lost a lot mostly because we got sick with new germs and then when we were on our knees with fever, they decided they liked us there, and that's when they opened the first schools." The schools were built to do experiments on the indigenous people in order to find ways for the whites to dream again. In this society the whites or people that can pass for being white holds the power. The government of Canada sends out recruiters to hunt and even work with the indigenous at some points to capture ones they deem more valuable. This has a big effect on how the indigenous interact with people of their own status because they can never be too careful. Frenchie was betrayed by some of his own indigenous people that he thought was just like him, yet they were working for the government "I couldn't believe it I'd been lulled to complacency by the color of skin and an accent that made home feel real". The government has control over the overall systems and cities but they do not know all the answers. One indigenous person that was captured through the scientist at the schools for a cure as they ran test on her "Minerva hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thigh throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that is when she opened her mouth. That is when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That's when she brought the whole thing down". Minerva was so powerful they could not tear down her old spirit/language and therefore they could not control her. This gave the indigenous people a upper hand because they had someone they knew the schools could not handle. Unfortunately, she passed during a failed rescue attempt leaving the government back in power. However, the indigenous are left with hope but nevertheless powerless.

Although the Canada government holds the power over society they also depend on the indigenous for their dreams. Which gives the indigenous a small portion of power but the indigenous still do not have power over there lives or wellbeing. They must live every day in society watching they're back hoping to not be captured while struggling to survive. As the indigenous people grow in population progressing in their adapted lifestyle, they learn to maneuver. After being oppressed for having the luxury of dreaming the indigenous have created a council that supports their people and welcomes others found and in need. At the end of the story hope and potential power is given to the indigenous when they find a young man that fluently speaks cree and could be the key. Subsequently, the Canada government still held the power in the end politically and socially, but the indigenous had found grounded mind building up eachother.

Figure 4.3 Stoney's Book Club Essay

In her essay Stoney identified who holds power within the text. She explained that the White Canadian government officials hold power and the indigenous people face many injustices.

In addition to questioning texts, Stoney was able to understand the importance of her experiences and background. On her survey, when asked what were there lessons you enjoyed, Stoney wrote: “I enjoyed the family storytelling assignment. I learned that storytelling gives life purpose and gives people something to believe in. Stories from families carry inside of us and we carry them on. I carry my family’s stories with me.” Stoney was able to explain why storytelling is important and that she carries her family’s stories as part of her identity. Stoney’s family story was a story her grandmother told her often, her grandmother stated:

Okay. When I was little my grandmother used to tell stories of how she couldn’t sleep with her feet covered because the spirits would wake her up at night by tickling her feet. And they won’t touch your feet if they are uncovered, but they’ll touch your feet through something. That is why she always left them uncovered. And we always thought is was a bunch of malarkey. So, one summer night, I was probably about eight years old, she came over and she spent the night. I had two twin beds in my room and she snored a lot. So I didn’t sleep well. I had creaky floors, and my bed would creak when it moved. So that night, I was laying on my side so that I could look over at her bed and her feet were sticking out of the covers. I heard a creaking sound, and when I looked, the end of her bed was bending down, like someone was sitting on it. That’s when I knew she was telling the truth, that spirits tickled her feet.

Stoney’s family story explains a belief in spirits that her grandmother experienced. In her reflection Stoney stated that she selected this story for two reasons, writing:

I selected my grandmother's story because it is one that she tells all of our family members and it is a story that I love to hear her tell. The second reason I selected this story is because my grandmother is the one telling the story. I love her and she is a big part of me.

Stoney shared that her grandmother's story is important because her grandmother is a major influence on Stoney's identity.

Multiple times during interviews, Stoney shared that student voice was important. In response to the survey question, what did you learn from this study, Stoney wrote, "I learned my voice matters and I need to share it." Stoney expressed that her voice, student voice, matters. It not only matters, but Stoney recognized the importance of her voice being shared and heard by others. In a follow-up interview Stoney again expressed the importance of student voice being heard and validated by their teachers:

Ms. Hostetler: I noticed that you mentioned in some of your surveys and interviews that you felt comfortable sharing your thoughts. What made you feel this way?

Stoney: Our classroom feels like a place where all of us can openly say what we are thinking, listen to each other, and have real conversations. You listen to us and let us listen to each other. I don't feel that I will be treated bad if I say what I feel. I realize the importance of being heard and how often I don't feel heard in school.

Ms. Hostetler: How is feeling comfortable speaking in class helpful?

Stoney: It helps because I can be the real me. I can learn more when I am not afraid to ask questions or to express what I think. I get more out of what we are doing because I care more too.

Stoney's thoughts reveal that the teacher listening to students' voices helped her feel safe and comfortable which led her to be successful within the class. She expressed that when she can share her true identity she learns more in the class.

In her follow-up interview when asked about her perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy, Stoney quickly shared her thoughts. Stoney defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

Learning about different perspectives and questioning everything. Like really everything, I can't even watch a commercial now without questioning what is in it and why, who isn't present. We read books that reflected different people in the classroom and we questioned everything. We learned that storytelling is all around us and in many cultures, including my own. Using culturally relevant pedagogy made me feel comfortable speaking my mind and having open discussion.

Stoney's perception of culturally relevant pedagogy focused on questioning texts and listening to different perspectives. She explained that culturally relevant pedagogy made her feel comfortable within a classroom.

Stoney defined blended learning as "mixing together technology and in-person lessons." She stated in a follow-up interview that "technology helped me keep in contact with you and the videos online really helped me understand what we were learning." During the research study, Stoney sent 19 emails, 2 Schoology messages, and 3 text messages. Stoney's messages communicated when she would be absent and asked for a more detailed explanation on assignments.

When asked in her final interview if there was anything else she would like to say or share, Stoney responded, “I want teachers to know how important it is for students to feel safe and accepted in a classroom. Most the time I don’t talk in classes because I don’t feel comfortable. I feel out of place. I learn better when I feel safe in a room.” Stoney’s final thoughts focused on the importance of students feeling safe, accepted, and comfortable within a classroom. She equated safety and comfort with an optimal learning environment.

Tanashia

When entering the classroom, Tanashia would take out her pink, fuzzy tablet, rainbow pencil case full of highlighters, and her favorite black ink pen. She often expressed that G2 pens were the superior pens. Tanashia would open her pink fuzzy tablet each day to reveal the abundance of notes that she took on the texts we were studying in class. Tanashia was successful at mastering the content presented during the study (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Tanashia’s Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	88%
Middle English History Test	86%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	100%
Canterbury Tales Test	94%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	94%

Tanashia had high grades on all of her tests and quizzes. She was also successful on her projects and papers. For *The Canterbury Tales* speed dating assignment, Tanaisha

became the squire. She arrived in class in a green tunic and grey leggings. She carried a small flute with her. When asked questions during the speed dating exchanges, she was flirtatious and randomly would recite poetry or play her flute. She demonstrated that she knew her character well.

When asked why she believed the characterization speed dating activity was successful. Tanaisha responded:

Because you didn't just throw it at us and say get this done. You made us, read and fill out a chart. Then we had to make a video real quick on our character.

After all that, we then got to dress up. I didn't want to be the only one not dressed up. You even were extra when we were coming into class. You wouldn't respond to Ms. H. You just said, that's not my name and was acting like the Wife of Bath.

Tanashia demonstrated that she felt successful because she had time to work through the process of becoming her character. She had time to read and re-read. She had time to complete a chart detailing the many different traits of her character. Tanashia expressed that characterization was scaffolded, which led to her success.

Tanashia exemplified the ability to question and identify inequities within texts and current events in multiple discussions, blog posts, essays, and reflections. During a discussion of "The General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*, Tanaisha identified inequities and questioned Chaucer:

Calico: It's like Chaucer is woke about social class issues, but then says "heathen Turk" in the text.

Bryan: Yes, probably because England was super Christian and tried to Christianize places. It shows his religious bias.

Calico: It is just frustrating. He's like, social class is bad, but if you're not male or Christian than you don't matter. Like with the Knight, he makes his son a party body with nothing to worry about. Like rich kids are spoiled brats. But, then only has, like, two female characters and no characters that are any other race than White. He continually goes on about social class.

Mrs. Hostetler: Why do you think that is?

Bryan: I think it is a bit because of the time period and the fact that he is British.

Tanaisha: I think time period is a factor. But, it is also kind of like he can't see outside of his own issues. It's kind of like some White people today that focus on social classes as the biggest issues. They don't see race as an issue for some reason. They just think that social class is the reason for problems. Like I have heard some of my White family members say we don't get money and we haven't had everything handed to us. They don't get it. They don't understand how being White gives them advantages even though they struggled.

Calico detailed the inequities that exist within the text *The Canterbury Tales*. Calico focuses on gender and religious prejudice that exist within the text. Tanaisha expanded the discussion and applied the inequities within the text to current issues in the society. She explained how Chaucer is oblivious to White privilege, in a way similar to members of her own family.

In another discussion focused on "The Wife of Bath's Tale," Tanaisha questioned Chaucer and his portrayal of gender:

Tanaisha: Chaucer is sexist.

Andrea: He makes the Wife of Bath loud and outgoing, but he is still sexist.

Mrs. Hostetler: How do you know he is being sexist?

Calico: He is straight stereotyping women in that whole part the Wife of Bath says that women can't keep a secret. I can keep a secret.

Bryan: But, women in that time really didn't ever get a voice or were main characters in a text.

Tanaisha: He sexualizes the Wife of Bath. She is outspoken, yes. She is in control of her own affairs. So, it might seem progressive. But, he makes her focused on sex, puts her all in red, a lusty color, and implies that she has killed all of her husbands for money. It's like he is using her more as a warning. Like look how women act if they can have control of their own lives.

Mrs. Hostetler: Can someone appear progressive or feminist but still have sexist beliefs?

Tanaisha: Yes, sexism is so ingrained into us because of how we are raised and we see it all through media. Like my mom is all about being independent. But, she still does all the housework and takes care of the kids. My dad doesn't help at all.

In the discussion, Tanaisha identified sexism within the text. She questioned Chaucer's intent. She explained how gender inequities are still part of our world, citing the media we encounter and her own family's dynamic.

Tanaisha was also able to demonstrate the ability to question and identify inequities within events that occurred during the study. The next class after the assault on the capitol, Tanaisha started a classroom discussion:

Tanaisha: Can we talk about what happened? Like openly. I feel like all the teachers are acting like nothing happened.

Mrs. Hostetler: Absolutely. We can't pretend it didn't happen.

Tanaisha: As a biracial person, I am having a hard time. I am hurt. I am disgusted.

I'm disgusted by the difference between the BLM protestor treatment and the treatment of the rioters yesterday. If they were Black people they would have never made it to the capitol without being shot. Where were the police?

Trey: The same place Miley Cyrus is when Hannah Montana performs.

Bryan: My family is Republican, to the most inner being. But what I saw yesterday was not Republican behavior. It was wrong. So many Republicans just condemned BLM movements for looting and rioting. And what they did was worse than looting stores, it was attacking democracy.

Calico: Even my crazy conservative parents stated that was too much. I was so angry at them. I have been trying to show them how this was building up to this point.

Andrea: This was a display of White supremacy and privilege.

Tanaisha: Did anyone else see the video of the people there re-enacting George Floyd's death?

Mrs. Hostetler: What?

Tanaisha: Yeah, I saw a video of them reenacting his death and laughing. I also saw pictures of a noose. It was terrifying. I was scared, hurt, and then angry.

Bryan: It's like how did we get here?

Tanaisha: By rhetoric and consequences of rhetoric going unchecked by Trump. By systemic racism going unchecked. By White supremacy not being challenged. By simple every day acts that no one calls out.

Ms. Hostetler: How do we move forward to heal and change?

Tanaisha: We all need to learn our own bias. If we had actual accurate history taught, that might help. We need to learn how to know actual facts and understand that images and videos can be manipulated. We need to think for ourselves and not be manipulated.

Bryan: I agree, we need to soul search.

The bell rang. All students remained in their seats.

Ms. Hostetler: I know this is a hard day and honestly, I don't know what to say. I want to just hug all of you. I don't know the right words right now. I do have faith in your generation. I do believe y'all will heal our nation and make great change. Even though yesterday's event took away some hope, y'all give me more hope today than I had all night. If you need to come back to my room anytime today, just do so. I will take care of emailing your teachers.

This discussion was started by Tanaisha. She and her classmates were able to identify a major societal inequity that occurred. Tanaisha questioned, responded, analyzed, and critiqued the event. She led a conversation with her peers about the inequities she noticed and shared her reactions to the event. She prompted and expanded a critical conversation around an event that happened within contemporary society during the study.

In addition to classroom discussions, Tanaisha showed her ability to think critically in her blogs. For her book club book Tanaisha selected *The Marrow Thieves*. She consistently posted blogs that questioned the text or identified inequities. In her first blog, she quickly identified that indigenous people were facing inequities, writing:

A view being portrayed in the text is one of victim and prey so to speak. I say prey because a certain group, the natives, are forced into a constant state of fear and are portrayed as animalistic. Not real people just something that they use for their own gain.

Her blog identified that the text presents a power structure. She specified that the natives are being mistreated. Again, Tanaisha demonstrated her ability to identify injustices within a text.

Tanaisha shared that she felt her culture and identities were affirmed in simple conversations and the décor around the classroom, writing, “You always made connections to our home lives with examples you gave in discussions.” During the introductory discussion to *The Canterbury Tales*, Tanaisha quickly was able to make connections to ideas presented within the text:

Ms. Hostetler: Write down spiritual locations that are important to you.

Ms. Hostetler: Now, who would like to share spiritual locations important to you.

Tanaisha: My church. I’m Baptist and church is really important to me.

Bryan: My church, I’m Catholic like the characters in *Canterbury Tales*.

Calico: I have a tree in my backyard that is a spiritual place to me. I go there and meditate and read.

Ms. Hostetler: Has anyone gone on a spiritual journey?

Tanaisha: Praise dancing is a spiritual journey.

Bryan: What is praise dancing?

Tanaisha: It is when you dance to music, your dance is a way to worship. It’s like you go on a journey with your mind and body to connect with God.

Bryan: That's cool.

In the discussion above, Tanaisha connected the spiritual journey described in the text to her own spiritual journey of praise dancing. She made a connection from the text to a part of her own life.

Tanaisha also expressed that she enjoyed sharing her identity with her classmates. On her survey she wrote, "I like sharing parts of me with my classmates. Like we did with the poetry Where I Am From stuff at the start of school and the family story telling thing we did." Tanaisha enjoyed sharing stories with her classmates. For her family storytelling assignment, she had her father share a story. Her father stated:

In a person's life they often look up to certain person. I looked up to my older sister. She was like my idol, like Spiderman or Superman to any other kids. She was a basketball and soccer player. So, as a kid I did the same thing, I played basketball, soccer, and wanted to do all the same things. I wanted to be a little bit better than her. But, that didn't happen. I always loved to see her play basketball. At half time at her games, I was always shooting ball until they came back out. She went to college and was the best top scoring athlete. One awful day, she wrecked and was killed. I thought I would never be ok. But, I kept playing basketball. During my youth league after her passing, they gave out an award. I worked hard and got the award. I thought of my sister. I knew she would be proud. Moral of the story is never stop going for your dream no matter what, cause you can achieve it.

Tanaisha's father told a story about how much he looked up to his sister and the importance of working hard at your dreams even when you face very difficult times.

Tanaisha in her reflection stated, “I picked my dad to tell the story about my aunt because it shows that even when some of the hardest events happen in your life, you keep pushing through. That is what my family does, especially my dad.” Tanaisha’s reflection demonstrated the importance of her father to her identity and her concept of perseverance.

Tanaisha often expressed that she felt her voice mattered. She engaged actively in class discussions and conversations. Tanashia wrote on her survey, “I understand that my voice matters and I can make a difference. It opened up activism in myself.” Her survey response demonstrated that by the end of the study, Tanaisha understood that her voice can make a difference, that she could make a difference.

At the beginning of the study, Tanashia was very vocal about her dissatisfaction with blended learning. She often expressed how overwhelmed she was, explaining she babysits all of the time and her teachers are using the blended model to assign ridiculous amounts of homework. However, by the end of the study Tanashia explained that blended learning was helpful within our classroom. Tanashia wrote on her survey:

Using Schoology and teams during our at home days helped me still feel connected to the class. We weren’t just reading on our own. We had to respond to each other’s blogs. We had to make videos and watch each other’s videos. We could join live video sessions on Teams every Friday where we could see and talk to each other. My favorite activities were Friday Teams meetings, because after Ms. H checked in on us we did poetry and open mic. I liked learning in a blended learning environment.

On her survey she identified that the blended learning environment helped her feel connected when she wasn't with students. She felt that she still was able to make connections with classmates despite being not physically together. During the research study, Tanashia sent 29 emails, 17 Schoology messages, and 11 text messages. Her digital correspondence focused on submitting assignments, getting clarification on assignments, and asking for extensions.

When asked in a follow up interview about her thoughts on culturally relevant pedagogy, Tanashia defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

A way of learning that confirms students' identities. We used culturally relevant pedagogy all school year in this class. From the poetry we did about ourselves, to when we looked at texts like *The Canterbury Tales* and questioned why they were written. We got to read so many different perspectives. Plus, we got to share ourselves with our family stories.

When asked a follow-up question about how did it make you feel engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy, Tanashia responded, "seen. I felt like who I am mattered in school." Tanashia's perception of culturally relevant pedagogy centered on students' identities, sharing their own and learning about others' perspectives. She expressed that culturally relevant pedagogy made her feel visible within the school.

When asked if there was anything else she wanted to share she stated, "I think representation is important in classes and making sure every student feels represented." Tanashia's final words were to encourage educators to think about the importance of representations within their classes.

Andrea

Often wearing Adidas joggers and a school t-shirt, Andrea always made sure to sit in the second row of the classroom. When asked why she sits in the second row of the classroom Andrea responded, “It is the best seat to see the board, hear my classmates, and hear you.” Andrea experienced perfect academic success during the study, maintaining a 100% average. She made perfect scores on all of her quizzes and tests (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Andrea’s Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	100%
Middle English History Test	100%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	100%
Canterbury Tales Test	100%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	100%

Andrea clearly mastered the content of the course. Not only was she able to pass quizzes and tests with perfect scores, she also demonstrated her ability to master difficult content, such as the medieval feudal system, through projects and papers (Figure 4.4):

REPORTER 2: And we're back. Let's begin with a tragic story about a man named Thomas Becket. In December of the year 1119, King Henry II appointed Thomas Becket of Canterbury to the position of archbishop. King Henry II was hoping that appointing a friend to this position would give him the upper hand in the church. Becket, however, fell in love with the church, and began to side with the pope instead of his friend, the King of England.

REPORTER 1: King Henry II was so mad at Becket that in December of 1170, four of his knights went into Becket's cathedral and murdered him. King Henry II was blamed, and this incident weakened the power of the king and strengthened the power of the church. In 1173, Thomas Becket became Saint Thomas the Martyr.

REPORTER 2: Yes, what a story. This story led to one of the greatest poets, Geoffrey Chaucer, to write *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer is known as "the father of English poetry." Before him, most important documents were written in Latin, and not English. He is responsible the switch to writing in English. He wrote the *Canterbury Tales* in 1387, which tells the story of a group taking a pilgrimage to Saint Thomas's shrine in Canterbury.

REPORTER 1: What a great story. Moving on, let's talk about the Magna Carta.

REPORTER 2: This document was very important, because it became the basis for English constitutional law. It stated that everyone was subject to law, even the King. King John was forced to sign this document in 1215.

REPORTER 1: That's right John. Later, the year 1337 would mark the beginning of the Hundred years war between England and France. This war started because of disagreements over rights to land, economic conflict, and claims to the throne of France. England was unsuccessful in the end. It lasted 116 years, ending in 1453, and between 2-3 million were killed as a result. In my opinion, the war may not have been worth it.

REPORTER 2: I agree Bob, and sadly the tragedy wasn't over. The Bubonic Plague, or Black Death hit England in 1348. This highly contagious disease killed roughly one third of Europe.

REPORTER 1: This devastating pandemic brought an end to the Feudal system. The high death toll caused a labor shortage, giving many serfs their freedom.

REPORTER 2: Well, this brings us to the end of the summary of the Middle English time period. Please join us next time when we talk about the Renaissance.

Figure 4.4 Andrea's This Just in Script

In figure 4.4 Andrea creatively demonstrated she learned that the feudal system was an important part of Middle English life.

Beyond content mastery, Andrea critiqued, questioned, and identified inequities within texts. In a reflection of "the Knight's Tale," Andrea wrote:

Gender issues are a major inequity in *The Canterbury Tales*. There is a rape scene depicted in the Knight's tale and at the end the Knight is happily married, after he

raped a woman. This made me very angry and upset. Chaucer clearly gives power to males in his text.

Andrea was upset about the rape described within the text. She identifies that Chaucer gives power to males in his text by having a rape scene occur and the knight living happily ever after at the ending of the story, despite his raping of a woman.

For her book club book, Andrea selected *Enrique's Journey*. She explained why she selected this text on her survey. Andrea wrote, "I picked I because it sounded like I could relate to it. I was right. Enrique's journey had similarities to my parents' experiences coming to the US. I liked reading about Enrique and I could connect to so much of what he said." Andrea had a connection with her text and was still able to question, critique, and identify inequities within the text. In her blog response, Andrea identifies who holds the power within the text, writing:

The characters that hold the most privilege within this section is the Mexican police force. The police officers are so corrupt that instead of doing their job of helping and protecting people they go around robbing and beating people. This leaves immigrants like Enrique powerless.

She identified that the Mexican police have all the power over the children and immigrants fleeing their homes for a better life. She showed that the police are corrupt and hurting people, demonstrating the injustices the immigrants face within the text.

Andrea continued to question and critique texts throughout the entire study. She used a feminist lens to analyze an episode of "The Office." After viewing an episode of "The Office," Andrea wrote, "a feminist lens can be applied to this episode. The most appalling example is when breastfeeding is sexualized in the workplace by the one male

co-worker. He is not reprimanded for taking a picture of the female character's breast when pumping." Andrea explained how a woman is sexualized within her work environment for pumping breast milk and the male co-worker is not reprimanded for his inappropriate behavior. She identified the unfair treatment the female worker is experiencing within the episode.

Another area in which Andrea excelled was on her family storytelling assignment and reflection. Andrea shared her father's story about his childhood pet, a chicken named Pichupichon. Her father stated:

I give you permission to record this story.

Te voy a contar la historia de Pichupichon, pero antes de contarte quiero darte una introducción de mi familia. Cuando yo era pequeño, en mi hogar no teníamos mascotas ya que mi mamá no las permitía. Adicionalmente, en mi casa no se practicaban deportes durante el año escolar para que nos enfocáramos en los estudios de la escuela. Esos detalles hacen esta historia, aunque triste, más increíble.

Cuando mi hermana esta como en el 3er grado, ella decidió participar en la carrera del pavo. A toda la familia nos sorprendió ya que ninguno de nosotros corría habitualmente. Yo no recuerdo haber ido a ver la carrera. Yo creo que nadie en la familia fue a ver la carrera, pero lo que si recuerdo es cuando mi hermana llego a mi casa con un premio por haber llegado en tercer lugar. El premio era un pollito de pascua que son pintados. Cuando llegamos a la casa, mi mama tomo la decisión de dejarnos tener el pollito. Yo pienso que ella nos dejó porque lo más seguro ella pensó que no iba a sobrevivir.

Mi hermana y yo cuidamos mucho del pollito. El creció en el medio baño de visita en una jaula compuesta de una canasta para poner la ropa invertida. El piso estaba compuesto de papel de periódico. A medida que pasaron las semanas, el pollito creció. Eventualmente lo tuvimos que mover al patio dentro de una jaula de alambres que mi papa fabricó. En este momento el pollito, ahora llamado Pichupichon, era parte de mi familia.

Después de anos de tener a Pichupichon como mascota de la familia, a mi mama le dio un tipo de enfermedad en la piel. Ella indico que era causada por las gallinas. Para que ella se mejorara, decidimos llevar a nuestra mascota a una finca de unos familiares en Sabana Grande. Ahí vivió el resto de su vida con otras gallina, hasta que la cuidadora unos anos mas tardes, falleció.

Desafortunadamente, cuando ella falleció, mi abuela se encargo de hacer caldo de todas las gallinas que ella tenía incluyendo a Pichupichon.

Después de muchos años mi hermana sigue corriendo para mantenerse en forma.

Anuque ella no entrana para competencias, su ejercicio típico es correr varias veces a la semana 4 millas en treinta minutos. (Transcribed by Andrea)

Andrea recorded her father telling the story in Spanish, the way he tells it to her. She wrote in her reflection, “I chose my father because he is a really good storyteller, and he used to tell many stories about growing up in Puerto Rico. I asked him to tell this particular story because he would tell it to my sister and I a lot. He would always make us laugh.” Andrea shared that her father’s story always entertained her sister and her. It brought them joy and gave them insight into their father’s childhood. In an interview, Andrea stated that she enjoyed the family storytelling assignment, stating, “I enjoyed the

family storytelling thing because I got to share part of who I am with my classmates. I also got to learn so much from them about who they are and who their family is.” Andrea expressed in the interview that she enjoyed sharing her identity with her classmates and learning about them in a deeper way.

Blended learning was an environment that Andrea found beneficial. Andrea in her interview stated:

I think having both online and face-to-face learning was beneficial for all of us. It helped to have different activities that catered to all types of learners. For example, the videos online helped me understand content. The Flipgrid assignment creation was a cool way to do vocabulary. Then in-person discussions and activities like the character speed dating reinforced a lot of the content. It went hand-in-hand.

Andrea stated that blended learning helped students with different learning styles be successful. She stated that the online learning paired with the face-to-face learning made her learning more impactful. In addition to strengthening content, Andrea expressed that blended learning was useful when quarantining occurred. Andrea stated in her survey:

Ms. H even still taught us when she was quarantined. She videoed in from her home to teach us. Sometimes her dog would start panting randomly or her daughter would run in and wave to us or say something funny. She had a few distractions that made us laugh, but we still could learn.

Andrea shared that blended learning was useful because content could still be taught and shared even when the teacher was absent from the physical environment. She showed that even though it might not be perfect, blended learning allowed for the teacher to still share

content when physically distanced from students. During the research study, Andrea sent 13 emails, 0 Schoology messages, and 5 text messages.

Andrea's perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy focused on multiple aspects. Andrea defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

Understanding the importance of our own culture, learning about others, and questioning why things are the way they function or why something is written. All of the books, poetry, and literature we read we were required to be critically conscious of what was happening to understand the big picture. We were asked to really understand ourselves too.

Andrea perceived culturally relevant pedagogy as understanding identity, learning from others, and challenging texts. She explained that culturally relevant pedagogy has multiple tenants.

When asked if there was anything else she would like to share or state, Andrea stated, "I hope that culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied in multiple classes. I think it is important to include students' cultures in all classes and to challenge students to question the concepts they learn and read about." Andrea's last words for the study focused on the hope that culturally relevant pedagogy will be applied in other classes and that teachers understand how impactful including students' cultures within classes can be. She also stressed the importance of teaching students to question and challenge what they are presented.

Bryan

Bryan was a bit resistant to conversations at the beginning of the school year. During our identity poetry unit, he often stated, "why are we doing this?" or "how is this

going to help me?” Despite his resistance, Bryan was successful academically during the study (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Bryans’ Quiz and Test Grades

Middle English Vocabulary Test	65% attempt 1 92% attempt 2
Middle English History Test	86%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	94%
Canterbury Tales Test	92%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	92%

Although Bryan was not successful on his first attempt of his vocabulary test, he showed that he mastered the content on his second attempt. He also received high grades on his other quizzes and tests. Bryan also performed well on his projects and papers.

Bryan was the Miller during the speeding dating activity. He entered the classroom with a white tunic and grey tights. He drew a beard on his face using an eye liner pencil. He carried a large picture of bag pipes with him. He answered questions to his speed dating exchanges often crassly. He demonstrated by his responses and his reflection that he mastered the concept of characterization.

Bryan often would state at the beginning of the year in discussions, “everyone is given the same chances in life” or “we are all treated equally.” During the study, he was able to question a text and identify inequities within a text or event. For his book club, Bryan selected *Enrique’s Journey*. In his essay, Bryan identified a power struggle occurring within the text, writing, “There are many different groups in the story that fight

for power. The first group of people who had power is the Mexican government. Law enforcement officers' rape, rob, steal, and murder immigrants passing through their county." In his essay, Bryan points out that the Mexican government holds power over the immigrants passing through their country. He identifies injustices that the immigrants face while traveling through Mexico.

Bryan continued questioning his book club text and connecting the book to his own context, writing:

What stood out to me is realizing that the United States of American isn't the only country with strict immigration rules. I'd even argue that this book makes the case that Mexico is more challenging to immigrate through. The Mexican law enforcement has the power in this book. They act as a wolf in sheep clothing.

They rob, beat, and rape immigrants.

Again, Bryan identifies that Mexican law enforcement holds all the power within the text. He expands this thought further, understanding that immigration rules are complex in multiple countries and identifies that immigrants are the people faced with inequities.

After the inauguration of Joe Biden, students read and watched the poem, "The Hill We Climb," by Amanda Gorman. Students wrote a reflection after watching and reading the poem three times. Bryan demonstrated his ability to question racial relationships within the United States and his own experiences as a White male, writing:

I had to read the poem twice. It really made me think. Think about how I have missed things as a White guy. Think about how my experiences have been so different from what Amanda describes at times. It made me question some things I have been told growing up.

His reflection demonstrated his ability to question his own bias and how the poet's text made him question his experiences. Bryan's response showed that he was thinking critically about his perceptions of events and gaining different perspectives.

With many of the texts presented, Bryan expressed that he could not personally relate to the content or experiences of the characters. One event that sparked Bryan's interest was the Gullah storyteller. Bryan shared that he enjoyed learning about her culture. On his reflection, he added, "I like that she is keeping her culture alive instead of westernizing it. She made it enjoyable and interesting to learn about other cultures' histories." Bryan stated that he admired that Ms. Daise was keeping her culture alive according to her culture's traditions and was not changing it for others. Bryan expressed appreciation for learning about other's cultural histories.

Although Bryan questioned the identity poetry at the beginning of the school year, he was excited to share his family storytelling recording with the class. In a follow-up interview, Bryan shared:

I really enjoyed the family storytelling stuff. I got to learn so much about my classmates. I didn't know about Baljeet's mom. I also love hearing my dad tell the story about how he discovered I was born. I think the fact that my dad couldn't be present shows a lot about our entire family's dedication to the military.

Bryan stated that he enjoyed sharing the family stories. It helped him learn more about his classmates, and it provided him with an opportunity for his classmates to know more about his own identity. Bryan selected a story about his father's sacrifice. His father stated:

So, you want me to tell you about the story of how I found out you were born? Your due date was November 29th. So, as it's getting closer, you know, I'm getting excited. I'm nervous. You know. Josh was born two weeks early, and April was born on her due date. So, we really expected you to born early or on your due date. Well, November 29th came and went. November 30th, nothing. I hadn't heard a peep. So, on December 2nd we finally go to celebrate Thanksgiving. They kind of gave us the day off. We had set times to go have our dinner. So, in the morning, I'm still asleep. But, it was a light sleep. And I hear this voice kind of from down the hall. And I can only hear bits and pieces of it. And what I hear was is "Jahoney awake yet?" And I knew someone was talking about me. So, I sat up and I yelled, "Who is it?" And I recognized the voice as the Chaplin. The Chaplin came in my room and said I have something for you. He said you got a message. He gave me the red cross message. It said: Please advise the solider in your chain of command that wife Linda Jahoney requests the notification of birth of their son Bryan on December 1, 2003, at the Regional Medical Center. His weight is seven pounds and eleven ounces. The mother and the child are well, verified by nurse Joan at labor and delivery. This was the greatest message I ever received.

Bryan's family story demonstrated part of his family's sacrifices for serving in the military. Bryan identified in his reflection that these sacrifices were important to his identity.

Bryan also expressed several times during the study that he felt confident in sharing his voice and appreciated having choices. In his survey Bryan wrote, "Ms. H

made me feel like I had a voice in the class and that my voice mattered. She had us tell her what we wanted blended learning days to look like and she changed them to what our class said would work.” Bryan expressed that he felt his voice was being heard by me and that his input affected the decisions that occurred within the classroom. Bryan stated that he felt that he had choices within the class. In a follow-up interview Bryan stated, “it felt like we had a say in your class. We got to choose what we read sometimes and what we wanted to learn.” He again detailed that he felt he got to choose what he could read and had say in what he was learning.

Bryan often communicated during the study using electronic communication. During the study he sent 43 emails, 13 Schoology messages, and 24 text messages. His electronic communication would often focus on his struggles with balancing school and COVID19. In a Schoology message Bryan sent, “I have a lot of personal stuff going on right now and it is bringing down all of my grades. I don’t know what to do to balance everything. Could you help me figure out a way?” In this message Bryan stated that he was struggling to maintain his grades in his course. He asked for help to balance school and his personal life.

At the beginning of class in an electronic bellinger journal response students were asked to write how they were feeling today, Bryan wrote, “I am sad. I just want to see my grandparents and I can’t. I haven’t seen my niece since last March.” Again, Bryan shared that he was struggling. He missed his family and was not able to see them due to the pandemic. This was interfering with his ability to focus at school. Bryan consistently shared his struggles via electronic communication during the study. Blended learning provided him with an opportunity to share his concerns in a less public manner.

Bryan was very forthcoming in sharing his perceptions on blended learning. In his survey Bryan wrote, “Blended learning enhanced lessons because we could talk with Mrs. Hostetler anytime what we needed. I am also a bit shy, so being able to email or Teams call Ms. Hostetler one on one helped me ask questions more.” Bryan shared that blended learning was effective because he had access to his teachers more frequently than the fifty minutes he normally would have in a classroom. He also indicated that blended learning gave him a platform to communicate with his teacher in a more one-on-one manner.

Culturally relevant pedagogy was an idea with which Bryan was initially resistant. However, by the end of the study Bryan defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

Learning from many different perspectives and stories, not just one. It also is about being able to think through the stuff you are learning and questioning things. Not just taking it at face value. We did it all year in this class. You always had multiple perspectives being shared in the stuff that we read. You also had us questioning stuff all the time and listening to each other. I learned a lot.

His definition shared his perception that culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on sharing many perspectives. It asks students to questions what they are learning and to think critically.

When asked in his final interview if there was anything that he would like to share or add, Bryan stated:

No, not really. Just I think that there are some good things that we did in this class that could be used in others. Like the blended learning. I liked how it was a mixture of both, not all online and not all face-to-face. It was like having

resources at both places. I also liked how you challenged us to think about what we are learning and reading. Like really think about why it was written and our own bias.

Bryan's final thoughts focused on the benefit of blended learning. The structure of having a balance of both technology and face-to-face interactions. Bryan also stated that being taught to challenge texts and his own bias was beneficial to his learning.

Conclusion

This study collected data on seven students' experiences and perceptions of blended learning amidst two pandemics. It sought to answer the following questions:

- What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?
- What are students' experiences with and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

Each student's perception and experiences were unique and emerged from their lived experiences during the pandemics. Although each individual case was unique, each case included the data sources of quizzes and test grades, This Just in Script, "Canterbury Tales" speed dating assignment and reflection, "Canterbury Tales" blogs, book club blogs, family storytelling assignment and reflection, guest speaker reflection, "The Office" reflection, critical lens essay, digital communication charts, initial interviews, student surveys, field notes, final follow-up interviews, and their final requests/thoughts to be shared with this study. Despite their different lived experiences, there were some similarities that emerged across their data sets. Chapter Five will detail the findings that

emerged from a cross-case analysis and foster a discussion on the implications from this research study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study explored what happened when culturally relevant pedagogy was implemented in a blended learning environment. The study sought to understand seven students' experiences and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. The purpose of the study was to fill the gap of knowledge on using culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment and understand students' perceptions and experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment. The findings of this study honor the voices of the individual cases, and they are not transferable. However, several ideas emerged across the cases that may be applicable in other settings. This chapter is divided into two major sections focusing on each research question:

1. What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?
2. What are students' experiences and perceptions with culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

Each section includes a discussion, an analysis of themes that emerged across the cases, and implications for pedagogy. The context of this study was unique, as it occurred during two pandemics and centered culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. Despite the uniqueness of the context and each case, several ideas

arose across the cases. The study adds to the understanding in ways teachers can implement culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment. It provides insight into students' experiences and perceptions to inform educational practice.

Research Question 1: What happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated in a blended learning environment amidst two pandemics?

To address this question a triangulated research design including interviews, surveys, observations, lesson plans, field notes, and classroom artifacts was employed. Several themes emerged across all seven cases and multiple data points. All seven cases revealed the following themes:

1. Culturally relevant pedagogy situated in a blended learning environment fosters academic success.
2. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and blended learning affirmed students' cultures and identities.
3. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and blended learning engaged students in critical literacy and critical consciousness.
4. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and blended learning provided student choice and voice.
5. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and blended learning opens up communication between student and teacher.

A detailed discussion and the implications on pedagogy for each theme follows.

Discussion: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Blended Learning Fosters Academic Success. Scaffolding instruction using blended learning and culturally relevant pedagogy led to students' academic success. The ability for students to consistently use

technology and complete assignments that were created focusing on core components of culturally relevant pedagogy led to their overall academic success. This success was demonstrated in test and quiz averages, along with major projects and reflections. Table 5.1 shows the averages for each major test and quiz grade for all seven cases.

Table 5.1 Averages of Test and Quiz Grades for Cases

Assignment	Case Average
Middle English Vocabulary Test	91%
Middle English History Test	95%
Canterbury Tales Reading General Prologue Quiz	98%
Canterbury Tales Test	97%
Critical Literary Theory Quiz	96%

The table above demonstrates that students experienced academic success on tests and quizzes. All of their quiz and test averages were 91% or higher. These scores were much higher than honors courses that I have taught in the past that were traditional brick and mortar classes. Academic success was also demonstrated in the Canterbury Tales Speed Dating Assignment. For the assignment, students enacted a character from *The Canterbury Tales*. All students dressed as their characters, created videos, and answered questions as their characters (Table 5.2). They were able to not only physically describe their characters, but were also able to act out their characters, demonstrating mastery of characterization. They used Flipgrid to create a speed-dating video of their character and posted it online. Their videos showed that they mastered the elements of each of their

characters. Their instruction on characterization was blended and their projects demonstrated that they successfully mastered understanding characterization.

Table 5.2 Character for Speed Dating Activity

Baljeet	Nun
Stoney	Knight
Andrea	Yeoman
Trey	Pardoner
Calico	Franklin
Bryan	Miller
Tanaisha	Squire

Each student successfully dressed and adopted the mannerisms of their characters during the speed dating activity. During a follow-up interview when asked why she believed the Characterization Speed Dating Activity was successful, Tanaisha responded:

Because you didn't just throw it at us and say get this done. You made us, read and fill out a chart. Then we had to make a video real quick on our character.

After all that, we then got to dress up. I didn't want to be the only one not dressed up. You even were extra when we were coming into class. You wouldn't respond to Ms. H. You just said, that's not my name and was acting like the Wife of Bath.

Another student Calico stated in their interview "the speed dating thing made me really learn about a characterization. I studied my character in and out. I had to know not just what they looked like, but how they would talk and act." Tanaisha and Calico both demonstrate that they acquired an in-depth understanding of their character. They

were able to identify their characters' outward appearances, thoughts, and physical mannerisms. The students used technology to create a dating video for their characters and they became actors within the classroom space. The use of technology from home and in-person performance engaged students in blended learning. All of the students excelled at mastering the concept of characterization demonstrating academic success, a core pillar of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Another example of student academic success, was students' ability to understand and apply critical literary theory lenses. In a pre-assessment survey, all students stated that they were not familiar with critical literary theory. All seven cases successfully analyzed "The office" using different critical literary lenses (Table 5.3). The students again used blended learning to complete this assignment. Students were instructed in-person with a demonstration of using critical lenses with "Little Miss Muffet." On their digital platform, they watched an episode titled "The Merger" from season three of "The Office" and posted a critical response to the episode on their blog. This episode was selected because it focuses on people from two different firms coming together into one firm. It offers multiple examples of misrepresentations of cultures and exploitation of different people. The students learned in-person from the teacher then applied their learning on a digital platform, engaging in critical consciousness. They were emerged in blending learning focusing on a culturally relevant component of critical consciousness. This structure resulted in them being academically successful.

Table 5.3 Cases Selected Literary Lenses for “the Office”

Case	Literary Lens	Notes from Episode
Baljeet	Critical Race	Multiple times African American and the Indian characters are mistreated. First none of them have a manager position. Only White men are the bosses or the assistants to the bosses. At one point, Michael the boss called his workers slaves.
Trey	Critical Race and Feminist	Michael makes a comment that Karen looks exotic. Michael uses Pam to buy groceries and set up the food. Why are there no women in management?
Calico	Marxist	Dwight and Andy fight for second in charge. Dwight said he is older and wiser. Andy kept trying to assert his power by stating “I’m a director.” It is sad that all the men were fighting for the power and the female characters don’t hold any manager positions.
Stoney	Feminist	Females were not even an option for Michael’s number two in the show. Only White men were his options. Not to mention how much they were sexualized within the episode.
Tanaisha	Critical Race	There are many examples in the episode that can be viewed through a critical race lens. For example, when Michael told the girl in the pink shirt that she can’t eat pork.
Andrea	Feminist	The most appalling example is when breastfeeding is sexualized in the workplace by the one male co-worker. He is not reprimanded for taking a picture of the female character’s breast when pumping.
Bryan	Marxist	Andy continually seeks power at the new branch in this office. Dwight struggles to stay Michael’s right-hand man. However, the corporation decides the second in power, which is Jim.

Once students expressed they were comfortable with identifying textual evidence to use critical literary lenses, students wrote an essay applying a critical literary theory to their book club novels. Bryan wrote in his essay, “the best critical lens for Enrique’s Journey is Marxist Criticism. There are many different groups in the story that fight for power. The first group of people who had power is the Mexican government. Law enforcement officers’ rape, rob, steal, and murder immigrants passing through their county.” Stoney wrote in reference to *Marrow Thieves* (2017), “a critical race lens is appropriate to use to analyze this text. The Whites in the society’s goal is to get their dreams back. The indigenous tribes are not seen as human by the Whites and as a government experiment.” Both students in their essays were able to cite textual evidence and explain how the evidence connected to a particular critical literary theory lens. The scaffolding of instruction from face-to-face modeling of critical theory lens, to digital analysis of an episode of “The Office” and having the students engage in digital blog conversations about their book club novels demonstrated students’ ability to successfully apply critical theory lens to different texts. The use of in-person instruction and digital instruction while interweaving a component of culturally relevant pedagogy led to the students being successful.

A core tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy is that it requires high expectations and academic success for all students. Ladson-Billings (1994) defines academic success as evidence of student learning, what the students actually know and are able to do. The students in this study experienced academic success. They demonstrated what they knew in multiple ways. They were able to act, blog, write, create, and reflect to demonstrate their mastery of numerous concepts during the research study.

Similar to Lopez (2011) and Stormer, Brown, and Stroud's (2017) studies, students experienced academic success due to the intentional scaffolding by the teacher with the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Academic success was achieved in each case through the scaffolding of instruction pairing blended learning and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Similar to the results of the Idaho Digital Learning Academy study on blended learning, students in each individual case received high-test scores in the blended learning environment. This study also supports Yapici and Akbaryin's (2012) findings that those who participated in the blended learning classes received academically high scores. Eryilmaz's (2015) study concluded that the blended learning environments had many positive effects on student learning. In the blended learning environments, learners seemed to be more actively involved. Learners appeared to use existing knowledge to create new knowledge through various activities. This study also found that blended learning had positive effects on student learning, demonstrated by their mastery of the content throughout the entire study.

Throughout the entire study, all seven cases received an 80% or higher on their quizzes, tests, projects, and essays. With one exception, Bryan received a 65% on his first attempt at the Middle English Vocabulary Test. However, on his second attempt he received a 92%. This study provides evidence that students mastered concepts in both the face-to-face classroom and a digitally blended learning environment. The study shows that academic success, a tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, is achievable in a blended learning environment. It supports and adds to multiple past studies that provide evidence of blended learning leading to student achievement.

Implications for Pedagogy: Blended Learning Fosters Academic Success. The findings of this study imply that blending learning can promote academic success for different students. Each of the seven cases all demonstrated that they mastered the content and skills being presented to them in a blended learning context. Across their individual differences, all students were academically successful in the class. This suggests that other students could be successful at mastering academic concepts in a blended learning environment. Key components of culturally relevant pedagogy were also able to be successfully integrated into the blending learning environment, implying that educators can structure and scaffold instruction to include culturally relevant pedagogy in blended learning environments.

Given the continued digital learning environment teachers find themselves in due to COVID19, this study shows that culturally relevant pedagogy can be successfully integrated into a blended learning environment. Districts should consider offering professional development to educators on implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment. Culturally relevant pedagogy honors all students, includes them in the curriculum, and creates critical thinkers. Due to the constant evolving changes of school settings, this professional development could help ensure that all students are being included in curriculum in the multiple formats presented to students. University educational programs should consider creating courses for future educators on teaching in blended learning environments, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy within the framework. This will help prepare future educators for digital classrooms, blended learning classrooms, and schools with one-to-one technology. Further studies are

needed in implementing CRP in a blended learning environment to see if the same themes emerge across multiple studies.

Discussion: Blended Learning Affirms Students' Cultures and Identities. A key component of culturally relevant pedagogy is cultural competence. During the study, I created assignments that provided opportunities for students to share and learn more about their cultures, affirming their home cultures within a blended learning environment. One area that students felt they were able to share their culture was with their family storytelling assignment. Students were asked to record a story by a family member who was important to them. The stories were uploaded onto our class website for all members to listen to and share. The students had to submit a reflection explaining why they selected the person to tell a story, connecting the importance of storytelling in the canonical text to their own lives. This activity combined in-person learning, a digital recording, a podcast, and interweaved a component of culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural competence. All of the student cases were able to capture a family story that shared part of their identity with classmates.

All students indicated during their interviews that they felt honored, reflected, and represented within the classroom. Baljeet expressed feeling reflected in the classroom through the text *A Long Way Gone* and by Ms. Daise's virtual visit. He wrote on his Guest Speaker Reflection, "Her story about magic and charms during war made me think about my mom's stories she would tell me that the soldiers in her town used old magic and created vests with charms with safety and protection. That she believed old magic would help win the war." Like Baljeet, Calico expressed feeling represented in the classroom by the book club texts and the room's décor. Calico on their survey wrote,

“your room is the only room that I know of that proudly displays a Trans flag. This meant a lot to me. I felt my culture would not be disrespected.” Ladson-Billings (1994) defines cultural competence as helping students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to other cultures. Cultural competence focuses on helping students validate and take pride in their own culture and identity. In addition, cultural competence helps students learn how to navigate between their home and school. It bridges students’ home lives to their school lives. The family storytelling assignment honored all students’ home cultures. They shared stories of immigration, spirits, chickens, and love. The stories gave them access to their classmates’ cultures. It gave students an opportunity to validate their identities. Cultural competence asks teachers to have students create cultural artifacts to share with members of the class. It asks students to write their stories and share their experiences. It honors students’ home languages. In their stories and experiences, students use their own dialects and home languages. Andrea purposefully chose to have her father share his story in Spanish, the way he tells the story to his children. Students created an oral story artifact that documented their stories and experiences spoken in their home languages. Similar to the teachers in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study, students built bridges from their home lives to school. The family storytelling assignment and the students’ perceptions of the assignment show how cultural competence can be successfully woven into a blended learning environment.

Data revealed that students felt their cultures were affirmed during the book clubs. The book club texts were selected to reflect the students’ backgrounds within the room and/or provide an opportunity for them to read about a character that was different from their own identity. Students received a copy of the text in-person. They

completed multiple discussions in-class together. They engaged in in-depth weekly discussions on blogs for their book clubs. This mixture of books that reflected their identity paired with blogs each week to discuss the content with their peers led to their feeling their culture and identities were confirmed within the blended classroom. Baljeet wrote on his survey, “the book *A Long Way Gone* connected to my culture directly. My mom fled from Sierra Leone when the wars were happening. So many of Ishmael’s stories I knew and the foods.” Another student, Andrea, wrote on her survey, “Enrique’s journey had similarities to my parents’ experiences coming to the US. I liked reading about Enrique and I could connect to so much of what he said.” Calico wrote on their survey, “I was very excited to see a LGBTQ book as an option for the book club choices. I was pumped! I never got an option to read a LGBTQ book in school as part of a class. I felt like my community was getting represented.” In their responses, students shared that they felt represented by the texts selected for book clubs. They stated multiple times that they could relate to the experiences and characters within the texts they selected to read. Their responses reveal that the blended learning context was able to affirm their identities and cultures.

Similar to Lopez’s (2011) study, book clubs helped students feel represented and take pride in their cultures. Lopez (2011) found poetry gave students permission to bring themselves into the writing process, validating and affirming their cultures. During book clubs, multiple students stated that they could relate directly to their characters and experiences presented within their selected texts. Olan and Richmond (2017) found students responded more fully to books whose characters and plots resonated with students and their life experiences (Olan & Richmond, 2017). This was supported by

students' responses on their blogs and interviews. Calico expressed joy for having a LGBTQ book as an option to read, an experience they have never had. Book clubs bridged students' identities with the classroom, fostering cultural competence within the students.

A Zoom guest speaker affirmed some students' cultures and helped other students learn about a different culture. Ms. Natalie Daise, an artist and professional Gullah storyteller, joined our class via Zoom to share stories from her Gullah culture and share the importance of storytelling. Ms. Daise was able to join our class via Zoom, a digital resource. This was possible because of our blended learning context. Students were able to respond to her in the chat on Zoom and unmute to ask questions. Several students shared that Ms. Daise affirmed their cultures because they were able to connect to her stories about magic and charms. The blended learning environment's ability to easily include Ms. Daise into our classroom led to students feeling affirmed. Similarly, several students shared that they felt their culture was represented when we watched and read Amanda Gorman's *The Hill We Climb* (Appendix M). Blended learning provided students the ability to watch and respond to Amanda Gorman's poem on a digital platform and then engage in a conversation in-person within the classroom. Four students shared that Amanda's poem affirmed their culture and identity.

A key concept of cultural competence is that it asks teachers to draw on the strength of local communities and family members. It calls on teachers to reshape the curriculum. Cultural competence is creating and teaching content that is not included in Eurocentric curriculum. It focuses on teaching the history of different groups before European contact and conquest. It is providing students with primary source materials

and asking for guest speakers in the community with experience. The guest speaker Ms. Natalie Daise provided students with a primary source of information. She shared her stories and beliefs in Gullah culture before European contact. The students' reflections reveal that some students felt direct connections to her stories, whereas other students were learning new perspectives and experiences for the first time.

Blended learning does not solely focus on digital learning. It balances digital and in-person learning. Students shared that they felt their cultures and identities were affirmed in simple conversations and in the décor around the classroom. Tanaisha wrote in her survey, "You always made connections to our home lives with examples you gave in discussions." Students often were able to connect content to their home lives in discussions. In addition, the décor of the room was noted as an important way students felt their identities and cultures were affirmed. Trey wrote, "I felt different walking in Ms. H's room for the first time. I looked around and was like this teacher's room is not like any other teachers. I immediately noticed the BlackLivesMatter flag in her room." Calico wrote, "Your room is the only room that I know of that proudly displays a Trans flag. This meant a lot to me. I felt I would not be disrespected." An important part of blended learning is balancing the digital and physical environments. The physical environment of the classroom that instruction occurs is a critical piece of the blended learning environment. Students indicated in the study, that the décor of the room affirmed their cultures.

This study found that a key tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy was present in the blended learning environment. All students felt reflected within the curriculum and learned more about their own identities and cultures. They acquired access to other's

culture. They built bridges between their home lives and school lives. They learned from local community and family members. They demonstrated an appreciation of their own identities.

Implications: Blended Learning Affirmed Students' Cultures and Identities.

The data from this cross-case analysis implies that a blended learning environment can affirm students' identities and cultures. All students expressed that they felt affirmed and valued by the family storytelling assignment. All of the students, except for Brian, expressed that the book club texts reflected their cultures and identities, stating that they were able to make personal connections to the guest speaker, Ms. Daise. The book club texts focused on giving representation to groups that are often marginalized in society and the overall demographics of the class. Brian, being a White, heterosexual male from a wealthy family, could not directly relate to the characters in the text or guest speaker. Brian expressed that he was able to learn about different perspectives from the book club texts and guest speaker and think differently about his experiences. This implies that even though a student may not be able to identify with the characters or guest speakers presented to them, they can still learn about other perspectives and reflect on their own identities in the process. This demonstrates that students were building cultural competence within themselves, as well as becoming culturally competent about others

This study shows that educators can affirm students' identities and cultures within a blended learning environment. They can create assignments that directly involve the students' families. They can create book clubs, which give students access to a wider range of texts. Digital platforms, such as Zoom and Teams, provide teachers with the ability to include family members as guests. Since visitors were not permitted at school

during COVID19, digital conferencing platforms can bring experts from around the world to students. Educators can use the digital part of blended learning to bridge home and school lives. School districts could offer professional development on bridging students home lives and school lives using blended learning strategies. This will help students feel reflected and affirmed in the curriculum. Educational programs at universities can share with future educators ways that digital resources can be used to include students' home lives and bring guests to the classroom.

Discussion: Blended Learning Engages Students in Critical Consciousness.

Students across each case demonstrated in numerous lessons the ability to identify, analyze, question, and critique societal inequities that existed within texts and the real-world. Through the scaffolding of in-class discussion, blogs, videos, and projects students demonstrated the ability to engage in critical consciousness. Several in-class discussions revealed students' abilities to identify, analyze, question, and critique inequities within texts and the real world. Students were able to question Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*:

Calico: It's like Chaucer is woke about social class issues, but then says heathen Turk in the text.

Bryan: Yes, probably because England was super Christian and tried to Christianize places. It shows his religious bias.

Calico: It is just frustrating. He's like social class is bad, but if you're not male or Christian than you don't matter. Like with the Knight, he makes his son a party body with nothing to worry about. Like rich kids are spoiled brats. But, then only

has like two female characters and no characters that are any other race than White. He continually goes in about social class.

Mrs. Hostetler: Why do you think that is?

Bryan: I think it is a bit because of the time period and the fact that he is British.

Tanaisha: I think time period is a factor. But, it is also kind of like he can't see outside of his own issues. It's kind of like some White people today that focus on social classes as the biggest issues. They don't see race as an issue for some reason. They just think that social class is the reason for problems. Like I have heard some of my White family members say we don't get money and we haven't had everything handed to us. They don't get it. They don't understand how being White gives them advantages even though they struggled.

Calico points out the inequities that exist within *The Canterbury Tales*. They focus on gender and religious prejudice that exist within the text. Tanaisha applies the inequities within the text to current issues in the society. She explains how Chaucer is oblivious to White privilege, connecting this to dynamics within her own family. Both students are able to identify inequities and make connections to contemporary society. The students identified a societal inequity within Chaucer's text. They questioned Chaucer's intent. They explained how gender inequities are still part of their world. Critical consciousness was also demonstrated in a discussion they held after the assault on the capitol:

Tanaisha: Can we talk about what happened? Like openly. I feel like all the teachers are acting like nothing happened.

Mrs. Hostetler: Absolutely. We can't pretend it didn't happen.

Tanaisha: As a biracial person, I am having a hard time. I am hurt. I am disgusted.

I'm disgusted by the difference between the BLM protestor treatment and the treatment of the rioters yesterday. If they were Black people they would have never made it to the capitol without being shot. Where were the police?

Trey: The same place Miley Cyrus is when Hannah Montana performs.

Bryan: My family is Republican, to the most inner being. But what I saw yesterday was not Republican behavior. It was wrong. So many Republicans just condemned BLM movements for looting and rioting. And what they did was worse than looting stores, it was attacking democracy.

Calico: Even my crazy conservative parents stated that was too much. I was so angry at them. I have been trying to show them how this was building up to this point.

Andrea: This was a display of White supremacy and privilege.

Tanaisha: Did anyone else see the video of the people there re-enacting George Floyd's death?

Mrs. Hostetler: What?

Tanaisha: Yeah, I saw a video of them reenacting his death and laughing. I also saw pictures of a noose. It was terrifying. I was scared, hurt, and then angry.

Bryan: It's like how did we get here?

Tanaisha: By rhetoric and consequences of rhetoric going unchecked by Trump. By systemic racism going unchecked. By White supremacy not being challenged. By simple every day acts that no one calls out.

Ms. Hostetler: How do we move forward to heal and change?

Tanaisha: We all need to learn our own bias. If we had actual accurate history taught, that might help. We need to learn how to know actual facts and understand that images and videos can be manipulated. We need to think for ourselves and not be manipulated.

Bryan: I agree, we need to soul search.

The bell rang. All students remained in their seats.

Ms. Hostetler: I know this is a hard day and honestly, I don't know what to say. I want to just hug all of you. I don't know the right words right now. I do have faith in your generation. I do believe y'all will heal our nation and make great change. Even though yesterday's event took away some hope, y'all give me more hope today than I had all night. If you need to come back to my room anytime today, just do so. I will take care of emailing your teachers.

This discussion was started by the students in the room. They were able to identify a major societal inequity that occurred. They were able to question, analyze, and critique the event.

In addition to discussions, students' ability to engage in critical consciousness was evident within their assignments. All students demonstrated this ability in their responses to questions on blogs about *The Canterbury Tales* and in their book clubs. Students recognized, questioned, and critiqued inequities within their chosen texts. Students were able to reflect on their ability to engage in critical consciousness on their student surveys. Andrea wrote, "critical consciousness made me question everything. It made me think harder and see other point of views." Trey explained, "critical consciousness helped me learn that my beliefs and ideas have been influenced by my

experiences and that I don't take enough time to challenge how my experiences are different from others." Students shared their perceptions of critical consciousness as a way to question, challenge, and better understand different ideas.

Blended learning was a context in which all students were able to engage in the culturally relevant component of critical consciousness. Students participated in class discussions that demonstrated their critical consciousness. Their responses on blogs showed their abilities to question and critique. Their digital survey reflections demonstrated how all seven students were able to reflect on how they engaged in critical consciousness during the study.

A foundational theory of this study is critical literacy. Critical literacy focuses on the social, cultural, and political forces that influence the creation and interpretation of texts and readers. Critical literacy helps readers stop and think about how their beliefs shape their interpretation of the text they are reading. It also encourages readers to question their own beliefs when responding to a text. Critical literacy focuses on a need to question, instead of passively accept, a text. The goal of critical literacy is for readers to become text critics in everyday life. The findings in the study reveal that students engaged in critical literacy in multiple ways. Students consistently questioned the author of the texts and the decisions they made. They often deconstructed the views portrayed by authors and noted who held power within the text.

A key tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy is critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, like critical literacy, focuses on helping students find ways to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities. Critical consciousness asks teachers to select texts with critical perspectives, provide students with counter-

narratives, and allow opportunities for students to create counter-narratives. It employs critical literacy skills to question and deconstruct texts. Critical consciousness uses dialogue and open-ended discussion within the classroom. It allows students to discuss controversial topics. Similar to Lopez's (2011) study, this study provides students the opportunity to encounter counter-narratives in their book clubs and guest speakers. It provided them opportunities to create their own counter-narratives through their family storytelling assignment. Students deconstructed their book club texts and engaged in critical consciousness by questioning and critiquing existing social structures on their blogs. Students in Lopez's (2011) study developed critical consciousness by deconstructing spoken word poems and journaling. Students challenged the status quo in the construction of their own spoken word poems, many calling out issues they faced. The students engaged in critical consciousness by questioning and critiquing existing social structures. Like Lopez's (2011) study, students were taught critical literacy skills to question and deconstruct texts. Students openly engaged in discussions that were considered controversial topics, such as racial and gender inequities. This study shows that a blended learning environment fosters critical consciousness, a key concept of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Implications: Blended Learning Engages Students in Critical Consciousness.

Each student was able to engage in critical consciousness during the study. This implies that the blended learning environment can foster the development of critical consciousness skills. Educators can use in-person instruction mixed with digital instruction to develop critical consciousness. Again, school districts can provide professional development to teachers that helps the develop ways to use blended learning

environments to promote critical consciousness. Universities can incorporate ways to develop critical consciousness within blended learning environments within their courses to prepare future educators for the different contexts in which they may teach.

Discussion: Blended Learning Opens Communication Between Student and Teacher. During the research study two new findings arose: blended learning opens communication channels between students and teachers, and blended learning provides choice and voice for students. Digital communication and conversations during the study revealed that students felt comfortable contacting and sharing their emotional concerns electronically with their teacher. The table below shows the amount of digital correspondences that were received from students during the study (Table 5.4). All students contacted me via digital platforms numerous times during the study.

Table 5.4 Digital Communications

	Totals
Emails	172
Texts	84
Schoology Messages	40
Teams Call	9

Students communicated at different hours during the day. The time of day that students most often would contact me was between 5:30pm-8:30pm. In addition to frequent digital communication, students often expressed emotional concerns to me during the study.

Students often shared their concerns with me about COVID19, school work, and their futures via digital communications. The blended learning environment opened new

ways for students to contact their teacher. Students learned how to send emails, send messages in Schoology, make calls through Teams, and text my cell phone number. As demonstrated in the study, these multiple digital avenues provided an open line of communication from student to teacher. Blended learning with one-to-one technology made it possible for students to have frequent communication with me. This frequent contact created an open communication system between the students and I. It also built strong relationships between the students and teacher.

Implications: Blended Learning Opens Communication Between Student and Teacher. This data reveals that blended learning creates an atmosphere where students can access their teachers in multiple modalities to ask questions, share concerns, and receive clarification on assignments. All students used multiple avenues to contact me during the study, mostly through digital correspondence. This implies that students may feel more comfortable contacting their teachers via digital communication. In communications students shared personal concerns, fears, health information, and expressed that they were overwhelmed with school. Digital forms of communication provide students with a place where they feel comfortable enough to communicate major concerns to their teachers.

School districts can work to provide one-to-one technology for students, so they have the opportunity to contact their teachers using multiple forms of communication. Schools can provide students and teachers with professional development on how to use different platforms to communicate with each other. Further research needs to be conducted focusing on understanding why students communicated well using digital

forms of communication. Research also needs to be conducted to understand if there are any correlations between students' frequent digital communication and academic success.

Blended Learning Provides Choice and Voice. In each case study, students identified the importance of choice within the curriculum. Students were given choice in making a script or news broadcast to demonstrate their mastery of Middle English history. They were given choice regarding which character they would become during the Canterbury Tales Speed Dating assignment. One area of choice that stood out to students was being given a choice of which book they could select for book clubs. Students expressed that having choice made them excited to read. Calico stated in an interview, "I normally hate reading because we always have to read some old text that we don't want to read. I loved my book club book. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Universe* wasn't old or irrelevant. I could relate to the characters and their journeys." All students, across the cases, expressed that they enjoyed having choice in texts.

The context of a blended learning environment promoted the ability for students to engage in book clubs and have book choices. The blended learning environment and having one-to-one technology made it possible for students to create blog responses to demonstrate their critical thinking in connection to their book of choice. Because each student could respond to each other via blogs, more book choices were able to be provided for students. The blending of in-person learning and digital platforms such as blogs and Flipgrids made it possible for students to have more choices within the curriculum and still be held accountable for learning. I, the teacher, was able to respond to their blogs and Flipgrids outside of class time. This created a space and time for me to respond to each student in-depth.

In addition to text choice, students expressed that they had a voice in classroom procedures and the ability to express themselves openly. At the beginning of the school year, students voiced their concerns about managing all of the work that is required of them during blended learning. Baljeet stated in class, “teachers are just piling work on us on our at home days to make up for a lack of in class time and it is too much.” Trey added, “it is too much to balance.” This prompted me as the teacher/researcher to ask them in a journal prompt, what skills they believe we should focus on this school year in English. Together they charted their skills list. We created a class list to center our instruction on for the remainder of the year (Figure 5.3) The list was displayed in the classroom, and all lessons connected back to their list moving forward.

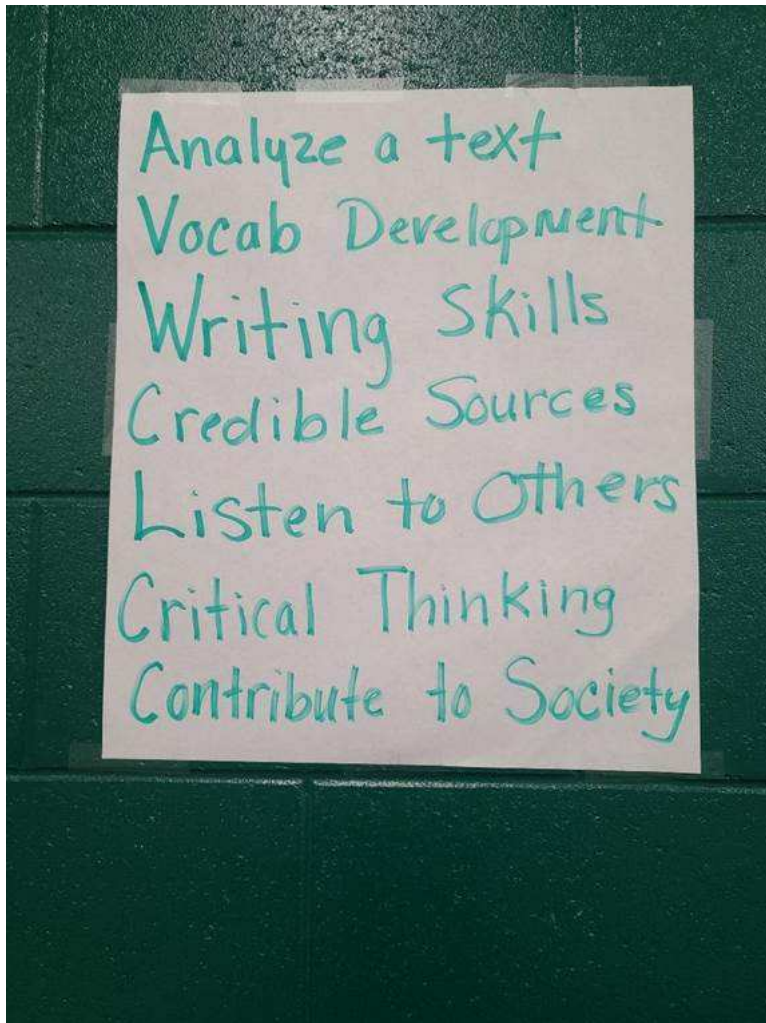


Figure 5.1 Chart of Skills Students Identified as Critical to Their Learning

The importance of students having the ability to share their voices was another concept that emerged from student surveys and interviews. The phrases “voice,” “express myself,” repeatedly emerged from the data. Andrea stated in her survey, “I learned how to express myself and that my ideas are important.” Stoney wrote, “I learned my voice matters and I need to share it.” Bryan shared, “Ms. H made me feel like I had a voice in the class and that my voice mattered. She had us tell her what we wanted blended learning days to look like and she changed them to what our class said would work.” The words “voice” and “matters” were repeated numerous times in the students’ responses.

Students perceived that their voices were valued within the study. Students revealed that it was important to them that I took the time to listen to their concerns and address them. I read their email concerns, their messages on Schoology, and heard their concerns in-person. Blended learning gave all learners the ability to communicate with me in the medium that they felt comfortable using. Blended learning provided a way for students to comfortably share their concerns.

Implications: Blended Learning Provides Choice and Voice. The data revealed that blended learning fostered student choice and voice. By having one-to-one technology and digital platforms, students were able to have more choices. Blogging made it possible for students to be grouped electronically to work on five different novels. Flipgrid made it possible for students to create videos on a character of choice and post them. Digital platforms provided the ability for myself to go into each students' work and view it at a convenient time to me. I would not have been able to view all the students' performances and check-in with them weekly on different books within a brick and mortar classroom schedule. The digital space of the blended learning provided flexibility. This implies that blended learning can give educators more flexibility in assignments and lessons, promoting more opportunities for student choice.

The data also revealed that students felt empowered in the blended learning environment. The digital communications available in blended learning gave all students an option of how they would like to communicate with the teacher. They all communicated with me in multiple ways. The ability to communicate with the teacher in a medium students felt comfortable using, provided students a sense that their thoughts and words were being heard and responded to by the teacher. This implies that blended

learning has the ability for all students to feel comfortable voicing their concerns and advocating for themselves within the classroom. Blended learning allows students the opportunity to communicate in-person when they are in class or digitally when they are working remotely.

School districts and schools can work to provide students with one-to-one technology to provide teachers with the flexibility to give more choice in the curriculum to students. School districts could provide professional development to teachers in using blended learning to promote student choice. College of Education could work to instruct future educators on strategies to give students choice using blended learning. Further research needs to be conducted to understand the many ways that blended learning can promote student choice and voice.

Research Question 2: What are students' experiences and perceptions with culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning approach amidst two pandemics?

To address this question data was collected and analyzed across cases through student surveys, and semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and member checked.

Discussion: Students' Perceptions of Blended Learning. Supporting Erilmaz's (2015) findings, most students in the study demonstrated positive perceptions of blended learning, except Calico (Table 5.4). Eryilmaz's (2015) results indicated that students' opinions of the blended learning environment were positive. Eryilmaz (2015) concluded that in light of the opinions expressed by the participants in the study, educational

blended learning environments are valuable in increasing learning, increasing attention, and increasing student motivation.

Table 5.5 Blended Learning Perceptions by Case

Case	Response from Interview
Baljeet	I like the use of videos and blogs. I think they helped me a lot. Like when you had videos of the content from that Mr. Osborne guy, that was helpful. Plus when we did Flipgrids and I could watch other students' examples first.
Trey	When I was quarantined the first time I was really worried about how I was going to stay caught up on work. I wasn't sick and knew missing 14 days would hurt my grades. However, the online set-up you had really helped me. Like when we had the Socratic Seminar, you had me join live with Teams. I was able to hear and speak with the class like I was there.
Calico	Blended learning to me is just using technology with the stuff we do in class. Technology did not make a difference to me in how I learned. I could do with or without it.
Stoney	Technology helped me keep in contact with you and the videos online really helped me understand what we were learning.
Tanaisha	Using Schoology and teams during our at home days helped me still feel connected to the class. We weren't just reading on our own. We had to respond to each other's blogs. We had to make videos and watch each other's videos. We could join live video sessions on Teams every Friday where we could see and talk to each other. My favorite activities were Friday Teams meetings, because after Ms. H checked in on us we did poetry and open mic. I liked learning in a blended learning environment.
Andrea	I think having both online and face-to-face learning was beneficial for all of us. It helped to have different activities that catered to all types of learners. For example, the videos online helped me understand content. The Flipgrid assignment creation was a cool way to do vocabulary. Then in-person discussions and activities like the character speed dating reinforced a lot of the content. It went hand-in-hand.
Bryan	Blended learning enhanced lessons because we could talk with Mrs. Hostetler anytime what we needed. I am also a bit shy, so being able to email or Teams call Ms. Hostetler one on one helped me ask questions more.

Students shared in their interviews that blended learning was helpful in multiple ways. It helped them communicate and stay in contact with the class, when they were working during their at home days or when they were quarantined. Andrea, Tanaisha,

Stoney, and Baljeet all shared that online videos helped to enhance their learning and were a positive experience. Both Tanaisha and Baljeet explained that they liked the use of blogs within a blended learning environment. In his follow-up interview Baljeet stated, “Blogs let me think about what I read and see my other classmates’ responses. Like, everyone responded, so everyone got to share what they thought. In class not, everyone would speak.” Baljeet perceived blogs as a way for all students to have the opportunity to share their thoughts within a classroom space. In contrast, Calico was indifferent to blended learning. They simply stated, “I could do with or without it.” Calico gave no further explanation on their indifference to blended learning. Calico received high grades on all assignments throughout the course and sent 13 emails, 1 Schoology message, and 11 text messages during the study. Overall, this study supports Erilmaz’s (2015) findings that many students have positive perceptions of blended learning. However, there are very few studies that document students’ perceptions on a blended learning model.

Implications: Students’ Perceptions of Blended Learning. The study shows that all students except Calico perceived that blended learning had positive effects on their learning and experience within the classroom. This suggests that blended learning could be beneficial for students. School districts could pilot blended learning classrooms to see if they are beneficial for their students. There are very few studies on students’ perceptions of blended learning. More research needs to be conducted to capture students’ thoughts on a blended learning environment to understand if students perceive it as beneficial to their learning process.

Discussion: Students’ Perceptions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In a follow up interview, students were asked the questions: how would you define

culturally relevant pedagogy, and do you believe that you participated in culturally relevant pedagogy this year? If so, how and if not, why do you believe you did not. At the beginning of the study, Bryan was initially resistant to culturally relevant teaching practices. However, by the end of the study Bryan was able to create his own definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. Bryan defined culturally relevant pedagogy as, “Learning from many different perspectives and stories, not just one. It also is about being able to think through the stuff you are learning and questioning things. Not just taking it at face value.” Bryan stated in his interview that he did engage in culturally relevant pedagogy, stating:

We did it all year in this class. You always had multiple perspectives being shared in the stuff that we read. You also had us questioning stuff all the time and listening to each other. I learned a lot. I never thought about like how we have only read White authors in all my other English class. But now, I realize it. We learned the culture of others and I was able to identify my own.

Calico defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “allowing the experiences and lives of the students into the classroom.” Calico agreed that they used culturally relevant pedagogy within the class. They stated, “One example is when we did the book club books. You taught us the required stories from the district, but then you connected it to books that represent so many kids in many different ways.” Calico added, “I loved the way we did things this school year, I wish we did this more in all my classes.” Tanashia defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

A way of learning that confirms students’ identities. We used culturally relevant pedagogy all school year in this class. From the poetry we did about ourselves, to

when we looked at texts like *The Canterbury Tales* and questioned why they were written. We got to read so many different perspectives. Plus, we got to share ourselves with our family stories.

When asked a follow-up question about how did it make you feel engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy Tanashia responded, “Seen. I felt like who I am mattered, in school.”

The students perceived culturally relevant pedagogy as valuing multiple and different perspectives. They expressed that culturally relevant pedagogy questions and makes them think critically about texts and life. They shared that culturally relevant pedagogy confirms their identities and experiences.

Implications: Students’ Perceptions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. The study’s findings imply that students find value in culturally relevant pedagogy. All students at the end of the study were able to explain that culturally relevant pedagogy values different perspectives, affirms cultures, and engages in critical consciousness. Bryan, who was reluctant and defensive with the term culturally relevant pedagogy was able to explain culturally relevant pedagogy and how he found value in it. This demonstrates that White students also benefit from culturally relevant pedagogy. There are few studies that focus solely on students’ perspectives of culturally relevant pedagogy. More research needs to be conducted on students’ perceptive of culturally relevant pedagogy and practice. Research also needs conducted on students who are very resistant to culturally relevant pedagogy to understand if resistant students once engaged with culturally relevant pedagogy changed their perspectives on culturally relevant pedagogy.

Implications for Future Research

This study attempted to fill the gap in the research on studies that use culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment. It in addition, it wanted to add students' perceptions and experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment to the literature. The study sought to understand students' perceptions and experiences. The findings from this study are unique to its context and are not meant to be generalized. However, many themes and ideas that emerged from the data may be applicable in other settings and classrooms. The findings of this research do suggest that more research could be conducted in two areas: culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment and student voice in academia.

As noted in my literature review, I was unable to find research studies that focused exactly on understanding what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy occurs in a blended learning environment. More research could be conducted to see if themes that emerged from this study occur in other contexts or if new themes emerge. In addition to expanding research on culturally relevant pedagogy in a blended learning environment, more research can be conducted on students' perceptions and thoughts on their educational experiences. There are few studies that share students' direct perceptions on their education and the methodology they engage with.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this study, I have grown as an educator, researcher, and person. I have learned an abundance from the cases presented. This study sought to understand what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is situated within a blended learning environment and students' perceptions of this experience. The data gathered and

findings helped to answer these questions for myself as their teacher and as a researcher. The study revealed across multiple cases that blended learning environment fosters culturally relevant practices. The study also made me critically aware of the need for student voice and perceptions within the field of education. It became clear throughout the study that each student could express and identify what was successful in the classroom and for their own learning. They participated in conversations and interviews that demonstrated their ability to think about their thinking and learning. They expressed the desire to have their voices matter and be heard by their teachers. The students shared their need for choice within the classroom and representation within texts. I learned as an educator, that I can and should give more control of the classroom and curriculum decisions to the students. This study has encouraged me to continue to find ways where both the students and I can work together to make decisions.

I have discovered that blended learning is an asset to my pedagogy. Blended learning was able to foster all of the components of culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition, blended learning provided students the ability to have more choice within the curriculum presented to them. It helped students feel more comfortable in communicating with me through multiple correspondence avenues and empowered them in many ways. Blended learning when intentionally planned out with student feedback promotes academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In the midst of COVID19, blended learning is going to be continually present. This study has encouraged me to continue to find creative ways to implement blended learning within my classroom and at the same time, center my curriculum on culturally relevant pedagogy.

This research study journey again reinforced my belief that students need to be involved in decision making and their voices need to be heard in academia. During the process of the study and the writing of this dissertation, students were given the opportunity to read and make edits to chapters 3, 4, and 5. They gave me feedback and clarified any areas when I was not sure of their perceptions. At the conclusion of the study, they were given an opportunity to share their final thoughts for other teachers and researchers. I would like to end this dissertation honoring their final thoughts and words (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Students' Final Thoughts

Baljeet	This year was crazy and stressful. You made it less awful in your class. But one thing that I think you should continue to do is use Schoology and make sure that students have choices in what they read. I like that the books we were given a choice to read were not super old. We read so many boring books in school. It is nice to have choice and some interesting books.
Trey	I think that even though people are overloaded with tech stuff, that the way we used the website was very helpful. I really liked how we did both. I think teachers should consider that even when we go back to five days a week.
Calico	I loved the way we did things this school year, I wish we did this more in all my classes.
Stoney	I want teachers to know how important it is for students to feel safe and accepted in a classroom. Most the time I don't talk in classes because I don't feel comfortable. I feel out of place. I learn better when I feel safe in a room
Tanaisha	I think representation is important in classes and making sure every student feels represented.
Andrea	I hope that culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied in multiple classes. I think it is important to include students' cultures in all classes and to challenge students to question the concepts they learn and read about.
Bryan	I think that there are some good things that we did in this class that could be used in others. Like the blended learning. I liked how it was a mixture of both, not all online and not all face-to-face. It was like having resources at both places. I also liked how you challenged us to think about what we are learning and reading. Like really think about why it was written and our own bias.

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APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Awareness, Consciousness, and Social Action: Implementing Culturally Relevant
Pedagogy in a Blended Learning Environment Amidst COVID-19 and Racism
Pandemics

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:

Your child is invited to volunteer for a research study conducted by Mrs. Kayla Hostetler. I am a teacher at Aiken High school and a graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina, Department of Education. Dr. Mary Styslinger is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to understand what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is implemented in a blended learning environment. This study also seeks to understand students' perceptions and experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. Culturally relevant pedagogy is teaching where the teacher creates a bridge between the students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curriculum. Culturally relevant teaching utilized the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher's lessons. Blended learning is when students learning takes place face to face and virtually. It requires a mixture of in person and virtual assignments

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because their classes demographics aligns the closest with the overall school demographics. This study is being done at Aiken High School and will involve approximately 16 volunteers.

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later in this form.

The study will take place over twelve school weeks. Classroom lessons will be videotaped for Mrs. Hostetler to review after the lessons occur. The videotapes will not be shared or viewed by anyone other than Mrs. Hostetler. The study will ask

students to complete a survey focusing on their thoughts and perceptions about culturally relevant pedagogy within a blended learning environment. The study will also ask students to sit and be interviewed about their thoughts and experiences pertaining to the study. In addition, students' assignments will be used to collect and analyze data.

Complete confidentiality will be enforced. I will not use your child's name in any presentation or publication. You have the right to decide whether or not you want your child to be a part of this study. Granting permission for this study is entirely voluntary. Your child's grade will not be helped or harmed by participating in this study. If at any time, you wish to have your child not participate within the study, please just reach out to me.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to have your child participate in this study, your child will do the following:

1. Complete classroom assignments and participate in instruction related to culturally relevant strategies.
2. Complete a survey about their thoughts and experiences with the instruction.
3. Be interviewed by Mrs. Hostetler and asked questions related to their thoughts and experiences with the classroom instruction.
4. Review the transcript of their interview to make sure that they were quoted correctly.
5. Review the final research findings to make sure that they were represented correctly.

DURATION:

Participation in the study involves twelve classroom weeks of instruction. Lessons will be recorded for only Mrs. Hostetler to review to add details to her field notes after lessons are conducted.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

Loss of Confidentiality:

There is the risk of a breach of confidentiality, despite the steps that will be taken to protect your identity. Specific safeguards to protect confidentiality are described in a separate section of this document.

BENEFITS:

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit your child personally. However, this

research may help researchers understand how culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied in different learning contexts.

COSTS:

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS:

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

AIKEN HIGH STUDENT PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to have your child not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. Your child's participation, non-participation, and/or withdrawal will not affect their grades or their relationship with their teacher.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:

Information obtained about you during this research study will remain confidential and released only with your written permission. Study information will be securely stored in locked files and on password-protected computers. Results of this research study may be published or presented at seminars; however, the report(s) or presentation(s) will not include your child's name or other identifying information about your child.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to have your child not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw your child from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email Mrs. Kayla Hostetler listed on this form.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, or a study related injury, I am to contact Mrs. Kayla Hostetler at 814-233-3207 or by email at khostetler@acpsd.net.

Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

If you wish for your child to participate, you should sign below.

Child's Name

Signature of Subject / Participant

Date

Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA ASSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

**Awareness, Consciousness, and Social Action: Implementing Culturally Relevant
Pedagogy in a Blended Learning Environment Amidst COVID-19 and Racism
Pandemics**

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about culturally relevant pedagogy being implemented within a blended learning environment and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about what happens when culturally relevant pedagogy is applied within a blended learning context. I am also interested in learning students' perceptions and experiences throughout the process. Culturally relevant pedagogy is teaching where the teacher creates a bridge between the students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curriculum. Culturally relevant teaching utilized the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher's lessons. Blended learning is when students learning takes place face to face and virtually. It requires a mixture of in person and virtual assignments

Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Answer some written questions about what you learned and gained from the classroom instruction.
- Meet with me individually and talk about the lessons we did within our class and your thoughts on the instruction.

Any information you share with me will be private. No one except me know what your answers to the questions. No one will see the videotapes of the classroom lessons besides me.

You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.

*For Minors 13-17 years of age:

My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

Print Name of Minor

Age of Minor

Signature of Minor

Date

APPENDIX C: STUDENT IDENTITY SURVEY

1. In the space provided, please write how you identify your race.
2. In the space provided, please write what pronouns you identify as.
3. In the space provided, please write the gender you identify as.
4. In the space provided, please write your preferred name.
5. In the space provided, please list any other identity that you believe is important to who you are.

APPENDIX D: FIELD NOTE TEMPLATE

Observation Date:

Time:

Lesson

Sequence:

Jottings:

Description:

Analysis:

Reflection

APPENDIX E: STUDENT SURVEY

1. Were there lessons that you enjoyed? If so, what were they?
2. What did you learn from this study? How did you learn this?
3. Were there lessons that you did not enjoy? If so, why did you not enjoy them?
4. What improvements do you think could have been made to improve the unit of study?
5. How did the instruction make you feel?
6. What were your experiences working within a blended learning framework?
7. How did Ms. Hostetler encourage academic success within the class?
8. What did you learn about your own culture and identity? How was your culture used within lessons?
9. What did you learn about critical consciousness? What activities did you engage in critical consciousness? Explain your experience.
10. Did you engage in social action? If so, describe your experience. If not, why did you refrain from engaging in social action.
11. How did technology enhance the lessons you learned? If it did not enhance the lessons, please explain why it did not.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. How was academic success encouraged during this study?
2. What did you learn about your own identity and culture? How did you learn this?
3. Describe your experience with your social justice research project.
4. How did you engage in critical consciousness?
5. Did any of the items that you learned help you deal with the pandemics facing our country?
6. In what ways did you engage in social action?
7. Describe your experiences learning from home.
8. Is there anything else that you would like to share? Or any questions you would like me to ask?

APPENDIX G: THIS JUST IN ASSIGNMENT

THIS JUST IN! Assignment

England in the Age of Chaucer

Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* against the backdrop of war, disorder, pestilence, and death. His lifetime was an age of great turmoil, uncertainty, and change.

Directions: Either individually or with a partner, develop a News Report covering the significant events of the Middle English time period. You are to take the significant events from the notes provided to you from Mr. Osbourne's video and Mrs. Hostetler's instructional video. Your newscast should cover at least ten major events.

Extra credit: Turn your news script into a podcast or video.

Your Newscast must:

- Be in script format. Example:

REPORTER 1: Breaking News! It has been decided that jelly will no longer be served in the cafeteria.

REPORTER 2: That's right Jim. Jelly has been deemed as "too messy" and "too expensive" by cafeteria workers all across Aiken County...

- Include information on WHO, WHAT, WHEN, & WHERE
- Explain WHY this is breaking news

APPENDIX H: SPEED DATING ASSIGNMENT

Canterbury Tales Speed Dating Assignment

You are going to become one of the famous characters from Chaucer's masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales*.

You will first select your character from the story. You then read the character's entire tale and review their description in the General Prologue. You will complete the characterization chart for the character that you are becoming.

You will create a dating app video for your character on flipgrid. You should dress up like your character for this activity. You must make a one to two-minute video stating your name, interests, and what you are looking for in life.

You will then come to class on your given date, dressed as your character and participate in a speed dating activity. This activity will require you to sit across from a partner (6ft apart) and ask questions of each other. You have to answer the questions your partner asks you, as the character you have become. The goal is to try and figure out who everyone is in the classroom and learn about each character. You will need to know everything about your character to successfully complete these activities.

Cohort B will do their speed dating activity on December 15th.

Cohort A will do their speed dating activity on December 17th.

Speed Dating Grading

Dressed as Character	/20
Knowledge of Character/Answers	/40
Questions Accurately	
Characterization Chart Completed and Correct	/40
Total Points	/100

APPENDIX I: FAMILY STORYTELLING ASSIGNMENT

Family Storytelling Assignment

Perhaps the thing that makes us human is the stories (real and imagined) that each of us has inside. Many people think that the gift of storytelling belongs only to writers, shamans, and the very old. The reality is we are all storytellers from the very earliest days of our lives.

Stories come in a variety of forms: poetry, song, movement, pictures, plays and even Dad Jokes. We make sense of our life experiences in part by the stories we learn or tell ourselves. Stories have the ability to help us learn about others and to find understanding and empathy for them and their situations. Stories serve so many purposes in our lives.

Directions:

For this assignment, I want you to think about the best storyteller you know. Is there a specific person in your family that tells the best stories? Is there a story that your family tells you over and over? Do you have a friend that tells great stories? Remember stories are both real and imagined.

You are going to capture this person's story. **You must ask permission to audio or video record the person telling their story and share it on our class website (see permission slip).**

After you capture this person's story, you will email it to me along with an image that you want to serve as the place holder for people to click on to hear or watch the story. You will also turn in a short-written response explaining why you chose this person and this story to capture and preserve.

Audio-Video of Story	/50
Permission Slip	/25
Written Response	/25

APPENDIX J: GUEST SPEAKER STUDENT REFLECTION

1. What aspects of the guest speaker's presentation was interesting?
2. What did you like about the guest speaker's presentation?
3. What was the most memorable aspect of the guest speaker's presentation? Why?
4. What did you learn about the art of storytelling? Why is storytelling important?
5. How did this presentation relate to *The Canterbury Tales* or your book club book?

APPENDIX K: CRITICALLY CONSCIOUSNESS QUESTIONS FOR TEXTS

1. What is my personal response to the section that I just read? How can I relate to it? What did it make me think of? What was my first reaction to this section? How am I similar to the characters present in this section? How am I different? What bias do I have that might influence the way I read this section?
2. Did you have a strong emotional response to any section in this text? If so, what part? Why did it make you emotional?
3. How is the author's biography present within this section of the text? What could the author's purpose be for including this section? What textual evidence proves his/her purpose?
4. What perspectives are present in this section?
5. Whose perspectives are absent?
6. What culturally loaded terms or stereotypes are present? What assumptions are in this section?
7. What questions does this section raise to you?
8. Whose view of the world is put forth in this section of text?
9. What characters have privilege in this section of the text? What are their privileges?
10. What societal influences are present within the text? How are they present?
11. Who gains from this text? Who loses from this text?
12. Who has power in this text? How do they have power? In what ways do they exert their power?
13. Who does not have power in this text? How are they disempowered?
14. What literary devices are present within this section? How do they develop meaning?
15. What is the theme of this section?
16. What can you learn from this text?
17. Why do you think this is a required reading selection by our school district curriculum guide?

APPENDIX L: BLOG RESPONSE

For your blogs each week, you will answer the question: What stood out to you in this reading section?

You will also pick one of the questions below from the Critically Consciousness Questions to answer.

After you post your response, you will be required to respond to at least **one classmate's response**.

Your original response should be at least ten sentences long and cites the text. Your response to your classmate's post, must be at least five sentences long.

Critically Consciousness Questions for Texts

1. What is my personal response to the section that I just read? How can I relate to it? What did it make me think of? What was my first reaction to this section? How am I similar to the characters present in this section? How am I different? What bias do I have that might influence the way I read this section?
2. Did you have a strong emotional response to any section in this text? If so, what part? Why did it make you emotional?
3. How is the author's biography present within this section of the text? What could the author's purpose be for including this section? What textual evidence proves his/her purpose?
4. What perspectives are present in this section?
5. Whose perspectives are absent?
6. What culturally loaded terms or stereotypes are present? What assumptions are in this section?
7. What questions does this section raise to you?
8. Whose view of the world is put forth in this section of text?
9. What characters have privilege in this section of the text? What are their privileges?
10. What societal influences are present within the text? How are they present?
11. Who gains from this text? Who loses from this text?
12. Who has power in this text? How do they have power? In what ways do they exert their power?
13. Who does not have power in this text? How are they disempowered?
14. What literary devices are present within this section? How do they develop meaning?
15. What is the theme of this section?
16. What can you learn from this text?

APPENDIX M: “THE HILL WE CLIMB”

“The Hill We Climb”

By: Amanda Gorman

When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We’ve braved the belly of the beast, we’ve
learned that quiet isn’t always peace and the norms and notions of what just is, isn’t
always justice. And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it, somehow we do it, somehow
we’ve weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny black girl descended from
slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself
reciting for one. And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn’t
mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect, we are striving to forge a union with
purpose, to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and
conditions of man.

So we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close
the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.
We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another, we seek harm to
none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true: that even as we grieved, we grew, even as
we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried, that we’ll forever be tied together
victorious, not because we will never again know defeat but because we will never again
sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and
no one should make them afraid. If we’re to live up to our own time, then victory won’t
lie in the blade, but in in all of the bridges we’ve made.

That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb if only we dare it because being American
is more than a pride we inherit, it’s the past we step into and how we repair it. We’ve
seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it. That would destroy our
country if it meant delaying democracy, and this effort very nearly succeeded. But while
democracy can periodically be delayed, but it can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith, we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has
its eyes on us, this is the era of just redemption we feared in its inception we did not feel
prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour but within it we found the power to
author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves, so while once we asked

how can we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us.

We will not march back to what was but move to what shall be, a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free, we will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation, our blunders become their burden. But one thing is certain: if we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left, with every breath from my bronze, pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one, we will rise from the golden hills of the West, we will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution, we will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states, we will rise from the sunbaked South, we will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful, when the day comes we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it.