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Supporting Black Children Within a Eurocratic Educational System: Making Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Foundational to the Role of the Literacy Coach

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Supporting Black Children within a Eurocratic Educational System: Making Culturally
Relevant Pedagogy Foundational to the Role of the Literacy Coach

by

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DEDICATION

To my amazing family for your unconditional love and support.

To James, my darling husband, my love, thank you for all of your love and support that you give me daily and for taking this journey with me. Without your love, support, and encouragement I would not be experiencing this moment right now. Thank you for providing a safe space for me to lay my truths and keeping everything running at home. I love and appreciate you beyond measure.

To my parents, Larry and Leanora Griffin, thank you for being there without question or hesitation throughout this journey. Your love and support are greatly appreciated, and I (we) cannot thank you enough. Thank you for also instilling in me at an early age the importance of being respectful and treating people right. Because of those values I have continued to work to provide an equitable learning experience for all children.

To my sons, Caleb and Jordan, thank you for your understanding when I came home late or spent all day away from you all while I wrote. Being away from you was not easy but your understanding and encouragement helped to keep me going because you and every child deserves to have their culture and heritage as part of their schooling experience.

The love of a family is life's greatest blessing.

-Author Unknown

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Based on my 2010 graduate entrance test scores, I should not be here today, but because Dr. Heidi Mills saw past a test score, saw me and my capabilities, and spoke up for me I was able to start my Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) program at the University of South Carolina. I am so grateful that she saw me, Jennifer, and not a number. I am also very appreciative of my wonderful co-chairs, Dr. Susi Long and Dr. Kamania Wynter-Hoyte, who believed in me and supported me throughout this study. You challenged my thinking, spent numerous hours talking and working with me, and encouraged me; and because of that I was able to grow in my role as a literacy coach who is committed to having culturally relevant pedagogy as a foundation for the work that I do with teachers. Dr. Allison Anders, Dr. Gloria Boutte, and Dr. Julia López-Robertson, committee members whom I had the opportunity to learn under for multiple classes and who each helped me get closer to understanding how my own learning was structured in the dominant race and how to make sure that my students saw and heard the beauty of their own culture. Thank you all for the knowledge that I was able to gain under your instruction and make a part of my daily life.

This study would not be complete without the dynamic duo, teacher participants. You two are the best and I thank you for being a part of this study because without you two I would not have been able to experience the struggles and successes of being a literacy coach who puts culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) at the forefront of students'

learning. Your honesty of how you felt as an educator and what you needed made this partnership even better and demonstrated the realness of our educational system. I am thankful for the support of my principal; you believe that all children should be seen for who they are and who they are capable of being. It is because of your belief, work, and support of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) that I was able to conduct my research and learn more about making CRP foundational to my role as a literacy coach. I also want to acknowledge the other participants- Executive Director of Elementary Instruction and literacy coaches' supervisor, and student intern- thank you for your time and insight that you added to my research.

ABSTRACT

This critical qualitative study documented what was learned about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to the commitment of a literacy coach while working closely with a kindergarten and first grade teacher for one school year. Critical Race and Black Critical (BlackCrit) theories were the driving theoretical frameworks used to design the study, represent findings, and provide insight into the process of working to make culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to the role of a literacy coach with a particular focus on supporting the Black child. The methods used to gain knowledge about CRP as foundational to the role of the literacy coach were through the examination of interviews with two classroom teachers, school's principal, and the district's literacy coach supervisor. Knowledge was also gained through classroom observations, school-wide and small group professional development, student work, and the researcher's field journals.

Thematic coding was used to analyze data leading to findings focused on barriers experienced by and support needed for teacher participants and their literacy coach to be able to make cultural relevance foundational to the literacy coach's position and the growth of the literacy coach over time. Barriers were found to include partial knowledge of CRP impacting decisions made about mandating programs at the district level, mixed messages received by teachers about whether or not and to what extent they were "allowed" to teach in culturally relevant ways, teachers' fears about potential

reprimands for diverging from the mandated program, teachers' confidence and concerns about developing students' critical consciousness, and the need for time for professional growth and curricular preparation. Support found within the study was through one-on-one coaching and small group sessions, immediate feedback from the literacy coach after teaching observations, teachers' excitement for teaching, student motivation, and teaching across cultural groups. The study concludes with implications for district personnel, administrators, teachers, and literacy coaches in the work to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to the literacy coach's role.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	African American Language
AVID.....	Advancement Via Individual Determination
ASL	American Sign Language
BDA	Before, During, After
CBE.....	Cultural-Based Education
CEEAAAS	Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students
CRAE.....	Culturally Relevant Arts Education
CRT.....	Critical Race Theory
CRP.....	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
DD.....	Developmentally Delayed
DOE	Department of Education
ELA.....	English Language Arts
ESSA.....	Every Student Succeed Act
HBCUs.....	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LETRS	Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling
LGBTQIA+.....	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans/Transsexual/Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Agender, Demisexual, Genderfluid, Graysexual, Non- binary/Genderqueer, Pansexual/Omnisexual
MC	Multi-category
ME.....	Multicultural Education

NAEP	National Assessment of Education Progress
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OCR	Open Court Reading
PD	Professional Development
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SCDE	South Carolina Department of Education
SCRI.....	South Carolina Reading Initiative
TA	Thematic Analysis

CHAPTER ONE

PATH TO BLACK JOY

Black joy is a beautiful thing but what would be even more beautiful is if all of us band together in solidarity to destroy and dismantle our system of white supremacy so that all joy is just human joy and Black folks can live freely in the world and strive.

-Mei-Ling Malone (in Pham, K., 2021)

It was spring semester of 2017 that an educational and life changing experience occurred for me. This was the year I met Dr. Clark as my professor for a course entitled Advanced Study of Language Acquisition; and the year I realized how culturally asleep (not aware) I was! I was aware of the negative stereotypes placed on Black men and women, but I did not know the richness and beauty of my culture, my history, my ancestors, my being. At the end of the course, I had to put all my feelings into a final presentation and below are the words that I presented. I called it, “Can You Imagine” and it serves as a fitting preface to this dissertation and this chapter that traces my path to Black joy:

“Can You Imagine”

Can you imagine not knowing your history or thinking that it comes at the beginning of an era that does not define who you really are? Can you imagine what it would be like day in and day out to be invisible, to be feared, to be hated for no apparent reason? Can you imagine?

See, no one really has to think about what it is to know that your language is not respected, to know that when you say, “Hey, wuz up?” that people think

that you're being ghetto or ignorant because you are not using the 'proper form' of 'Hello, how are you doing?' Not realizing that it is a beautiful language that I am speaking. Can you imagine? Can you imagine if you, speaking standardized English, the English that people know, the English that people respect is not valued? Think about how others feel not being able to communicate in their mother's tongue. Delpit (1997) said it is the language of our family, it is the language of love, it is the language of our personal identity. Can you imagine if yours were stripped away and not even know why? Can you imagine?

Everyone can't imagine what it would be like to sit in solitude and wonder where you would be, or why am I considered dumb or ignorant. These are just some of the questions I began to wonder about. Taking this course made my eyes open wider and made me think, "What can I do for the little ones coming up? What can I do for my two little boys? How is it that I can be a woman of stature, but feel that I am isolated, invisible, and don't have a voice?" But you see this class is what sparked the voice inside of me to want to speak again. If I come to you and say, "I ain't gon do dat!" It doesn't mean that I don't know how to speak, it doesn't mean that I'm not smart, it just means that I am embracing the language that is important to me, the language that is mine, the language that is of my ancestors, the language that is of my community. Why should that be shunned away, it's a compass pointing to home, directing me to those who love me, those who care.

History doesn't start with Indigenous people having things taken away, their names stripped, their families taken away, their hair cut to demean them,

their land stolen. So, how can we help all children know that everyone is important, and everyone has a hand in making the United States of America what it is today? The United States of America, are we really united, are we really one? How can we teach everyone to embrace every piece of culture that makes this place America the beautiful? What is it that we can do, what is it that I can do? You see, I have two little boys that I have to think about. My husband and I are teaching our boys that, yes, they have to be respectful and mannerable, but no they don't have to forget who they are. See this course, has driven me to not only want to be a voice for myself, but to be a voice for my children, a voice for my family, a voice for those little kids who don't know that they, too, have a voice.

See, I was smart in school, I did everything I was supposed to do, but I was lacking what I needed to know from MY history, from who I was. It didn't start with segregation or with my ancestors being brought from Africa. If my ancestors were Kings and Queens, then so were yours! So, what makes you or others better than me? There is nothing! So, can you imagine if you didn't have the knowledge of who you were supposed to be or who you are?

I have a lot to learn, and like Dr. Joyce E. King (Lecture, 2017) suggested, I need to go back from whence I came. Did I hear about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriett Tubman, Rosa Parks, Frederick Douglass? Yes, year in and year out, but there are other names that I didn't hear about and it's because of them and OTHERS that we're where we are today. When you look at your long-lasting light bulb or drive your car and stop at a stop light have you ever thought about who

had that glorious idea to have those things? Many people don't. You just assume, but can you imagine that you never knew that someone like you did that?

See a lot of us can't imagine all that we have, but I am here to tell you that everyone, everyone is important. And this class has given me a voice to say it!

I wrote this piece at the end of my spring semester 2017 as I was beginning to learn about the greatness of my people, and I poured out my feelings in this writing. For the past five years I have continued to learn more about the richness of my heritage and know that Black people have contributed to global and American history in many ways. Our contributions of governmental structures, architecture, principles of ethics, scientific advancements, medical technology, art, music, exploration, mathematics were the foundations from which other cultures learned as we have impacted the lives of people all over the world. However, this great heritage was not a part of my educational experience until my doctoral program.

As I continued my studies, I learned that grounding teaching practices in cultural relevance can be highly supportive of students' success, particularly when your teaching normalizes cultures, linguistic groups, races, etc. that are typically marginalized from or silenced in the curriculum. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) conceptualized this kind of teaching as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). It is an approach to education grounded in three components gleaned from her analysis of successful teachers of African American students who were characterized by their commitment and ability to develop students' (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence in their own and other cultures, and (c) critical consciousness or ability to recognize and respond to injustices. As a literacy coach working with teachers to support literacy development of elementary

school students and with a specific interest in Black students (as described in the body of this chapter), I began to wonder what I might find when attempting to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my role as literacy coach in my attempts to address the cycle through which Black students are consistently failed by schools. Thus, this dissertation is the story of what happened when I asked: What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?

My Educational Why

As a Black woman educator in the Southeastern United States, I am disheartened by the way Black students are viewed within the educational system as “at risk,” are assessed using tools representing a legacy of systems designed to maintain White power structures and taught through practices and materials that are Eurocratic (King & Swartz, 2014) in nature, and by the lack of focus on Black literature, art, histories, joy, resistance, and resilience (see Definitions later in this chapter for explanation of the use of the term Eurocratic). I see this as well in the training of literacy coaches who are hired to work with teachers in developing their abilities to effectively teach all students. Before breaking down why and how I conducted a study about making culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to the literacy coach position, an approach that not only develops students’ academic achievement but their cultural competence and critical consciousness, I unpack experiences that brought me to the study.

I was a student who did very well in school. Throughout elementary and middle school, I succeeded on standardized tests and academically. Then, in my senior year of high school, one test defined me differently and almost closed out opportunities for

higher education and my current career as an educator. I was faced with taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the pressure was building on me because I was looking toward my future as a college student. This is where, for the first time, I felt inadequate as a student because I did not do as well as I thought I would have done on the SAT. My previous outcomes - doing well enough in order to make it to the next stage in my education - came to a halt when my combined score of 930 kept me from my desired university. This is not uncommon for Black students. On conventional assessments, students of Color, in particular Black students, across the U.S. perform lower than White students and some Asian students (McAdoo, 2015; Nation's Report Card, 2017a; 2017b; 2019; 2020). Studies show that this is often due to (a) the biased nature of testing (Rosales, n.d.) and not to students' intelligence, and to (b) curricula and teacher biases that marginalize and make students of Color, their languages, histories, and communities invisible (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Paris & Alim, 2014). However, students continue to be defined by tests and are taught by curricula that minimize the importance of who they are and what they can actually do academically.

As I opened the university's letter expecting to read "Accepted," my heart broke as I read that the acceptance letter was actually a denial letter. It was the first time that I had to face the fact that a test score would define who I was without knowing who I really was. I had not only been denied entry into a school, but I was now on the path of serious test anxiety and lowered self-esteem and belief in myself. After my SAT experience I began to face tests with very forceful butterflies, and I also developed an "I can't attitude" which would continue to be a downfall for me. The young Black girl who

had always defined herself and been defined by others as an exceptional student, well-mannered and followed all the conforming rules of a White-driven system was now a Black child who, because of White-driven systems felt that I was being labeled as a failure. My 18-year-old self, having had little education in the realities of Black oppression and White privilege in schools, saw only deficits in me, rather than a systemic problem, shown by years of research demonstrating curriculum and assessment biases against Black, Native American, Latinx, and some Asian groups (Rosales, n.d.; Rosales & Walker, 2021; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020).

Long after my experience with the SAT, I began to learn that, in addition to not understanding the injustices of biased assessments, I had internalized the racism of curricula or what Johnson et al. (2017) call “curriculum violence” (p. 62) because I accepted as truths the Eurocratic schooling that marginalized or made invisible my own histories and community. Looking back at my own experiences, I realized that I had been deprived of my own culture and heritage within the school curricula. I felt ashamed for not knowing the truth and lost for not knowing all of the greatness that my ancestors contributed to the world. I was also ashamed because I had trusted in the educational system to educate me fully and thought that, with the passing of Civil Rights Laws and everyone coming together under one school roof, all people were equally important in education and contributions were addressed in the curricula as such. I felt lost and not connected to my African roots because I had not known about the many contributions and successes of my ancestors.

I also realized that I had been operating in what Du Bois (1903/2005) called “double consciousness” living in a state of twoness-having two souls with two thoughts.

Operating in double consciousness caused me to only engage at home in African American Language (AAL) and other cultural traditions of my community and move in silence outside of my community in order to succeed in a Eurocratic system. This state of living causes one to feel as though their identity is divided into multiple parts and that they do not have one unified identity (Du Bois, 1903/2005; Kristin Does Theory, n.d.; Makhorin, 2020). Double consciousness is what I and many people of Color experience daily, playing the “White” game in order to succeed and to avoid being labeled in negative ways such as “troublemakers.”

Prior to my doctoral studies, as I took courses for my Educational Specialist degree (Ed.S.), I began to deepen my awareness of more issues surrounding the oppression of Black people, for example, the alarming numbers of Black and Brown prisoners who were reading below level (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). From there I knew that I wanted to study more about helping Black students obtain academic success, particularly in the area of literacy, and to end the series of denials and failures inflicted by school systems leading to the school-to-prison pipeline. At that time, I did not know there was a particular terminology for what I wanted to do. However, when I was introduced to the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009), I felt that it embodied all that I wanted to learn more about in order to reach my desired goal of helping Black children build their reading abilities.

Learning about CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009) caused me to reflect on my days as a classroom teacher. The desire to create a strong literacy foundation for Early Childhood students, birth to third grade, had always been a desire of mine, but the more I learned about CRP the more I wanted to make changes to the ways in which I taught my

students. Through my role as a teacher, I had always provided different literacy learning ways for students to understand letters, sounds, and how they go together to make meaning. I always made a conscious effort to know my students and what they liked and implemented that into my daily instruction to help them learn literacy concepts. This instruction looked like singing, dancing, personal connections in stories, and finding greatness in all that my students did, even their mistakes, because making mistakes made opportunities for more focused teaching and learning as I used topics that were meaningful to them in their everyday life.

When deciding to transition from the classroom in 2014 to be a literacy coach, I was not ready to leave my “babies.” However, after long consideration, the one thing that made it okay for me to leave the classroom was the thought of being able to help more students build a strong literacy foundation. Within my classroom, I was able to reach 18 or more students, but as a literacy coach I envisioned reaching an entire school of students. Reaching more students as a literacy coach also meant that I would be able to use my own experiences to relate to and support more students who did not experience excellence on test scores and work with teachers to build positive experiences for students. My own story with the SAT and with Eurocratic curricula connects me to the many children who are negatively defined by tests and are expected to learn through curricula in which they and their heritage are all but invisible. This frequently gives teachers, students, and families a false sense that they are not capable of excelling at school. I know that Black students are capable of performing academically better than what the scores on an assessment state they can do. This belief is what drove my dedication to understanding more about what would happen when culturally relevant

pedagogy was used as foundational to supporting teachers through my current position as a literacy coach.

Statement of the Problem

Our public education system has caused a “failing” epidemic amongst Black students that has been going on too long. This epidemic of Black students being failed by U.S. schools has been ongoing since slavery was declared to have ended as many freed Africans were still denied education within American schools (Renfer & Sandifer, 2003). During Reconstruction immediately after the U.S. Civil War, recently freed Black people were educated in segregated facilities that were far worse than White schools, they had fewer books, physical facilities were poor, and Black communities had very limited resources to be able to pay Black teachers anywhere near the salaries being paid to White teachers (Virginia History, n.d.). At the same time, Black teachers and schools in Black communities tended to emphasize an education that focused on the needs and taught the histories of the Black student and “encouraged black students to aspire” (Siddle Walker, 2019, para 13), a precursor to the philosophy underlying much of what we know as culturally relevant teaching today. However, many White teachers in Black schools often had no knowledge of the community, their languages and literacies, and had little commitment to teaching to sustain students’ cultural and community strengths while teaching for success in the dominant culture.

White Teachers and Black Students

After the 1954 ruling by the Federal Supreme Court in the Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas case that declared it unconstitutional to have segregated schools (National Park Service, 2016), some Black people began attending what were

previously all-White schools with predominantly White teachers and, while facility inequities began to be addressed, Black students did not receive an education that was supportive of the Black community or that emphasized Black histories from Black perspectives (personal conversation with my dad who was a part of integrating the first integrated high school in our district). In addition, many Black teachers were pushed out of their jobs and White teachers began to populate previously all-Black schools further destroying the connection between and beliefs in the value of the Black community (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019; Siddle Walker, 2019).

Pushing Black teachers out and replacing them with White teachers meant that Black students endured an education plan that was carried out by educators who attempted to teach Black students with no knowledge of or desire to teach histories of Black people or the literature of Black authors, and who did not support the Black community. Although these changes –pushing Black teachers out, removing Black cultural experiences from education, and desegregating schools–occurred over 60 years ago, schools today continue to follow a curriculum that centers Whiteness as rightness (Au et al., 2016; Lyiscott, 2017; Woodson, 1933/2010). This means that students are only learning about culture, history, literature, and contributions from a Eurocractic perspective and even when they study Black history, it is typically through a White lens, thus, leaving out many contributions and the brilliance of Blackness. With this educational change, an intentional epidemic of educational neglect denied and continues to deny Black students their identity and sends messages of Black inferiority and White superiority to all students. Since we know that students’ positive identity including image of self, family, community, and history are foundational to learning, this became and

continues to be a barrier to opportunities for Black students' success. Understanding culturally relevant teaching is one way we can get back to curricular systems and teacher attitudes about Black students that have the potential to lead to student success.

Curriculum Violence and Black Students

Du Bois (1903/2005) stated that “the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro” (p. 24); and with this fear of educating the Negro, Black people were and still are mentally and spiritually killed (Love, 2016) not just immediately following desegregation but continuing as a curricular norm today. According to Johnson et al. (2017), “educators can intentionally and unintentionally shoot metaphorical bullets that kill the spirit and humanity of Black students” (p. 61) through bullets of rejection, silencing, and disrespect (Johnson & Bryan, 2017). Johnson and Bryan (2017) explain the bullets as:

1. rejection- experienced when the multiple identities Black students bring to the classroom is rejected
2. silencing- experienced when students' voices are silenced by only centering the lived experiences and stories of Europeans
3. disrespect- experienced when educators lower expectations and over-surveillance the Black body

Johnson et al. (2017) and Boutte and Bryan (2019), write that this type of killing happens for many reasons within the classrooms which they name as five kinds of violence: physical, symbolic, linguistic, systemic, and curricular. They write that curriculum violence occurs when teachers intentionally and unintentionally marginalize prior knowledge, experiences, literatures, culture, and language of Black students within

the classroom. Curriculum violence also occurs with “oppressive literacy curricula and practices that serve as violent acts to Black youth” (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 62). Racial violence is also committed against Black students when their teachers do not acknowledge that there is little difference between the murder of Black youth—“Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Michael Brown, Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, and Aiyana Stanley-Jones” (Johnson et al., 2017, p.62)--and the spirit and academic murdering of Black youth in their classrooms when Black students do not learn about their own history throughout the everyday school curricula, are disproportionately and more harshly disciplined (Gordon, 2018; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2016) and are over-referred to special education (McNair, 2021; NCLD, 2020), and under-referred to gifted programs (Dreilinger, 2020; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

It is important to mention that spirit murdering of Black students does not only happen within the educational system; however, the educational system is a place where much of this is perpetuated. This deprivation of heritage, and negative assumptions about behavior and intelligence, according to Woodson (1933/2010), relegate students “to nothingness and nobodiness” (p. 5). This needs to be challenged and changed. In order to make these changes, teachers need spaces to recognize these injustices and learn how to address them within their classrooms (Chisholm, 1994). Because literacy coaches are charged with supporting the development and implementation of curriculum and the success of all students, they have the potential to play a critical role in effecting this kind of change.

Curricular Privileging of White Students

This oppressive cycle continues today and is why many scholars have long called

for pedagogies that humanize Black students and Black people, with culturally relevant pedagogy being one of them. The curricula that are typically forced on students are developed from a Eurocentric stance (Lyiscott, 2017) and do not “present authentic Negro History in schools” (Woodson, 1933/2010, p. 5) meaning that it is culturally irrelevant to Black students. Important historical knowledge of who Black people were and are, is not being taught extensively within our school systems (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Woodson, 1933/2010), which leaves Black students not knowing who they are and where they come from. They are disconnected from the curriculum that, at the same time, connects to and thereby advantages White students (Baines et al., 2018; Freire, 1970/2000; Muhammad, 2020).

In contrast, culturally relevant pedagogy places ALL students at the center of the curricula and teaches for academic success that is embedded in developing students’ cultural competence and critical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 1995a, 1995b, 2011, 2014, 2017). Having curricula embedded in culturally relevant pedagogy accesses students’ knowledge about their own culture while teaching them about cultures beyond their own (Banks, 1993/2019; Gay, 2010/2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 1995a, 1995b). This also requires students to develop a critical consciousness to recognize injustices like curricula omission and other injustices and to acquire the skills to stand up against them (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 1995a, 1995b, 2011, 2014, 2017).

In addition to curricula, current methods of assessment are also Eurocratic which, again, advantages White students. Assessments that are typically used to determine the future success of students’ lives are embedded within a Eurocratic history through which tests were developed to ensure the success of White students and the failure of students of

Color (Singer, 2019); thus, scores do not truly represent what all children know. While we work to eliminate the emphasis that schools, districts, states, and the nation place on test scores and work to overhaul assessments themselves so they no longer privilege White, middle class, English-only students, we still have a responsibility to help students succeed with existing assessment structures. However, with alarming test results year-after-year showing that Black students continue to be failed by schooling and the tests, educational reforms, such as creating the role of literacy coach in many schools, were developed to make changes to the reading instruction students received with hopes that those reforms would change the outcome of the end of the year assessments and students' success in future endeavors. The literacy coach plays an important role in ensuring students' success on existing assessments while also challenging and transforming the assessment norm. However, without an understanding of how Black students are inequitably assessed through systems that are relevant to middle- and upper-class White students and largely irrelevant to Black students, the literacy coach has little knowledge or ability to address needed changes and provide support.

Literacy Coaching, a Reform That Fails to Recognize the Need for Cultural Relevance

One of the educational reforms implemented to address the low achievement scores of Black students, as determined by assessments, was the addition of literacy coaches. Literacy coaches were added as an educational reform to give assistance for teachers in reading instruction in order to build students' reading proficiency and raise reading scores on national assessments. However, although literacy coaches were added for additional support, reports show that the scores of Black students are rarely positively

affected (McAdoo, 2015; Nation's Report Card, 2017a; 2017b; 2019, 2020). This caused me to look at the training of literacy coaches recognizing that while literacy coaches are trained to help teachers with reading instructional practices (Deussen et al., 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; International Literacy Association, 2004; Mraz et al., 2009), coaching through a culturally relevant pedagogical focus is missing. Thus, year after year I see Black students fall below what the public education system has determined to represent success and I wonder what I can do as a literacy coach in order to help teachers address this issue. I believe that a partnership between teachers and literacy coaches can make a positive impact on students' success; but I strongly believe that instructional practices that incorporate students' lived and understood experiences have to be in place for all students to be successful.

Because studies of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) tell us that students of Color achieve better when CRP is foundational in their classrooms (Byrd, 2016; Howard 2001a; 2001b), it stands to reason that it should be foundational to positions like that of literacy coaches who are charged with working with classroom teachers to raise the literacy achievement of all children. Supporting teachers in teaching from this framework has the potential to provide spaces for marginalized groups to be visible and successful within the educational system. CRP provides educational spaces and academic support for people who are knowingly and unknowingly silenced by the oppressive state of the public education system by having their voices, histories, literatures, languages, and communities heard and normalized. Although many educators or the curricula taught may not verbally state that our society and education system operate in an oppressive state towards Black and Brown children, the images, topics, and language used within the

content say a lot to those who are often left out or marginalized. The absence of students' languages and cultures within their daily educational environment say to the students that not speaking, acting, or practicing specific traditions in ways that the White culture does signifies that something is wrong with them, their families, and their communities.

CRP can give students the ability to know that who they are as human beings is important and that they are capable and knowledgeable and have rich histories and heritages that are critical to the world's knowledge. CRP expands the "one-size-fits-all curricula and pedagogies that disadvantage Black children and that render their unique strengths and particular needs invisible" (Sealey-Ruiz & Haddix., n.d., p.14). CRP provides windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) into and beyond children and teachers' own cultures which is well-documented to underlie students' academic achievement. At the same time, a culturally relevant curriculum teaches White students that they are not the be-all and end-all of society, history, literature, and so on. Clearly, if support systems such as literacy coaches are to be effective in helping students of Color, especially Black students, making CRP foundational to their positions holds great promise. However, CRP has not been understood as a necessary foundation to the role of the literacy coach even though it is well documented that CRP is an approach that can alter the unjust state of education in the lives of Black students (Baines et al., 2018; Borreor et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Howard, 2001b). Therefore, it is a problem if literacy coaches, who are often the primary literacy support systems in teachers' lives, do not make this kind of support foundational to their role. By making CRP a part of the literacy coach's position, it seems likely that we will have

further opportunities for transformative and liberatory education (Freire, 1970/2000) to be reached.

In summary, the problem that this study attempts to address is based on a long history of schools not serving Black children equitably and the documentation of Black students continuing to lose a sense of self-worth, academic motivation, and spirit through the Eurocratic and racially microaggressive nature of much of schooling (Johnson & Bryan, 2017; Love, 2016). While culturally relevant teaching has been shown to be supportive of the achievement of Black students (Baines et al., 2018; Banks, 1993/2019; Boutte, 2016; Gay, 2010/2018) it is not widely a part of classroom teaching. Nor is it seen as foundational to any kind of reading intervention or support from reading specialists in schools such as literacy coaches. That is why I focused my study on literacy coaching through the lens of culturally relevant teaching, in order to see what happens when attempts are made to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to the role of literacy coach.

Research Purpose and Questions

From this foundation, my study investigated what occurred when I redesigned my work as a literacy coach to make culturally relevant teaching foundational to that role. Specifically, I engaged in a qualitative study that asked: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* The study focused on my work to support two teachers in deepening and implementing their understandings about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) as well as the growth of my own understanding of CRP and my abilities to support implementation in the teachers' kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Specifically, I wanted to know

about the barriers and support experienced when attempting to change the dynamic of literacy coaching through a commitment to making CRP foundational to literacy instruction within a system designed for the success of the dominant culture - White culture – as I served in a position (literacy coach) that has not historically questioned the Whiteness of its foundations, materials, teaching strategies, and teacher dispositions. Thus, subquestions included:

- (a) What barriers are experienced and how are they negotiated (or not)?
- (b) What support is experienced in the work to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach?
- (c) What can I learn about myself in the role of literacy coach as I attempt to make CRP foundational to my work with teachers and children?

Significance of the Study

Learning about past and present accounts of people from many different cultural backgrounds is important within our educational system and society. However, having curricula from the Eurocratic perspective and not considering the influence of how children’s cultures influence their learning (Boutte & DeFlorimonte), the dynamic culture that is learned and that does not represent cultural aspects of Black students, has resulted in poor academic achievement for Black students as indicated by national and state yearly reading assessments (The Nation’s Report Card, 2017a, 2017b, 2019, 2020; South Carolina Department of Education, 2019, 2021, 2022). Low reading assessment scores, particularly among Black students, has labeled students who perform below a desired number as being “at risk;” which is a term often used to classify students who are not performing well within a traditional school setting (Toldson, 2019), and indicates deficit

and dismissive views of the knowledge students bring from homes and communities and privileges knowledge in White-driven curricula and assessments. To help develop my argument for the significance of the study, this will be divided into four sections

- 1) Significance for Literacy Coaches
- 2) Significance in Supporting Teachers as Advocates and Activists
- 3) Significance in Building Teachers' Abilities to Support Black Students to Reach their Highest Academic Potential
- 4) Significance in Countering Racist Perceptions of Black Students

Significance for Literacy Coaches

Described more completely in Chapter Two, a literacy coach is typically an educational leader who works with teachers and students, primarily in a professional development capacity although that varies from state to state and district to district. Literacy coaches are generally trained to give daily support to teachers by helping with the implementation of instructional practices (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018). Research shows that teachers who work with literacy coaches are more likely to practice and implement new strategies in order to fit the needs of their students more than teachers who do not work with literacy coaches (Joyce & Showers, 2003). However, there has not been a significant impact on the literacy growth of Black children (Nation's Report Card, 2019; 2020). Despite so-called reforms such as the implementation of Reading Excellence Act (1998), No Child Left Behind (2001), Race to the Top (2009), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), Black students who are forced to show knowledge of our White dominant educational system are labeled as at risk in reading (Nation's Report 2017a & 2017b, 2019; 2020). Within those reforms was the decision to add the additional

support of reading specialists to work with teachers in their schools. Reading specialists and others in a reading capacity worked with teachers, but in 2001, with the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act (2001), literacy coaches received national recognition with the Reading First Program (Toll, 2014). From there literacy coaches began to work with teachers as mentors collaborating about instructional practices (International Literacy Association, 2004; Mraz et al., 2009). However, this did little to improve literacy achievement for Black students.

It is clear that growth has not been obtained because Black students continue to fall behind in national assessments (Nation's Report Card, 2017a; 2017b; 2019; 2020), even with the implementation of new educational reforms in the 21st Century. The latest reforms that have not shown growth for Black students are Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (U.S. Department, n.d.) developed under former President Barack Obama and the state of South Carolina's education reform, Read to Succeed (2014); which was implemented by former governor, Nikki Haley. As a result of these legislative moves throughout the years, roles and responsibilities changed for literacy coaches in order to add support for classroom teachers to include instructional planning and delivery; but even with the changes, Black students continue to be underserved. Results reported from educational reforms show that they continue to score below Whites in reading achievement. The 2017 NAEP Reading Report Card (Nation's Report Card, 2017b) reported that 4th grade scores had not changed since 2015 and Black students scored below Whites. The 2019 Nation's Report Card (2019) showed that all students had declined below the 2017 scores in reading, but Black students continued to score below all other subgroups of children. The Nation's Report Card (2020) showed that students of

all races had no significant changes in their reading scores from 2012-2019 with Black students continuing to receive scores lower than other racial groups.

Reports like this say loudly that something else needs to be done in order for Black students to make educational gains, which has not been seen since the first aptitude test, Coleman Report, was administered and reported to President Lyndon B. Johnson (Coleman Report, 1966). Coleman's aptitude test compared the learning of White and Black students and was based on an educational system taught from the dominant culture's experiences and knowledge base (Brown & Au, 2014). This test did not show what Black students were capable of doing academically when assessed on topics that were culturally appropriate to their daily lives and learning. This test and other tests do not show experiences of Black students' daily lives because assessments (Singer, 2019) and curricula used to teach students (Aronson & Boveda, 2017) are both a part of a White supremacist system and, therefore, do not counteract the differences among cultures.

Even with this research and history, the work of literacy coaches does not address the White supremacist nature of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and the work of literacy coaches continues to be an implementation of the same White-dominant, White-driven, and White-serving curricula that have existed for centuries. And yet, the training and role of literacy coaches supposedly supports them in providing professional development for teachers (Deussen et al., 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; International Literacy Association, 2004) so that they can "turn knowledge and principles into effective teaching practices" (Mraz et al., 2009, p.17), but when Black students continue to be failed by schooling, the question that literacy coaches could be asking is: Effective teaching practices for whom? The reality is that literacy coaches work within the

guidelines of the daily curriculum promoted in their states and districts and do not receive much (if any) professional development on successful ways to support teachers on instructing students through a culturally relevant lens. As a result, they do not have the knowledge or the expertise to argue for change.

Literacy coaching literature such as Mraz et al. (2009) used words such as *change agent* and *student advocate* when discussing the important role of literacy coaches but do not elaborate on what those words specifically mean in order to give educators a clear understanding of what a literacy coach as a culturally relevant change agent and student advocate should do. They also wrote that “literacy coaches work with teachers to present lessons that are relevant to their students” (Mraz et al., 2009, p.12), however, those words can be interpreted in different ways. For example, some might see lessons as being relevant if they resonate with a topic of study without a focus on culture or recognizing the White center of curriculum while, for other educators, words such as change agent and student advocate can mean that the teacher is highly invested in speaking up for their students and making changes within the classroom that result in academic success which means altering the Eurocratic curricular center.

Without learning how to teach in truly culturally relevant ways, literacy coaches and teachers are left not understanding how they can advocate for their students through and alongside the curriculum; how deeply their instruction should be rooted in the lives, literacies, languages, heritages, and communities of their students; and how all students will benefit by broadening their cultural competence and critical consciousness. Looking through a culturally relevant lens requires literacy coaches to lead teachers as change agents by overhauling what has been determined to be the “appropriate” content,

typically content that privileges White students. It also requires literacy coaches to speak up and to support teachers in speaking up in curricular planning and professional development sessions about the need for change in order to give students the opportunity to grasp the content in a way that is more meaningful to them, presenting instruction that is relevant to students.

One of the reasons that culturally relevant teaching may not yet be foundational to the literacy coach's position is that it requires teachers to sometimes step out of their comfort zone to understand a culture that is different from their own and to acknowledge curricular injustices that occur. This can be an issue even within the same racial groups because race is not a monolithic concept. People who are of the same race can also have cultural differences with each other (Howard, 2001a) which means they also need to come out of their comfort zone to understand cultures that are not like theirs. In addition, even within communities of Color, educators have come to believe the Eurocratic "truths" about curriculum that have been taught so well. This is a form of internalized racism (Bivens, 2005; Pyke, 2010; United to End Racism, 2021). Believing the truths about what is presented in curriculum, White dominant curriculum, educators and students of Color experience internalized racism because they "develop ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviors that support or collude with racism" (Bivens, 2005, p. 44). Thus, causing one to feel inferior and seeing themselves through the eyes of White people (Du Bois, 1903/2005).

Stepping out of a comfort zone that exists as the result of being taught for years from a Eurocratic system, can bring about uncertainties and even fears for teachers. Uncertainties can exist because speaking out against a racist and oppressive system that

has been determined the “normal” form of schooling is a challenge and often something that teachers have not confronted. Forcefully challenging the system does not allow for one to be comfortable or to receive rewards (Johnson & Bryan, 2017). In other words, educators will not likely be praised and viewed in positive ways which may cause discomfort. However, research shows that rewards can be gained through the creation of equitable learning opportunities that are owed to students (Alim & Paris, 2017; Borreor et al., 2018; Howard, 2001b; McCarther & Davis, 2017; Paris, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014). Therefore, there is a need to have educational leaders like literacy coaches who have the knowledge to be able to challenge the status quo of oppressive school systems which includes Eurocratic curricula and mandates; as well as literacy coaches who will choose to play a role in dismantling and replacing these systems rather than supporting and perpetuating them.

Significance in Supporting Teachers as Advocates and Activists

Teachers can affect how the injustices of our world, such as racial injustices and educational debts (Ladson-Billings, 2006), are placed upon students and they can also affect much needed changes to our education system. In terms of curricular injustices (omissions, distortions, decentering and devaluing of literatures, histories, and communities of people of Color), if teachers are not critically conscious about how and where those injustices appear within our schooling environment, which is a key component of culturally relevant teaching, they do not get addressed in the classroom or the system at large.

The literacy coach can be instrumental in working to ensure that teachers are aware of and make changes to these injustices in our educational system so that all

students will have an opportunity to excel. However, being aware is one thing but being aware and making changes for the better is what Baines et al. (2018) would consider an effective teacher as one who takes action for change after identifying “bias, privilege, and oppression in the institutions of schooling: curriculum, standards, book collections, program adoption, discipline enforcement, language policies, assessment measures, identification of students for special-needs and gifted programs, and hiring and zoning practices” (p. 24). Again, literacy coaches can be instrumental in supporting the knowledge building that is necessary for teachers to engage in this kind of pedagogical analysis.

In addition, when teachers take time to look for biases, privileges, and oppressive beliefs and actions within themselves and their classrooms, school, district, and curricula, they are able to be more effective because they know their social identity (Haas, 2020; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2022) and are more likely to challenge these states by replacing Eurocratic narratives with counternarratives to their own stories and stories told about other groups. Taking this kind of action also shows that teachers really care about their students by focusing on the histories and current situations that are relevant and important to them (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). In order to be effective in ensuring an equitable education for all students, teachers have to be ready to advocate for dismantling the Eurocratic narrative and adding pro-Black and Brown narratives to what is deemed the “right” narrative through required curriculum and literacy coaches can play a primary role in guiding that work

Significance in Building Teachers' Ability to Support Black Students to Reach Their Highest Academic Potential

According to Camera (2018), research from Johns Hopkins University and American University has shown that Black students who have had a Black teacher by third grade are 13% likely to go to college than Black students who have not had a Black teacher and that Black students who have Black teachers perform better on standardized assessments than Black students who have not had Black teachers. This is a critical point because currently 79.6% of the teachers in the U.S. are White (Data Point, 2020). In addition, we know that, just because a teacher is Black does not mean that the teacher will teach in culturally relevant ways. Most Black teachers have been brought up through the same Eurocratic system (in PreK-12 schooling and teacher education programs) as White teachers which means that they may not recognize the omissions, oppressions, and marginalizations. I am a prime example because I was brought up through a Eurocratic system and unknowingly omitted, oppressed, and marginalized my Black students by teaching them through the required curricula without providing knowledge of contributions and other greatness of their ancestors and other people of Color. Also, as Howard (2001a) stated, “cultural incongruences” (p. 181) can arise between teachers and students who are of the same race or ethnic background meaning that, although there are similarities, their cultural and economic experiences may be different (Boutte, 2016; Howard, 2001a).

Thus, it is critical that both White and Black teachers learn how to be effective teachers of Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). This means that all teachers need support for recognizing when curriculum silences students, their communities, and

their histories. These curricula have been categorized as grounded in Eurocratic narratives that are invisible because they have been accepted as representing truths when, in fact, “many of the ideas, histories, and theories that were relevant to the construction of curriculum history in the United States” (Au et al., 2016, p.4) are missing or marginalized. In contrast, curriculum and instructional practices grounded in visibility narratives—because they teach through narratives of White people “inspir[ing] and stimulat[ing] the oppressor” (Woodson, 1933, p.14)—academically privilege White students.

In sum, invisibility and visibility narratives underlie daily instruction and continue to oppress those whose lives, histories, and communities are negated, impacting opportunities for academic achievement. A curricular foundation in culturally relevant pedagogy would require challenging and dismantling invisibility narratives. Literacy coaches, if well versed in CRP, can play an important role in supporting teachers in learning how to recognize invisibility narratives and replace them with practices that support academic excellence for Black students.

Thus, while successful teachers of Black children do not have to be Black, Howard’s (2001a) explanation of cultural incongruence brings awareness to the fact that, in order to successfully teach Black students, teachers truly have to care about them and want to know and appreciate their heritage. This is carefully explicated by El-Mekki (2017) who delineated characteristics of effective teachers of Black students aligned with components of culturally relevant pedagogy requiring teachers to:

1. have the mindset that their students can learn
2. support students in developing positive racial identities

3. have high expectations, with high support and much love
4. establish windows and mirrors
5. serve students holistically
6. continue to learn about Black culture
7. be able to channel anger
8. have a community outlook
9. have a sense of purpose

With these convictions, literacy coaches, teachers, and administrators working together can support Black students' academic success by challenging unjust curricula and foregrounding voices of those who are often deleted from the Eurocratic narrative that guides typical practices. An understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy can help educators overturn curriculum that impedes academic success by making Black students "feel that [their] race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples" (Woodson, 1933/2010, p.14). Black students will continue to suffer within educational systems that do not acknowledge their brilliance, while White students will continue to learn that they matter more (Au et al., 2016).

Significance in Countering Racist Perceptions of Students

Race and racism are often inequities within the educational system that literacy coaches could be trained to help educators recognize and address. Over and over, we hear that it is a sensitive topic to discuss but it is something that affects students daily. Black students are oppressed each day through institutional racism which "privileges Whites in the US over people of color" (Boutte, 2016, p.35) and the unexamined individual racist views of educators who work with them. Both forms of racism cause students to be

viewed in deficit ways before they have had a chance to show their true potential. As Love (2016) stated, “Black children are dehumanized and criminalized from the moment they enter those school doors” (p.2). Because of societal negative stereotypes about Black intelligence, this means that most Black children are already negatively viewed by the time they enter preschool (Galvin, 2016; Gilliam et al., 2016; Young, 2016).

These negative perceptions often lead to teachers’ views of Black students as not fitting into the “normalcy” of school and repeatedly seen as troublemakers or less intelligent. Cokley (2016) list some of the “troublemaker” behaviors as anger issues, unmotivated, bad attitude, and having a learning disability. Howard (2014) discussed how Black children who were considered “problematic” were males. Black males were considered to be in the most need of help due to statistical data (Love, 2013); but now Black girls “have become the fastest-growing population to experience school suspensions and expulsions” (Morris, 2016, p.69). With these “problematic” views, Black boys and Black girls are receiving out-of-school suspensions more than their White counterparts (Goff et al., 2014; Howard, 2014, Morris, 2016). Some of the suspensions and expulsions have even led to these students being arrested and sometimes placed in the judicial system (Howard, 2014; Morris, 2016).

Suspensions and expulsions rates are higher for Black and Brown students and lead more likely to Black and Brown students entering jails as adults (Camera, 2021). Systemic racism is what causes students from marginalized communities to enter the school-to-prison-pipeline (American University, 2021). Systemic racism (American University, 2021; Boutte, 2016) and systemic schools (Johnson, et al., 2018) is how institutional systems and policies create and/or uphold racial inequities. Literacy coaches

have the potential to address these issues, to make teachers and administrators aware of them, to work with colleagues at the school, district, and state levels to dismantle anti-Black practices and replace with pro-Black pedagogies and policies. Working through a culturally relevant lens, literacy coaches can work with teachers to challenge and change the negative narrative and impact on Black students by being “supportive of pro-Black teaching” (Kinard et al., 2021, p. 327) which, according to Kinard et al. (2021) includes:

1. teachers’ self-work- teachers are committed to examine their own beliefs, biases, and how they position children’s identities and their families in classrooms;
2. pro-Black curriculum- daily instruction that centers the humanity of Black people;
3. verbal mapping- “justice-oriented dialogic spaces that support children in creating meaning about each other and the world” (p. 328)

In Sum

My study asked the question: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* As outlined in the sections above, it is significant to literacy coaches, teachers, and students because it adds to the research knowledge base about culturally relevant instruction, particularly the literature about literacy coaching where there is a void in the study of how culturally relevant teaching could be foundational to the work of literacy coaches. Therefore, adding dialogue to the study and practice of literacy coach training, purpose, and roles: delivery of instruction for teachers and students, ability to address as well as challenge mandated curricula, abilities to develop and engage in coaching cycles that

support culturally relevant teaching, and ability to replace anti-Black curriculum with content and practices that provide counternarratives- stories that provide evidence of what is really true (Torres & Milun, 1995)- to dismantle and replace Eurocratic dominance. The study adds to the literature about literacy coaches by introducing cultural relevance as a necessary foundation reporting on the processes involved in the work to make that so which could lead to important discussions and structural changes surrounding the development of students' literacy understandings and academic learning when being taught through culturally relevant pedagogy.

Reading achievement is continuing to decrease in the United States for Black students even with additional instructional support for teachers and students. This means there is a need to change the mode of instruction that is being delivered as well as the role of the literacy coach to support those changes in order to give all students an opportunity at a meaningful and successful education. Because culturally relevant teaching has been shown to raise achievement for Black students, it stands to reason that it is important to look at how committing to culturally relevant teaching as foundational to the roles of a literacy coach can enhance the learning experiences of students. Literacy coaches have been written into the educational plan in many states and districts as a way to have effective teaching practices throughout our schools and they need to be used to their fullest capacity for helping make improvements in students' academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

To assist with terminology, I have provided a few terms that I think will help readers understand the process of my paper.

Blackness- While Blackness is certainly not monolithic and I do not intend to essentialize across all Black people, for this study, I use the term Black or Blackness to refer to peoples or histories of peoples who are African or of African descent, who may live anywhere in the African Diaspora, and who self-identify as Black, African, or African descent (Encyclopedia, 2019)

Coaching Cycles- coaching cycles are ongoing interactions between the teacher and coach that formulate a collaborative partnership and consist of supporting the teachers' strengths (Garmston et al., 1993).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)- “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).

Dominant Culture- the group whose members hold more power compared to the other members in society (The Decision Lab, 2022). I use *dominant culture* to refer to White and European descendant people, recognizing that in many places in the world, they are not the dominant group in terms of population but that racist imagery, stereotype, systemic structures, etc. mean that they have positioned themselves as such.

Dominant Race- I use the term *dominant race* throughout my dissertation because race was developed as a social construction that gave or denied benefits and privileges, while Black people were denied their humanity (Smithsonian, n.d.).

Eurocentrism (Eurocentric)- “assumes the superiority of European cultural values over those of non-European societies” (Pokhrel, 2011, para.1).

Eurocratic- provides more insight about hegemony of the privileged White race and how Europeans and European descendants have claimed themselves as entitled to determining

“whose culture has influence and whose knowledge is worth knowing” (King & Swartz, 2014, p. xv).

Literacy Coach- a literacy coach is an educational leader who works with teachers to help them recognize what they know and what they can do while growing in their profession as an educator with a particular focus on the teaching of reading and writing (Toll, 2014).

Scripted Programs- scripted programs are commercial reading programs that determine what the teachers are to say during instruction and/or the lessons they are to teach and when (EdResearch.Info., n.d.).

Whiteness- often not acknowledged by White people (DiAngelo, 2018) and rests upon a foundational premise that White people are the “norm or standard for human, and people of [C]olor as a deviation from that norm” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.25).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1973; Crenshaw et al., 1995) and Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) (Dumas and ross, 2016) were at the forefront of my thinking as I designed this study. Together, they form the theoretical framework for my research. I embraced CRT because of its history as a set of theories developed to examine issues of race and racism in legal systems and later other systems such as education. Given that this study looked at literacy coaching as a system within larger systems that mandated programs which impacted my role as literacy coach, this foundation was important. I also grounded this work in BlackCrit Theory because of its specific focus on Blackness and my particular concerns for Black students as outlined earlier in this chapter. Both aspects of my framework are described below.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory was originally developed in the 1970s by legal scholars to examine issues of racial justice in the legal field (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Over the decades, it has provided a foundation for scholars to interrogate systems across professions and institutions. CRT was introduced to the education field in the 1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995). They felt that inequities around race in education were "muted and marginalized" (p. 47), so they began to "theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity" (p. 48). Having CRT in the education field allows scholars to raise important questions about racial inequities seen in education (Howard, 2014; Johnson & Bryan, 2017). In education, CRT provides a lens for analyzing "the role of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in the lives of People of Color" (Pérez Huber, 2008, p.159).

There are dozens of theoretical concepts from the original group of CRT scholars (Crenshaw et.al, 1995), however, for my study I found three of those concepts to be particularly important: the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992, 1995a) and interest convergence (Bell, 1995b, 2004). These concepts, while important to the design of and purpose of my study, became much clearer as I collected and analyzed data for a study conducted within a white-dominant educational system.

The Permanence of Racism

Derrick Bell (1992) described the permanence of racism to mean that racism is permanent in a particular sense of the word. Recognizing that "many people will find it difficult to embrace my assumption that racism is a permanent component of American

life” (p. 13), he explained that the “goal of racial equality, while comforting to many whites, [is] more illusory than real for blacks” (p. 13). Bell continued:

For too long we have worked for substantive reform, then settled for weakly worded and poorly enforced legislation, indeterminate judicial decisions, token government positions, even holidays. I repeat If we are to seek new goals for our struggles, we must first reassess the worth of racial assumptions on which, without careful thought, we have presumed too much and relied on too long. (p. 13-14)

This aligns well with the concerns I had going into this study, that Black students’ needs are not being met, CRP has been demonstrated to be effective in the education of Black students, and yet neither is addressed in the literacy coach’s role. Using the concept of the permanence of racism, requires me to consider if, when, and how we are settling for “weakly worded and poorly enforced” (p.13) reforms. Are we settling for weak and condescending “approvals” to only teach CRP addressing the fidelity of mandated reading programs, thereby adding to the permanence of racism in the teaching of reading? CRT helped me consider this in my study.

In further clarification of the permanence of racism, Bell noted that change will require both recognition of “where action is more civil rights strategies destined to fail *and* the unalterable conviction that something must be done, that action must be taken” (p. 199). By this he meant that although we may fail at receiving civil rights, we must engage in the struggle to disrupt White supremacy. Therefore, this is directly supportive of my work as I consider how CRP has been suggested and demonstrated as an effective approach in the teaching of Black students (see Chapter Two for a review of studies) and

yet it is not widely adopted as foundational to classrooms or the literacy coach position; thus strategies have been used to communicate the positive impact of CRP for Black students (perhaps aligned with “civil rights strategies destined to fail”) and yet action still must be taken to make it a reality.

In a further discussion of the permanence of racism as it impacts education, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) addressed how our educational systems are built on race and racism and thereby benefit Whiteness. For example, the curricula used in schools reflect the dominant race and their stories and therefore makes White “racial privilege seem natural” (p.28). In the case of the literacy coach, this study revealed that the training of literacy coaches, in my situation, and the mandated reading programs were deeply embedded in systemic racism as programs and practice were White dominated. Also, some district and school leaders, were brought up in White-dominant systems themselves and did not have the knowledge to recognize racism as it was embedded in those programs.

Interest Convergence

The notion of interest convergence also conceptualized by Derrick Bell (1995b, 2004) points out that any changes to elements of systems that are racist only come about due to “perceived self-interest by Whites rather than the racial injustices suffered by blacks” (p. 59). Clarifying this, Bell wrote that “blacks obtain relief even for acknowledged racial injustice only when that relief also serves, directly or indirectly, to further ends which policymakers perceive are in [their] best interests” and that relief is viewed “as proof that the society is indeed just” (p. 56). This concept was particularly important to my study because I knew that my focus of supporting students’ academic

success through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) would be met with conflicts when challenging the usage of the required Eurocratic curriculum that was chosen by the district. My findings, in fact, demonstrate as outlined later in this study, that the only way that the teachers and I were eventually able to teach in culturally relevant ways was when it served the district's mandates for use of a particular curriculum. Ultimately, as Bell's quote above establishes, full "relief" in terms of being able to make CRP foundational to the literacy coach's position was not realized and CRP was only sanctioned basically to appease us for a period of time.

Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) work was particularly helpful for me in encapsulating how the permanence of race and interest convergence factor into the inequities of my attempts to make CRP foundational to my position as literacy coach.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offered three central propositions:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States;
2. U.S. society is based on property rights;
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity (p. 48).

In these ways, these concepts of CRT helped me to look critically at the dominance of Whiteness that students face daily within systems that guided the literacy coach position and teaching reading in our school and district. CRT not only supported my study by fostering of conversations with teachers about the inequalities in education, but it also required me to think about challenges and changes that needed to be made within systemic structures for the betterment of Black students.

Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit)

While other racial groups of students are oppressed within our White-dominant, Eurocratic structures in schools, I conducted my study because of my concern for Black children and my concern that literacy coaching is void of a focus on race and racism, particularly Blackness, and this is why BlackCrit Theory was essential to my study. I worried about Black students being schooled within educational systems that murder their spirits because those systems are built from structures of racism and White dominance (Love, 2013).

BlackCrit was first developed by Dumas and ross (2016) who felt that CRT was not focused enough “to encompass the experiences of Black folks in the United States” (ross, 2019, p.1). They noticed that other “crits” such as AsianCrit, LatCrit, and TribalCrit addressed the specificity of racial oppressions that they faced, but that the specificity of Black people was not addressed. Therefore, they wanted to explore in more detail how Blackness mattered and how it is to be racialized in a world that is anti-Black (ross, 2019).

Dumas and ross (2016) acknowledged that many conversations about race and racism and Blackness began in CRT, but they wanted to create a space for a theoretical focus on Blackness and within the field of education in particular. To push toward a focus on Blackness in education, Dumas and ross (ross, 2019) have framed BlackCrit as:

1. Acknowledging that anti-Blackness is endemic and is at the center of how we make sense of historic, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of human life;
2. Acknowledging that liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism diversity is often positioned to be against Black lives; and

3. Providing space for Black liberatory fantasy instead of supporting majoritarian stories (ross, 2019).

The endemic nature of anti-Blackness was critical to this study because it allowed me to address my concern about Black students and to also look closely at district and school mandates with regard to anti-Blackness in programs and materials and in literacy coach training as well as at leaders' abilities (or inabilities) to recognize anti-Blackness in those systems. It also allowed me to look at the fears and lack of confidence felt by me and the teacher participants in the study, having been brought up in Eurocratic systems of schooling ourselves.

The BlackCrit's concept of liberal multiculturalism positioning educational practices against Black lives align well with my concerns of how policy makers determine who and what should be honored within the school buildings. Therefore, perpetuating curricular violence onto students as they are left with messages of White is right and to be successful you have to be White or conform to Whiteness.

Acknowledging that liberal multiculturalism can often go against freedom for Black students allowed me to look at messages that are represented within the school system and provide ways to support teachers in nurturing Black joy in their classrooms.

Finally, the idea of Black liberatory fantasy helped me design a study with a vision for the future of the literacy coach position as one that would be grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach supportive of the education of Black students. In conjunction with use of Bell's notion of the permanence of racism, it allowed me to focus on barriers that may keep a transformed literacy coach position from

becoming a reality along with support that may make it possible as I envision and ultimately call for a different kind of future for literacy coaching.

Thus, having BlackCrit as a paradigm guiding my study was needed so that the anti-Blackness of the school and district environment as well as curriculum and our experiences could be acknowledged and challenged. Each of these elements had an impact on whether or not CRP could be adopted as foundational to the literacy coach position.

Conclusion to Chapter One

I strongly believe that the reading achievement of Black students in the United States can be increased with approaches, commitments, understandings, and structures grounded in culturally relevant teaching. Having a literacy coach who is committed to the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy that focuses on developing a critical consciousness, cultural competence, and academic achievement can support teachers in building the knowledge and abilities necessary to challenge and change inequitable education systems. In challenging the education system, they can work together to notice the injustices that students face daily in the classroom and school, particularly in terms of literacy instruction, and create curriculum and instructional practices to change that status quo. The relationship between the coach with a culturally relevant foundation and teachers has the potential to create partnerships that fight against the many injustices experienced by students in the name of literacy education.

Throughout the study, I gained more insight into making culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to the role of a literacy coach. My understandings are presented in the following chapters. Chapter Two shares the literature around literacy coaching and

CRP, Chapter Three explains my methodology, Chapters Four, Five, and Six take you through findings focused on elements experienced in the process of trying to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach. Chapter Seven gives implications to this much needed work of a literacy coach.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE LEADING THE WAY

Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.

-Nelson Mandela (in The Big Apple, 2013)

The fight for justice and equity in education has been ongoing for many years. Injustices that are now seen in education and that were introduced in Chapter One as impeding success for Black students began in the United States with the dehumanizing structures of enslavement and colonization. Goodwin (1997) stated that this “inferiority paradigm is grounded in the assumption that visible racial/ethnic people are genetically inferior in comparison to whites, an assumption that condoned slavery and resulted in visible racial/ethnic group people, particularly African Americans and Native Americans, being considered uneducated and barred from formal or adequate schooling” (p.7).

After being barred from formal school throughout enslavement, Black students during the Reconstruction era were expected to come to school with certain skills such as, 1) being fluent in standardized English; 2) having motivation to attend to and perform in school; 3) curiosity and a willingness to explore their environment; and 4) have “proper” school behavior-responding to adults (Quintanar-Sarellana, 1997). These skill sets, grounded in White-defined notions of “proper behavior” and expecting motivation and willingness to perform in systems divorced from their own lives are still required of Black students today within systems that are dominated by Eurocratic practices and

policies. To better understand the literature around these realities as I developed and carried out a study looking at the potential for grounding the role of the literacy coach in culturally relevant teaching, I reviewed over 50 pieces of literature in the areas of research and theory, which are organized in the following categories: histories and definitions of pedagogy, studies of culturally relevant pedagogy, remixes of culturally relevant pedagogy, literacy coaching, South Carolina literacy coaches, and educational reform.

History and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Examining the literature focused on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) helped me get closer to understanding what true liberatory and neolibertory education is by taking me deeper into the conceptual framework from readings about the evolution of research undergirding Ladson-Billings' original research that led to her coining the term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Through my review of the literature, I learned that CRP is not only anchored in Ladson-Billings' research, but that its evolution is grounded in the works of other scholars who preceded her. For example, Du Bois (1903/2005) and Woodson (1933/2010) discussed in the early part of the last century the undermining ways Black people were treated, such as "teaching him that his black face is a curse" (Woodson, 1933/2010, p.18) and teaching students to despise the Negro language that was from the African tongue (Woodson, 1933/2010). Black people were also taught to assimilate to the Eurocratic ways of learning and being, which caused Black people to live a double life and have internal problems because they view themselves from the White person's perspective thus causing an identity crisis (Du Bois, 1903/2005). Living this double life is what Du Bois called "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903/2005).

Through Woodson and Du Bois' work, they expressed the need for Black people to know the greatness of being Black. Woodson (1933/2010) felt that it is was important for the Negro (Black person) to know their history and celebrate it and DuBois resolutely demanded excellence in education for Black children, including a strong foundation in reading, writing, and especially thinking" (Bishop, 2017, p. 22). Because of this belief, DuBois created a children's magazine called the Brownies' Book. It had stories, poems, current events, games, and photographs that celebrated "African American identity, urged racial pride, and encouraged its young readers to aspire to positions of leadership within their communities" (University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Washington University in St. Louis, n.d.). Brazilian educator and activist, Paulo Freire (1970/2000) also discussed how teachers needed to work with students through humanizing pedagogies also anchored in racial and cultural pride. These scholars were a few of many who helped to set the framework for what Ladson-Billings eventually conceptualized as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). In the following sections, I discuss histories of questioning Eurocratic curricula, defining culturally relevant pedagogy, studies of culturally relevant pedagogy, and remixes to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Histories of Questioning Eurocratic Curricula

Inequities in education have been in place since the time of enslavement. The broader education system began to seek changes in the 1960s and 1970s through desegregation efforts and moves toward effectively teaching Black and Brown students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Effectively teaching students meant that questions and changes had to be made to the Eurocratic curricula. Joining in the efforts of effectively teaching students were Au and Jordan (1981) who coined the term "culturally appropriate" in order to highlight how some Hawaiian teachers incorporated different

aspects of their students' cultural backgrounds within the reading instruction. Mohatt and Erickson (1981) looked at how some Native American teachers used the students' cultural home language patterns within instruction to improve student achievement and termed it "culturally congruent." Cazden and Leggett (1981) and Erickson and Mohatt (1982) used the term "culturally responsive" to explain the language interactions between teachers and students who were linguistically different. Jordan (1985) and Vogt et al. (1987) looked further into incorporating Hawaiian students' homes and communities into the daily instruction and termed this "culturally compatible."

The field of multicultural education is also an important precursor to CRP (Peña-Sandoval, 2017). Multicultural education began in the 1970s and evolved through social movements for equity and social justice for all (Nieto, 2017). The Civil Rights Movement inspired the context of multicultural education because "it catapulted the quest for educational justice to the forefront of civic life in the early 1970s" (p.2). In the quest for educational justice, Nieto (1994a) listed four levels that occur to have a multicultural educational setting:

1. tolerance-to endure differences without having to embrace them
2. acceptance-acknowledge differences without denying them or belittling them
3. respect- diversity is admired and held to a high esteem and is the basis for what happens in schools
4. affirmation, solidarity, and critique- conflict is accepted as a part of the learning and is not avoided (p. 3-5).

Multicultural education (ME) can be defined in many ways, and as one of the leaders of multicultural education, these are the four elements that Nieto believed were critical if

there was to be needed change in the education system.

Another leader in multicultural education was James A. Banks. Banks (1993/2019) defined multicultural education as “a reform movement designed to make some major changes in the education of students” (p.1). According to Banks (2019), the major components of multicultural education (ME) are:

1. content integration- using examples and content from various cultures and groups to teach specific subject areas or disciplines
2. the knowledge construction process- the process teachers take to help students understand how implicit cultural assumptions influence the way knowledge is constructed
3. prejudice reduction-how teaching materials and methods are used to modify students’ attitudes about race
4. an equity pedagogy- teachers make changes to their teaching styles to promote academic success for students of different races, cultures, and social and economic statuses
5. an empowering school culture and social structure- having an empowering school culture that supports students of different races, cultures, and social and economic statuses.

These components are the dimensions that Banks set in place for schools to implement to reform the education system. Banks and Banks (2016) stated that schools have to be reformed so that all students will be given an equal opportunity to learn and experience cultural empowerment. To work towards a reform for schools, Banks (1989; 1993/2019) developed four leveled approaches to reform schools and they are

1. the contribution approach- focus is limited to celebrating holidays, heroes, and individual cultural elements
2. the additive approach- adding cultural content, themes, and concepts to the required curriculum without changing the curriculum
3. the transformation approach-makes changes to the curriculum structure and allows for students to share their perspective and point of view
4. social action approach- allows students to take on activities and projects that they make decisions on and help solve the issue by taking action.

Like Banks, Geneva Gay (2010/2018) worked closely within a multicultural education framework to put forward what she calls culturally responsive teaching. Within culturally responsive teaching she, too, has dimensions that focus on “curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationship, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments” (p. 39).

Ladson-Billings was also an advocate for students of Color, particularly Black students, and began her research in areas that would promote the academic successes of Black students. At first, she wanted to improve teacher education in order to find ways for the new teachers to see and use what their students from urban communities brought into the classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Within her research she reacted against literature that positioned “African American students as problems” (2009, p. vii) and language that was used to describe them was “*at-risk, disadvantaged, and underachieving*” (2014, p.76). The negative descriptions that she read about when describing Black students led her to focus on “what was *right* with African American students’ education and what happens in classrooms where teachers, students, and parents

seem to get it right” (1994/2009, p. vii). Each of these terms “advocated for connections between home-community and school cultures” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p.67) of students of Color who previously did not have academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

DuBois, Woodson, Banks, Nieto, Gay, and Ladson-Billings all focused on frameworks that had student achievement at their core and they surround the core with learning through and about cultural lenses. Each of these approaches counter educational systems that dominated then and now in which teaching is Eurocratic in nature (King & Swartz, 2014) and leaves out the teaching and learning of those marginalized cultures. Although multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy all focus on the importance of culture, equity and student success, culturally relevant pedagogy also focuses on developing the critical conscience of students and teachers, and the impact that it has on teaching and learning. It is with this understanding that Ladson-Billings’ work consistently focuses on breaking down our own biases and checking for the centering of voices most marginalized in order to obtain the outcome of success possible for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Defining Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is rooted in many of the movements discussed in the previous section because it is built from convictions about the importance of normalizing the histories and cultures that make up the world we live in as well as moving away from a Eurocratic curricular approach. Ladson-Billings (2009) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally,

and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.20).

Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) conducted research in 1989 to investigate elements in the teaching of teachers who had success with African American students. In order to identify the teachers in her study, she surveyed African American parents, principals and colleagues in a Northern California district to find teachers for her research. From a list of names presented by parents, principals, and colleagues, she found eight teachers who taught in grades second, fourth, fifth, and sixth and who were described as embodying what was right in the teaching of African American students. Out of the eight teachers, five were African American and three were White; and they each had experienced “pedagogical success with them [Black students]” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). Her findings from this study with eight dynamic teachers, lead her to coin the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 1995a, 1995b). To her the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” highlighted what collective empowerment was and could be between teacher and students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) and encompassed specific characteristics of successful teaching of Black students as supporting: (1) academic success [student learning], (2) cultural competence, and (3) critical [or sociopolitical] consciousness. Ladson-Billings defined each of the characteristics to be as follows:

1. academic success [student learning]- teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely to make them “feel good”
2. cultural competence- teachers implement students’ culture within instruction as a vehicle for learning while students develop competence in their own and at least one other culture

3. critical [sociopolitical] consciousness- students are to “engage the world and others critically” (p.160-162) while recognizing injustices and standing up against them.

Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) found these eight teachers to be highly successful at teaching their Black students because, even though they had different approaches they embodied all three of these characteristics (explained in detail in the following sections). The work these teachers did within their classrooms changed the trajectory for their Black students and their capability of not being labeled “at risk,” “underachieving,” “disadvantaged,” and other deficit views.

Academic Success

Academic success should be a goal for students to reach after spending a school year of learning and it is a key component of Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Ladson-Billings (2021) changed the way she refers to academic achievement as a component of culturally relevant teaching, calling it instead, promoting students’ academic success. This was to communicate that she does not see academic success as correlated with test scores on achievement tests, but putting attention where it needs to be, on student learning.

It is in response to the persistent reporting of Black students scoring lower than White and other students of Color when measuring their success on national end-of-the-year reading and math assessments (Nation’s Report Card, 2017a, 2017b, 2019) among other assessments. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is one measure used nationally, professing to aggregate testing data in order to determine how well students have grasped the curriculum from that current year and comparing their test

taking ability and knowledge to other students in their district, state, and the United States. Although students typically take the assessments from third grade through their senior year in high school, scores are only reported nationally from grades 4th, 8th, and 12th. Based on these once-a-year assessments, the term achievement gap came into common usage as Black students have been identified as being largely academically behind White and Asian students.

The term achievement gap has been used more and more within educational reforms over the past 20 years (Howard, 2010) to define the test discrepancy between Black students and other students. Howard (2010) stated “the most pressing and difficult educational and social challenges” (p.12) are dealing with the achievement gap. However, Ladson-Billings (2006) does not look at what many people are considering to be an “achievement gap” as such. She considers it to be an “educational debt” (p.5) that is owed to students because of educational injustices around the education of Black students. She raises the issues of debt to pose questions about the equity of education that is provided to all students putting responsibility on the systems of education and the people who perpetuate them, instead of accepting that the achievement gap exists and placing blame on students, families, and communities (Patel, 2016). Allowing students and teachers to raise questions and address the issues of education equity provides the opportunity to identify and discuss inequities and make changes that positively affect all students.

Focusing on the component of promoting students’ academic achievement, Kana’iaupuni et al. (2010) conducted a study on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and the effects this teaching had on Native Hawaiian students’ academic success. They

wanted to incorporate CRP in the local curriculum because there was a “long standing achievement gap of Native Hawaiian students in the state’s public schools” (p.1). Within their study, there were 62 out of 81 schools consisting of Kamehameha schools, public charter schools, and Department of Education (DOE). Within these 62 schools there were 600 teachers, both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian, and over 3,000 student participants. The findings from their research were that teachers who used cultural-based education (CBE) teaching strategies had a greater impact on students’ academic success and engagement. This is one study of many studies that demonstrate how making changes by addressing the equity issues within the curriculum has the potential to lead to academic success for all students by drawing on their languages and literacies, their communities and families, and their histories and heritage and helping them to develop a critical consciousness about the injustices they and other people face in school, and communities. When culturally relevant pedagogy is a part of the everyday class instruction it can provide this type of success for students when used in the way that Ladson-Billings intended for it to be used.

Unfortunately, CRP is not always interpreted or implemented in the way that Ladson-Billings intended for it to be used for academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Since she did her study, the words culturally relevant pedagogy have been used in many educational settings over the years but is not what she intended for culturally relevant pedagogy to represent (Ladson-Billings, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2021). Her dissatisfaction comes from translations of her research defining culturally relevant pedagogy by “limited and superficial notions” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77). She considered CRP to be limited and superficial in notion because the fluidity and variety of cultural groups were not

discussed or implemented within the classrooms and teachers rarely pushed students to develop their critical consciousness (2014). Ladson-Billings (2011) said that she envisioned academic success to be student learning and the “cultivation of student minds and supporting their intellectual lives” (p.38) not merely high scores on standardized tests. With the most practitioners equating academic success to the score received on standardized tests, Ladson-Billings (2021) changed academic success to student learning to clarify what she means. She made this change because “students always learn much more than we can ever test (p.5) and looking at student’s learning allows us to determine how much growth occurred throughout the year.

Cultural Competence

Academic success is not the only component of CRP that is misinterpreted from what Ladson-Billings intended for it to mean, teachers helping to develop cultural competence of their culture and at least one more culture in (2009, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2021). Ladson-Billings (2017) acknowledged that teachers may avoid or poorly teach for cultural competence if they do not understand what culture is. In 2014, she defined culture “as an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief system” (p.75) and she explained that, for students to have success, teachers have to understand this about culture. Ladson-Billings (2017) continued to define culture to give further understanding of its meaning and said that it “involves every aspect of human endeavor, including thought, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes” (p. 143). She intended for cultural competence to mean these things, as this is what she saw in her initial study, noticing that cultural competence had been reduced to only visible or tangible things from the

community or culture or a “tourist” approach to teaching about culture (Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Getting to know the culture of the students within a teacher’s classroom allows the teacher to know how to be able to help his or her students succeed academically. Ladson-Billings (2011) said teachers who are culturally competent “understand that they must work back and forth between the lives of their students and the life of school” (p.40). This means that while they have a responsibility to teach the curriculum set forth by the school, they also have a responsibility to build the cultural competence of all students. So, teachers must find ways to bring aspects of all students’ everyday life into the curriculum to broaden students’ understanding of what is centered in terms of histories, literature, communities, etc. of their own culture and cultures not of their own. These kinds of connections lead to academic success. Ladson-Billings (2017) also warned that knowing the culture of the students within a classroom can be a difficult place for teachers to start because they sometimes do not understand their own culture. Thus, teachers need to start by taking a look at their own lives and addressing their own identity (Haas, 2020; Wynter-Hoyte, 2022) in order to help Black students and other students understand their own and the culture of others.

Critical Consciousness

Another component of CRP is developing students’ critical (or sociopolitical) consciousness which, according to Ladson-Billings (2011) is by far “the most difficult to convey to teachers who wish to develop their own [CRP] practice” (p. 39). Ladson-Billings (2017) also referenced that this difficulty leads teachers to neglect critical consciousness in their practice. She has found that the neglecting of critical

consciousness happens because many teachers “have not developed a sociopolitical consciousness of their own” (p. 41) which means that teachers must educate themselves about local and community issues and their own biases. Many teachers have not yet developed their own critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2011), therefore, applying this component to the classroom environment can be very hard for teachers to do.

When wanting to implement this component into classrooms Ladson-Billings (2011) advised teachers to first educate themselves on issues that locally and within school communities affect their students. Secondly, Ladson-Billings (2011, 2017) suggested that teachers take issues of concern for students and add them into the curriculum and let students work and learn through something that is meaningful to them. Sometimes these meaningful topics may address inequities in the educational system or country and teachers have to be prepared to enhance the learning of the students.

Studies of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy has inspired many researchers to study its application in a variety of educational settings. Many studies looked at components of culturally relevant pedagogy and how they affect the teachers or the students who were implementing or learning through CRP. For example, Howard (2001b) conducted a case study of elementary students who attended four urban schools in the northwestern part of the United States. He researched *the perception that African American elementary students have of their teachers' pedagogical practices*. The participants of this particular study were seven girls and ten boys within four urban elementary schools. He wanted to have an even number of boys and girls, but some students were not given consent to participate in the study. He chose the participants based on academic achievement based

on the teacher's assessments. From this information, he labeled students as high, medium, low.

For this study Howard's theoretical framework was grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy and in student voice. He used works from several scholars that focused on the importance and need to have students' input into their learning and the pressures they face in doing so. Some of the scholars he addressed were Giroux (1988), Waxman (1989), Nieto (1994b), and Phelan et al. (1994). Howard interviewed students and conducted classroom observations during the 1997-1998 school year. He interviewed the students individually once and subsequently while in their focus groups. From his analysis of data three themes emerged: (1) the importance of caring teachers, (2) the establishment of a community/family-type classroom environment, and (3) education as entertainment (Howard, 2001b, p. 136). Howard (2001b) found that the teachers within the study taught through a culturally relevant lens. Evidence of their teaching through this lens was found because most of the students thought their teachers cared about them and established a great classroom environment that felt like home and were able "to incorporate features of the students' cultural capital into their pedagogical practices" (Howard, 2001b, p.145). Other feelings that students encountered and expressed represented teachers not using culturally relevant practices within the classroom, they did not demonstrate feelings of personal connections, and the classroom environment was boring.

Another study by Borreor et al. (2018) focused on using culturally relevant pedagogy as their theoretical framework. Their research focused on *how new teachers perceived CRP and larger equity issues within public school*. The participants of this

study were 13 pre-service and in-service teachers who were completing “their final semester of a dual master’s/credential program or completing their first year of teaching in a public school” (p. 25) and were from 10 different public schools in grades K-12. All the teachers’ average age was factored to be 26 years old and out of the 13 participants, one identified as queer, nine were females, and three were males. The ethnicity of the teachers was two of mixed race, four as Latino/a, three were white, three were Flipino/a, and one was Chinese American. The participants were a part of a focus group and had these questions to center their thinking around:

- What does culturally relevant pedagogy mean to you?
- What does culturally irrelevant pedagogy mean to you?
- What are the consequences of culturally relevant pedagogy?
- What has helped you develop culturally relevant pedagogy?
- What are challenges to culturally relevant pedagogy?
- What is working for you as a new teacher (Borrero et, al., 2018, p.26).

Data collection consisted of interviews with the participants and audio recordings of the focus group discussions. Findings demonstrated that these teachers *challenged monolithic views of cultural relevance; authentically centered students’ lived experiences; cultivated an environment for CRP; used reflexive teaching mentalities and practices; and addressed barriers when enacting CRP* (p.27) thereby identifying “multiple dimensions of CRP [as] necessary prerequisites for stimulating critical consciousness with their students” (p.27). The new teachers also noted that there were a lot of challenges with teaching through a culturally relevant lens because of the emphasis

placed on student testing. Even though this was a challenge, their research showed that the new teachers were determined to teach through CRP.

These two studies showed the benefits of having CRP as a part of the educational system. They highlight the facts that teachers have to understand who their students are in order to understand their cultures and reach the students beyond just reading books (Borrero et al., 2018). They also cautioned the interpretation of considering stern interaction between teacher and student to be of a negative demeanor (Howard, 2001b). Although these studies each represented a positive outlook on CRP from a perspective of students and teachers, they did not represent how the students and teachers felt within the same study. The studies showed how the teachers' perceived culturally relevant pedagogy but did not reference how the students who were learning under culturally relevant pedagogy perceived their learning to be. The same is true for capturing how students felt about learning through culturally relevant pedagogy but left out how teachers felt about teaching through a culturally relevant lens.

Although those two studies did not discuss how both teachers and students perceived culturally relevant pedagogy effected their learning within the same study, there have been studies that focused on the learning of both teachers and students. Morrison et al. (2008) and Aronson and Laughter (2016) wrote about several studies that represented the importance of teachers changing the curriculum to teach students in culturally relevant ways to help students reach academic success. Their studies showed that with implementation of CRP in their daily content, teachers found that students were academically successful, and students participated more in their learning. Aronson and Laughter (2016) wrote about one study conducted by Ensign (2003) that analyzed second

through fifth-grade students from two urban schools in their math classrooms. During this time students and teachers created math problems that related to the lived experiences of the students and soon students were performing better in math and students noted during an interview with Ensign (2003) that they had an interest in math when it dealt with their “out-of-school problems were included in classroom lessons” (p. 419). This study and other research studies shared by Morrison et al. (2008) and Aronson and Laughter (2016) strongly represent the importance of student voices and how they best learn; as well as the importance behind teachers listening to what students have said and implementing it into their daily instruction to provide students with academic success, cultural competence, and developing a critical consciousness.

Remixes to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Having academic success, cultural competence, and critical understanding is what Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b, 2021) put forward as foundational to culturally relevant work. Since then, CRP has been studied and implemented by many other scholars (i.e., Alim & Paris, 2017; Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). These scholars and others understand the injustices within the educational system as well as the “gap between theory and practice” (Boutte, 2016, p.22). Removing injustices within schools is what culturally relevant pedagogy sets out to do and other scholars have followed the road map of CRP because as Boutte (2016) stated “it is foundational to evolutions that follow” (p.22). Ladson-Billings (2014) also saw CRP as the foundation and noted that the additions did not “imply that the original was deficient; rather, they [additions] speak to the changing and evolving needs of dynamic systems” (p.76).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is one of those additions that has led to changes and evolving needs of the system. The term Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) was developed by Paris (2012) after he delved into the work of Ladson-Billings on CRP. He thought her work was important but was missing something (Paris, 2012), a focus on the upkeep of “the languages and literacies, and cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society” (p.93). Paris and Alim (2014) came together to elaborate on their conceptualization of CSP and defined it as seeking to maintain and sustain the cultural identities of students within schools and outside of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Ladson-Billings understood and agreed with what Paris, and later Alim, meant by culturally relevant pedagogy missing something by writing that CSP “was a newer, fresher version of culturally relevant pedagogy that meets the needs of this century’s students” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.76). She saw that, in meeting the needs of this century’s students, CSP focuses on pushing “us to consider the global identities that are emerging in the arts, literature, music, athletics, and film” (p.82). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is a version of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) that pushes us to create conditions for students of Color, so that they not only thrive but survive (Alim & Paris, 2017) within schools, classrooms, and society that have not changed much over time. In sum, CSP calls for sustaining the centering of typically marginalized groups, histories, literacies, communities in not only education but in communities and society at large.

Culturally Relevant Arts Education

The term Culturally Relevant Arts Education (CRAE) is another term created by educators who have embraced what CRP components represent. Educators embraced the components of CRP and saw that the arts were another way to meet the important goals of CRP (McCarther & Davis, 2017). Through CRAE, educators see another way to meet the important goals of CRP is providing a way for people to use their voices to address the ongoing and persistent situations within the environments that students of Color encounter (McCarther & Davis, 2017). It is through having a voice that “provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, [which is] a first step in understanding the complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.14). Through CRAE students are given an opportunity to use their voice and address social justice issues that affect them personally and within society. (McCarther & Davis, 2017).

Literacy Coaching

The title of literacy coach is used in several written texts (i.e., Hall, 2004; Toll, 2005) and reading coach is used in the South Carolina Read to Succeed Act (SCReads, 2018) as well as by the International Literacy Association (2004). Although there were many name changes for the literacy coach’s title, one aspect of the job’s qualifications that did not change was the responsibility of the literacy coach to support the classroom teacher “in their daily work” (Dole, 2004, p. 462). Throughout the literature that I examined on the development of educational reforms and literacy coaches, findings show that throughout history, academic coaches in some form, have been an addition to the learning environment in elementary schools. The literature also highlighted the need to

change the roles of literacy coaches in order to increase reading achievement for students (International Literacy Association, 2004; Mraz et al., 2009). It was not that literacy coaches were not already considered to be assets to the educational system, but that things needed to be changed to better meet the needs of all students. When academic coaching was first introduced, there were great intentions placed on having literacy coaches in schools to offer onsite professional development and one-to-one interactions between literacy coaches and teachers; but, in spite of these efforts, growth in teachers' abilities and the academic growth of students of Color, Black students in particular have not been obtained across the United States (The Nation's Report Card, 2017a, 2017b, 2019, 2020).

In chapter 1, I stated that one way educational reforms have targeted teacher quality and effectiveness of daily instruction has been through the practice of utilizing literacy coaches within the school buildings (International Literacy Association, 2004). The practice of having literacy coaches has become "increasingly important in schools" (Bean & DeFord, 2012, p.1) in the past 15 or so years. Their role has been important because the academic success of students has been a concern since the 1930s, when the first variation of a literacy coach was implemented (Bean & Wilson, 1981). The roles from 1930 till now have looked different but the goal throughout the years has been for students' success (Bean & Wilson, 1981; Mraz et al., 2009). The first implementation of literacy coaches, then called Reading Specialists, was to work alongside the teacher to improve the reading program (Bean & Wilson, 1981). Soon after this particular model was used, the role of the specialist changed from working alongside the teacher to pulling students out for small group instruction (Bean & Wilson, 1981; Mraz et al., 2009).

Having a reading specialist working alongside students seemed as though it would have been what was needed to increase the reading success of students. However, it was soon proven not to be as effective as was hoped. Educators and policy makers then came together to find other ways to make improvements (Mraz et al., 2009). In looking at why improvements were not made for students, collaboration between teachers and literacy coaches was deemed necessary in order for student success to occur.

Mraz et al (2009) noted that collaboration was necessary because the Reading Specialist and teacher did not know how the students were performing academically when the Reading Specialist and teacher were not in the presence of the other. What the specialist and teacher were doing with the students individually was important; but collaborating with each other (teacher and specialist) would open more possibilities for reading achievement. Lewis-Spector and Jay (2011) stated “their [teacher and specialist] individual and collaborative endeavors have a direct impact on the quality of education children receive” (p.6) and therefore, the students’ reading achievement goals would be met. The understanding that collaboration between teacher and literacy coach was the beginning of changing the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches.

Roles and Responsibilities

The first change made in the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches’ framework was for teachers and literacy coaches to spend time discussing instructional needs for students to improve reading achievement (Lewis-Spector et al., 2011; Mraz et al., 2009). With a high emphasis being placed on students’ reading achievement as reported through standardized assessments (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001; Race to the Top, 2009), more shifts occurred in the roles of literacy coaches (International Literacy

Association, 2004; Mraz et al., 2009), such as providing professional development, selecting instructional materials, and coaching cycles.

As roles and responsibilities changed, “changing expectations for the role of literacy coaches produced new titles and new job descriptions” (Mraz et al., 2009, p. 7).

The name changes used to describe a literacy coach over the past 15 years included these:

1. learning specialist
2. literacy facilitator
3. language arts specialist
4. language arts literacy coach
5. curriculum specialist
6. instructional specialist
7. instructional literacy coach
8. academic facilitator (Mraz et al, 2009, p.7).

Bright and Hensley (2010) also listed another name for a literacy coach: reading literacy coach.

Although the title literacy coach has changed many times in order to offer more clarification to the roles and responsibilities, there is still confusion about the actual roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches (Deussen et al., 2007; Mraz et al., 2009). Part of the confusion is due to the inconsistency of the literacy coach’s job description from one school building to the next. For example, literacy coaches in the same district, state, and country all have different requirements for their jobs (Deussen et al., 2007), which makes it hard to pinpoint the exact description of a literacy coach’s job. Although an exact description of how a literacy coach’s job should look has been hard to define, the

common factor in all of the descriptors of a literacy coach is that they are there to assist the teacher in their daily instruction (Dole, 2004; ILA, 2004).

The job description - helping teachers with daily instruction - can vary between school to school or teacher to teacher because it is determined by what each teacher needs. Assisting teachers with their individual needs causes literacy coaches to have a wider range of complex tasks they must complete. Bean and DeFord (2012) referred to these ranges of complexity as involving instructional planning, assisting with student assessments, and coaching teachers. These ranges fall within five categories that Deuseen et al. (2007) classified as data oriented, student oriented, managerial, individual teachers, and groups of teachers. Although one literacy coach may work more heavily in one category than another category (Deuseen et al., 2007), most address all categories in their jobs at some point. In looking further at the jobs and responsibilities of literacy coaches, these five categories can be broken down into three subheadings: literacy coach's role as a supporter of teacher learning, professional developer, and supporter of the school.

Literacy Coach's Role as a Supporter of Teacher Learning

Literacy coaches spend time working with teachers by assessing the needs of the students in the teachers' classes and then looking at the teachers' desires for their own learning. By assessing the needs of the students, literacy coaches provide instructional guidance for teachers that will help with pushing instruction further to meet the students' needs (Mraz et al., 2009). Literacy coaches help with this guided instruction through literacy coaching cycles of planning, modeling, observing, and giving feedback (Deuseen et al., 2007; Mraz et al., 2009). Eisenberg (2015) described this literacy coaching cycle as

Before, During, and After (BDA) meaning the work before the lesson, the work during the lesson, and the work after the lesson.

The same practices can also be adapted to accommodate the teachers' desires for their own learning. Therefore, these learning experiences between teacher and literacy coach can be individual or within group meetings such as grade level meetings (Deuseen et al., 2007; Shanklin, 2006). Whether meeting individually or in a team, the intent of literacy coaching is to collaborate with teachers on instruction to make decisions that will help with student achievement. Mraz et al. (2009) stated that teacher and literacy coach collaboration helps with student achievement because "literacy coaching is designed to reinforce practices and help teachers become more aware and intentional about their teaching" (p.17). So, a teacher's decision to work with a literacy coach can foster a collaborative relationship that can positively affect students' progress.

When literacy coaches support the teacher as a learner, the teacher is able to learn and then effectively support the students where needed for their academic success. Deussen et al. (2007) wrote that academic success comes when "literacy coaches support teachers in making instructional changes or decisions in order to improve student achievement in reading and writing" (p.5). Making improvements to student achievement requires literacy coaches to support teachers "by demonstrating instructional strategies, conferring about how to best match instruction to children's literacy needs, and sharing instructional resources" (Mraz et al., 2009, p.17). Therefore, the support given to teachers by literacy coaches helps the overall goal of student achievement.

Literacy Coach's Role as a Professional Developer

Another part of supporting teachers as learners is through the usage of professional development that is provided by the literacy coach (Deussen et al. 2007; Mraz et al., 2009). Professional development can be offered to whole groups of teachers or it can be specifically geared towards individual teachers. Literacy coaching with a whole group could consist of book studies on a particular topic that teachers want to increase their practice in, or it could be more in-depth training on the core curriculum (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011). Having individual professional development with a literacy coach, engaging in a coaching cycle, is when the literacy coach and teacher plan together using instructional practices that will help the students learn the information as well as supporting the teacher's learning. From the time spent working together, literacy coaches can model and co-teach lessons with the teacher and debrief about the experience (Shanklin, 2006).

Literacy coaches providing professional development and working with teachers on particular skills of desire has increased the teacher effectiveness of delivering instruction. Joyce and Showers (2003) linked the increase of improvement of teachers' practices to the amount of time they spend working with literacy coaches on particular skills. Therefore, when teachers work with a literacy coach in certain areas, they may need additional support in personal growth or for student growth, the additional support can help improve overall achievement.

Literacy Coach's Role as a Supporter of the School

As supporters of the whole school, literacy coaches add support for teachers, and they also collaborate with the principal and focus on the priorities of that particular

school. Some of the priorities may be “forming a school literacy team; analyzing data and reporting to stakeholders; reporting on curriculum strengths and needs across the building; and planning staff development sessions” (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011, p.12). These priorities are school wide because they address the literacy of every student in the school building and a plan is put in place to provide additional support for teachers (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011). Receiving this information about the whole school makes everyone aware of where the school is academically and can potentially open doors for a teacher-literacy coach relationship.

Literacy Coach Training

Literacy coaches are supporters of literacy within schools and assisting with academic success within the building. However, the support that literacy coaches are provided through training is from the literacy collaborative framework that “gets everyone on the same page about the most effective ways to teach reading and writing in grades K-8” (Center for Reading Recovery & Literacy Collaborative, 2022, para. 2). Through this framework, literacy coaches are trained to provide professional development that supports teachers in planning and implementing reading and writing skills as well as looking at data and developing an action plan for using the data to inform instruction. The Editorial Team (2022) noted that literacy coaches provide professional development for teachers, but that the job is “more deeply rooted in curriculum and lesson planning (para. 3).

Literacy Coaching and Relationships

The relationship between a literacy coach and a teacher is very important and is one that Stover et al. (2011) referred to as delicate. The relationship between the two is

delicate because the teacher first has to know that they can trust the literacy coach. When the teacher can trust the literacy coach, they are able to have more effective literacy coaching cycles (Before-During-After) and student achievement is seen (Joyce & Shower, 2003). According to Bean and DeFord (2012), trusting relationships are built when literacy coaches listen carefully, maintain confidentiality, are positive, follow-through, and work with teachers who want to work with them [literacy coach] on the things that are most important to their [teacher] agenda.

Honoring the teacher's agenda will give teachers power over their learning, which is something that teachers often feel they do not have power over because they are constantly told what they should do (Toll, 2005). This power can provide a trusting relationship and collaboration between teachers and literacy coaches which "is critical in helping the teacher grow as a professional" (Mraz et al., 2009, p.22). Having a collaborative relationship benefit both the teacher and the literacy coach because through reciprocal relationships the teacher grows professionally as well as the literacy coach (Mraz et al., 2009). Within the relationship there may be times that a literacy coach and teacher encounter challenges, but a literacy coach has to honor and respect the individual differences and the professional needs the teacher may have in order for growth to occur (Shanklin, 2006). Having literacy coaches within the school who honor, respect, and have a trusting relationship with teachers can be one piece towards the transformation of schools (Aguilar, 2013).

South Carolina Literacy Coaches

By seeking transformation of schools, South Carolina is one state that decided to have literacy coaches in each building to support student achievement. Looking at 4th

grade reading scores from The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), South Carolina has ranged below the national level since 1992 (The Nation's Report Card, 2017a). NAEP (The Nation's Report Card, 2017a) also reported that 8th graders have also scored below the desired range on national reading tests since 1998. In 2003 NAEP began reporting scores for the South (Southern Region) in both 4th and 8th grades and students' scores have been below the desired score in reading from 2003 to present.

In reviewing the national reading scores and the common trend of failing scores within South Carolina, the South Carolina State Department of Education (SDE) developed the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI). SCRI's main focus was set on providing professional development for classroom teachers (Stephens et al., 2011). Within this model of SCRI, literacy coaches were assigned to 8-10 teachers, and they worked together within study groups and within the classrooms from 2000-2003 (Stephens et al., 2011). Literacy coaches studied literacy theory and practices in cohorts of about 25 literacy coaches meeting monthly for their own full-day professional development (PD) and each summer for three full weeks of PD ultimately receiving 27 graduate hours of literacy education.

From 2003 South Carolina literacy coaches have been within schools working in different capacities, but a difference occurred with the 2014 Read to Succeed Act. This act was signed into law by South Carolina's then Governor, Governor Nikki Haley, and it focused on increasing reading skills of children who were performing below the reading level by the time a child was in third grade. The plan consisted of each elementary school having a reading/literacy coach on site who would provide professional development in order to help improve reading and literacy instruction (Code of Law, 2014). In order to

help students improve their reading skills, Code of Law (2014) cites that reading/literacy coaches are to:

- a) model effective instructional strategies for teachers by working weekly with students in whole, and small groups, or individually;
- b) facilitate study groups;
- c) train teachers in data analysis and using data to differentiate instruction;
- d) literacy coaching and mentoring colleagues;
- e) work with teachers to ensure that research-based reading programs are implemented with fidelity;
- f) work with all teachers (including content area and elective areas) at the school they serve, and help prioritize time for those teachers, activities, and roles that will have the greatest impact on student achievement, namely literacy coaching and mentoring in the classrooms; and
- g) help lead and support reading leadership teams. (SECTION 59-155-180 (2))

The plan also required that literacy coaches' educational qualifications fall under one of these three terms:

1. holds a bachelor's degree or higher and the R2S literacy coach or R2S literacy specialist endorsement; or
2. holds a bachelor's degree or higher and is actively pursuing the R2S literacy coach or R2S literacy specialist endorsement; or
3. holds a master's degree or higher in reading or a closely related field and is actively pursuing the R2S literacy coach or R2S literacy Specialist endorsement (Spearman, 2017, p. 4 & Spearman, 2019, p. 3).

South Carolina literacy coaches' roles require them to implement professional development, work alongside teachers, help with the literacy development within their buildings, attend professional development with district and state literacy coaches, as well as earning their literacy add-on endorsement to their teaching certificates. The literacy add-on endorsement can be obtained through courses and professional development that is approved by the South Carolina Department of Education (Code of Law, 2014). Literacy coaches are required to operate under these state mandated laws as well as other literacy coaching roles provided by the state. According to Code of Law (2014), reading/literacy coaches in South Carolina are not to have their own classroom, acquire administrative duties that are outside of the realm of improving literacy, and they are not to spend a significant amount of time coordinating and/or administering assessments.

As with other literacy coaches in different areas of the country, the same is true for South Carolina's reading/literacy coaches--their job descriptions vary (Deussen et al., 2007; Mraz et al., 2009). Although the description varies, the common role and responsibility of South Carolina literacy coaches and other literacy coaches is that they all assist teachers in their daily instruction (Dole, 2004; ILA, 2004).

Literacy Coach Training

Literacy coaches in South Carolina have state and district trainings throughout the year that focus on coaching moves and strategies for implementing reading and writing skills. Literacy coaches who are new to the role have training once a month with state Literacy Specialists who work closely with them to provide coaching strategies and training for using data to help teachers identify strengths and areas of growth for student

achievement. Trainings provided by the districts also support coaches in the implementation of reading and writing skills as well as upholding district requirements for English Language Arts (ELA) instruction.

Educational Reforms

Educational reforms were developed to transform structures of schools that would raise the educational quality (Dissertation Experts, 2020). Education reforms have been a part of our educational system since 1837 when Massachusetts created the first board of education (Biography.com Editors, 2014/2021). Since the 19th century educational reforms have continued to be a part of our educational system with the notion of transforming the school structures. Although many changes within the education system occurred in the 20th Century, it was the Coleman Report (1966) that reported on all student achievement within public schools. The Coleman Report (1966) was the first documented educational assessment that measured students' output of academic knowledge (Evitts Dickinson, 2016) and from this assessment educational disadvantages of Black students were found.

Although the educational curriculum was designed to model the dominant race, educational reforms were developed to show that our nation was doing what they could to help Black students reach academic achievement. Each educational reform that was developed had some form of assessments to determine academic achievement when compared to others in the country (A Nation at Risk, 1983; Improving America's School Act, 1994; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). This comparison between students throughout the country started dialogue within our nation and decisions were made as to what was needed within the educational system to turn a failing education system around.

With concerns over a troubled education system the education reform, A Nation at Risk, was developed in 1983. The public education system continued to decline and, according to standardized tests, Black students were continuing to perform academically behind White students. Because of the continuous decline in tested academic knowledge of Black students, the Improving America's School Act (1994) and No Child Left Behind Act (2001) were developed to help in this educational crisis.

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was developed under the presidency of George W. Bush with the focus of having higher academic standards that would measure student achievement and promote equity and excellence in education for the schools in the United States (U.S. Department, 2019). However, the NCLB (2001) requirements for higher academic standards did not promote equity and excellence in education as it had hoped to accomplish. It however "exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved students and their peers and spurred an important national dialogue on education improvement" (U.S. Department, n.d., para.11). With knowledge about certain parts of the NCLB reform (2001) that was causing the achievement gap to increase instead of decrease led to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) (U.S. Department, n.d.). This new law revamped a great portion of the No Child Left Behind Act (Klein, 2016) and made changes to educational laws that had been in place for 50 years (U.S. Department, n.d.).

ESSA (2015) made changes to the previous educational laws by allowing districts to have more input into what their state's educational reform would look like (Klein, 2016). School districts, however, had certain guidelines to follow within their reform planning stages that were similar to NCLB and other reform acts. For example, states are

still required to develop state standards that are not necessarily Common Core Standards (NCLB standard requirement) but are still challenging (Klein, 2016; National Association, 2019). Under ESSA (2015) students are still required to take their end of the year state's assessment to measure their performance output (Klein, 2016; National Association, 2019). In my state of South Carolina, 75.8% of 4th grade Black students taking the 2021 end of the year assessment did not achieve a passing score (South Carolina Department of Education, 2021), and in May 2019, the year before the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, 67.6% of Black students taking the test did not achieve a passing score (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019). Because most Black students in the state of South Carolina *should* be impacted by the work of literacy coaches in each school, these startling numbers point out the disconnect between the intent of literacy coaching, classroom teaching, and Black student achievement and is what led to this research study.

Educational Reforms: A Call for Scripted Reading Programs

With a high demand placed on state standards and assessments from educational reforms (ESSA, 2015; Improving America's School Act, 1994; NCLB, 2001), school districts have often looked towards scripted reading programs with the goal of standardizing teaching and supposedly improving the teaching of reading (Duncan-Owens, 2009). With a rise in the demand for scripted reading programs, districts began to focus on improving reading through the usage of scripted researched based programs that requires teachers to teach explicit and systematic reading instruction by reading from a script (Commeyras, 2007). Commeyras, a teacher at the University of Georgia and a researcher with the National Reading Research Center, said that delivering an explicit

and systematic reading program would give students an opportunity to receive the same intense instruction which would improve reading clearly without attention to the need for culturally relevant teaching nor an understanding about how current curriculum privileges White students.

Although some people view using scripted reading programs as a strength and as a way to improve reading instruction, others believe that scripted programs are part of the reason why students' reading ability is not improving. People such as Davison (2015) state that scripted programs are a strength because "scripted lessons help focus instruction by providing consistent language and maintaining fidelity to the lesson's objectives" (slide 3). Whereas people such as Dresser (2012) state that "scripted reading programs have had a negative impact on teachers and students around the country" (p.71). Some teachers have felt that using a scripted program did not allow them to use their own creativity in teaching and that they were not able to give their students what they needed (Griffith, 2008).

In Griffith's 2008 study, teachers shared that their conflict with reading programs came from "having to adhere to a certain structure instead of being able to go with the kids," (p. 7) and "spending so much time teaching [insert scripted program's name] that you're missing out on some other things that are also equally important" (p.7). During the study, teachers also wondered how they would be able to meet the different instructional needs of their students if they were only using a scripted program (Griffith, 2008). Some teachers thought that only using scripted programs negatively impacted their autonomy to do what they knew was right for the students (Dresser, 2012; Griffith, 2008). In contrast,

some teachers thought that the fidelity of the instruction helped to develop them as reading teachers (Davidson, 2015; Griffith, 2008).

Although there are different feelings about scripted programs, little attention has been paid to their lack of cultural relevance while more districts have required the usage of them (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Powell et al., 2017) typically because of the demands of the many educational reforms (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). The United States' educational reforms target teacher effectiveness in delivering daily instruction (ESSA, 2015; Improving America's School Act, 1994; NCLB, 2001) and the systematic, one size fits all, approach of scripted programs is one way that policy makers think delivery of instruction will be more equitable (Commeyras, 2007) when, in fact, it makes educational opportunities ore inequitable since those programs are developed from a Eurocratic base.

Thus, even though policy makers push for teachers to use scripted programs believing that it will level the playing field and help all students become successful in reading, it has not been successful as seen within standardized test scores (Nation's Report 2017a & 2017b, 2019; 2020) and constant revamping of educational reforms (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). ALL students, particularly Black students, are failing in this environment. As Weilbacher (n.d.) described one reason for Black students performing lower than White students is the fact that "White people and agendas have historically and deliberately controlled U.S. education since its inception" (p.2). With this in mind, it is important to build education systems around the contributions and cultures of ALL people and not one subgroup. Literacy coaches are in a position to be able to affect the quality and content of those systems.

Reframing the role of a literacy coach by having a culturally relevant focus, teachers and literacy coaches have the potential to work together to build students' academic knowledge of textbooks and beyond. In addition, through the guidance of a literacy coach with a strong foundation in cultural relevance, coaches, teachers, and administrators can work together to address the need to change testing systems and mandated curricula thereby better revealing and supporting the knowledge and abilities of students of Color. Consequently, Black and White students will not only have a broader and more truthful global understanding of the world and the ability to think critically and apply their knowledge to their daily encounters and future professions (Banks, 1993/2019), but Black students will be taught through systems that do not invisibilize or marginalize them and thereby provide foundations for effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion: From Literature to Research

Literature surrounding and about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) have helped me in developing a better understanding of it and its historical contexts and provide an important foundation for this study. Similarly, the literature about the roles of literacy coaches provide information about the contexts within which the literacy coach's position has evolved and exists nationally and in the state of South Carolina where this study took place, and about the importance of literacy coaches' role in supporting teachers with daily instruction. In reading about the educational reforms, I was able to see that educational changes have been made but they have not been made in the right direction to promote achievement for Black students, still anchored in Eurocentric and Eurocratic views of what constitutes reform. The right direction for student achievement would result in a system that leads to growth for all students each year and is what Ladson-Billings (2021)

calls student learning (p.5). Throughout the literature, I found no studies regarding CRP and literacy coaches or even mentions of the need for the two to come together. Thus, because CRP has the potential to be an asset to all of the students who enter into school buildings within systems that engage in so-called reform that does not benefit all students, it stands to reason that educational leaders such as literacy coaches should explore what can happen when CRP becomes foundational to their work with teachers and children. Consequently, my research question was developed to be: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach.*

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Education can't save us. We have to save education.

-Bettina Love (2019)

To address my research question about the process of making culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to the role of literacy coach, I designed a qualitative study that utilized observations, interviews, field notes, videos, and collections of documents such as, children's work, teachers' lesson plans, my professional development plans and recording of meeting sessions as well as my reflective notes as literacy coach, student of culturally relevant teaching, and researcher. These data sources are detailed in the following description of the methodology. The study asked: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* This chapter explores the methodology used to develop and conduct this study and includes sections outlining my methodological stance, positionality, context, participants, coaching plan, data collection and analysis methods, and timeline.

Methodological Stance

As I considered the beliefs that undergirded this work, I was guided by the words of Usher (1996) who defined paradigms as “frameworks that function as maps or guides for scientific communities, determine important problems or issues for its members to address and defining acceptable theories or explanations, methods, and techniques to

solve defined problems” (p.15). The theories and methodologies that guided the development and implementation of my research design were drawn from my understandings about critical race theory, participatory action research, and autoethnography. Usher (1996) referred to critical theory as “the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy” (p.22). Because these beliefs and practices are embedded in every institution that guides our lives (Braveman et al., 2022; Patel, 2016), it is important to look at structural inequities that undergird those institutions.

In my experience, the role of a literacy coach is determined by institutions such as school district policies and literacy coach guidelines that pay little attention to what that role means within Eurocratic systems of curriculum, policy, and pedagogy. This means that the literacy coach’s role often supports oppressive structural conditions by supporting teachers to educate all students within a curriculum that marginalizes Black students. Keeping this in mind, my study looked at what happened when I critiqued and challenged “historical and structural conditions of oppression and seek[ed] transformation of those conditions” (Glesne, 2016, p.10) by grounding my role as an elementary school literacy coach in a commitment to culturally relevant teaching. To ground my role as a literacy coach committed to culturally relevant teaching, I used critical race theory, participatory action research, and critical autoethnography as my methodological stance.

The diagram shown in Figure 3.1 shows the intersecting nature of the components of my methodological stance for the study. Each section represents how these three stances were connected throughout the study. When viewing the section on critical race

theory, one will see that I have listed out the methods that I used to gather information throughout the study. Justice within our society (world) for those who are not of the dominant race is needed and throughout this study I focused on providing social justice by breaking through inequities presented to students within the educational system. Therefore, social justice is in the middle of my methodological stances.

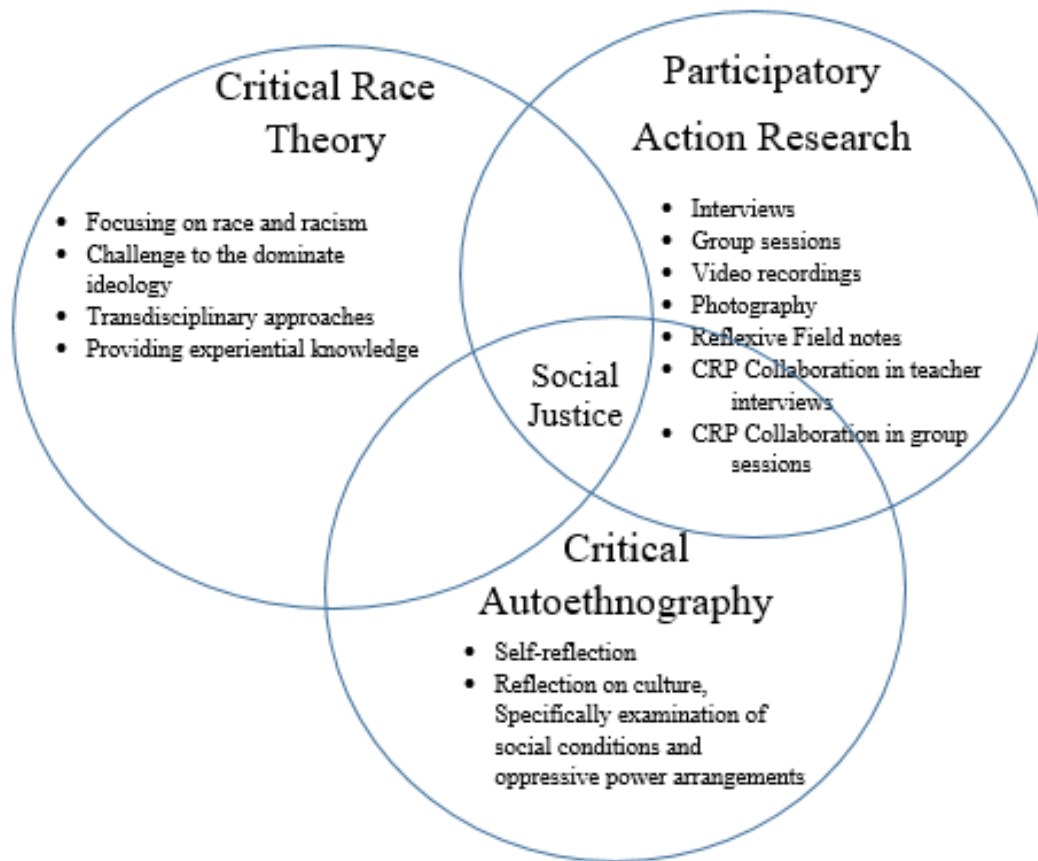


Figure 3.1 Methodological Stance for this Study

All three stances (critical race theory, participatory action research, and critical autoethnography) represent the foundation of my work. I was also drawn to these methodologies because they allow me to focus on examining what it takes to create a more just foundation for the literacy coach position by focusing on race, engaging alongside the study's participants, and studying my own growth and reflection. These

methodologies also allowed me to connect the methods of my study to my broader theoretical frame which, as explained in Chapter One, was anchored in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit).

Critical Race Methodology

As I looked to paradigms that spoke to the issues of race and racism that are endemic in this study--the Whiteness of the literacy coach framework and literacy instruction, and the need for culturally relevant coaching that challenges Eurocratic dominance--Critical Race Theory became an essential foundation to how I planned and carried out this study. This is because “Critical Race Theory aims to reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness” (West, 1995, p. xiv). It has long been acknowledged that, from the time of colonization, the American consciousness has been propagandized to make communities of color invisible within the curriculum as a strategy to secure Eurocratic power, wealth, and control (Au et al., 2016).

I was also drawn to critical race methodology because it requires researchers to recognize the institutional realities of racism and to look at the truth behind those realities (Bell, 1992, 1995a). Therefore, in using critical race methodologies, I was able to design my study to fight against colorblindness- looking for equality for Black people and eradicating the effects of racial oppression (Crenshaw, 1995, p.105)- and acknowledging that race does matter and the ways that systems like literacy coaching and reading instruction ignore the realities of systemic racism (Vincenty, 2020). Critical Race methods supported my interest in investigating how the coaching position, grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy, could change the stance often taken by teachers and literacy coaches which reifies Whiteness and eliminates possibilities for teaching beyond White

dominant curricula. This is the “colorblind” stance often heard from teachers using language like, “I don’t care if they’re Black, White, or green with polka dots, I treat all children the same” (Boutte et al., 2011, p.335) which underlies deeper inabilities to acknowledge the injustices of systems, policies, and practices that marginalize and/or omit Black students from opportunities for educational success.

By countering this stance using methods that would allow me to examine my role as a literacy coach through a lens focused on issues of race and justice as they impact systems like literacy coaching, I hoped I would be able to better understand the supports and barriers experienced when trying to make CRP, with a particular focus on supporting Black students, central to my position. Critical race methodology supported my work to understand what might happen when a literacy coach worked with teachers to develop the ability to see racial injustices in literacy curriculum and know how to react and change those realities. I felt that, if teachers and literacy coaches worked together to develop an understanding of the histories, heritages, and languages that are marginalized or omitted from curricula, changes could occur.

In sum, I drew from critical race methods by focusing on race and racism within the education system, challenging required curriculum that holds the dominant race’s ideologies and providing students with transdisciplinary approaches and counterstories. Through the lens of critical race methodology, counterstories was a method that I used to provide another story to “challenge majoritarian stories rooted in a dominant Eurocratic perspective that justify social inequities and normalize white superiority” (Pérez Huber, 2008, p. 167) and humanize the injustices and struggles experienced by Black people (Pérez Huber, 2008).

Participatory Action Research

I used participatory action research because my intent was “to change something, to solve some sort of problem, [and] to take action” (Glesne, 2016, p.18) and to be actively involved in the work as a participant as well as researcher. Grounding participatory action research in critical race foundations meant that I committed to change something about systemic racism and Eurocratic practice and policy through my participation in it. Participatory Action Research allowed me to focus on making improvements to the present situation in which I was fully involved (Ferrance, 2000; Syae Purrohan, 2011; Glesne, 2016; Young et al., n.d.) – specifically, the lack of attention to cultural relevance in literacy coaching - and to “inform and change [educators’] practices in the future” (Ferrance, 2000, p.1) as well as my own. I went into the study with the belief that it is important to change the role of a literacy coach—my role—by grounding the work of the coach in culturally relevant pedagogies as the driving force of instruction.

With the belief that it is important to change the role of a literacy coach, I worked with the teacher participants in small group sessions along with Dr. Clark as well as working with them one-on-one. Within the small group sessions, I, along with the support of Dr. Clark, discussed the components of CRP and what that meant for implementation within their classrooms. We discussed the importance of adding content that would honor students’ languages whether written or spoken as well as bringing awareness to richness of their heritage. During these sessions we discussed their future lessons and planned ways that CRP could be implemented into their daily instruction, such as creating shared reading books about the contributions of Africa that taught their required foundational

and reading skills for the week. This type of planning and discussions also happened when it was just the teacher and I working on how to move to the next steps within their classroom based off of what I saw during an observation, modeling, or co-teaching experience as well as me following the lead of the teacher and where they wanted to go instructionally.

Critical Autoethnography

Because I continued to learn about what constitutes culturally relevant teaching and how to own a critical stance, an important aspect of my study was studying my own learning--how I grew alongside the participants/teachers. Therefore, another methodology of choice for this research was critical autoethnography with similarities to critical race theory which values the study of self by focusing on issues of race. Specifically, I drew on critical autoethnography which Boylorn and Orbe (2014) described as having three aspects of critical theory: “to understand the lived experiences of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (p.20). Thus, the study required me to examine my own lived experiences in the context of my literacy coach position and my life with a focus on power, oppression, and race. It also required me to use reflections of self as a vehicle for examining, bringing attention to and challenging oppressive states of our education system.

Critical autoethnography became essential to this study because, at the beginning of the study, I was in the initial stages of understanding critical and critical race theories and culturally relevant teaching and how to apply them to my abilities as a literacy coach and a researcher. This methodology allowed me to be both insider and outsider to the

research so that I could share my learning story and my interpretation of participants' experiences from both places. As an insider, I shared several characteristics, roles, and experiences with the participants in this study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam, 2009): I am a Black woman who attended public schools that were majority White and learned under anti-Black curricula; and as a previous classroom teacher, I taught my own students under the same anti-Black curricula. I placed my positionality as an outsider because I had some experiences studying culturally relevant pedagogies as a graduate student, but have not implemented those experiences as a teacher, so I was a learner alongside the participants. Thus, my positionalities as both an insider and an outsider (which will be elaborated on in the next section) aligned well with participatory action research and critical autoethnography.

Researcher's Positionality

My beliefs about changing an unjust norm through culturally relevant pedagogy, my history as a Black woman being schooled in Eurocentrism, and my role in power differentials in my school and district are all a part of what researchers call positionality. In this section, I describe those elements of my positions going into and conducting this study.

Desire to Challenge an Unjust Norm

Having trust is important to me because as an educator I want to make sure that all voices are heard in ways that they feel are accurate. When looking at the number of Black students who are considered "at risk," I want to challenge the norm to create a new norm. I am an educator who has taught from required curriculum for many years and as an educator I also understand the pressures that come with the mandates of

teaching from a curriculum that is hurting instead of helping our Black students.

However, I believe that teaching through culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is the right way to educate our students because it provides an educational shift in how Black people are viewed as inferior, exposes White supremacy, and supports academic success, positive self-concept, and joy for Black students. Although challenges did arise in my attempts to make CRP foundational to my position, I held true to my belief that something different needs to be done for our Black students to have success in today's school and to create more equitable educational environments for all students.

Throughout my career as an educator, academic reports have positioned Black students as not academically successful. For example, Black students have scored lower than Whites, Asians, and Latinx students for over 15 years (NCES, 2017; The Nation's Report Card, 2017a; 2017b; 2019). With this repeated report, I wondered what more could be done to help Black students gain academic success within public schools. It is my belief that culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is an approach through which students can attain academic success as well as competence in their own and other cultures and gain a critical consciousness so they can recognize and stand up for injustices. It is my opinion, and research supports this as outlined in Chapter Two, that CRP can be foundational to students' academic success and is what teachers do and stand for when loving all children. What happens within our schools is that Black students are stripped of their cultural identities during the school day (Alim & Paris, 2017) and they have to respond in ways that others deem to be the correct way to act and do school.

Highlighting one's culture by broadening what is normalized and foundational within the school setting, particularly beyond the narrow Eurocratic norms of curricula,

pedagogy, and policy, provides those who often have their cultures erased with opportunities to embrace their cultural identity while using it to learn. Teaching through a culturally relevant lens makes it possible for those from the currently narrow norm, Eurocratic learning, to broaden their views of what and who matter. These are beliefs that became stronger and stronger as the foundation of my positionality going into and through this study.

A Black Woman Schooled in Eurocentrism and Brought up to Follow Eurocratic Rules

My positionality as a Black woman who has been a victim of a Eurocratic system as a student, a citizen, and a teacher helped to determine my research question and the development of my study. As a young Black student in elementary school, I learned that I had to speak “properly” which meant that I learned that the rich African American Language (AAL) of my community was “not proper,” and I was to be seen and not heard. I did not have a teacher directly say those things to me, but teachers’ comments and reactions toward fellow classmates and our curricula made me understand these things. In school we learned minimally about Black History. Outside of the contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Frederick Douglass, not much more was mentioned about Black people or Africa other than that “slaves came from Africa.”

So, I come from a history of being schooled away from loving Blackness, a history that is so embedded in White as “right” that I often find it coming to the surface even in the midst of my convictions about not repeating that for future students. It is something I have had to watch for throughout this study and call out for myself as I grew. Rule-following is what I learned most from my time in elementary school and college, and I

thought I was doing what was best and getting the best education possible because I was in a predominantly White district or institution. Unfortunately, institutional and internalized racism taught me that some Black schools and some Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were looked at as less educationally sound. Also, I was doing well academically so I never thought that what I was learning or not learning was a part of a system that was developed to keep me, a little Black girl, and Black woman, a victim of not knowing who I truly am.

As a Black teacher I followed the rules of teaching the standards and teaching about specific Black people who were decided on by legislators as those who should be discussed in schools. Placed in our curriculum in January with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, I began teaching African American history then and ended my teaching in March, just as I had learned in school. I taught this way for nine years before I took a course that made me question my teaching and how I was harming instead of nurturing children's identity (explained in Chapter One). As a literacy coach and researcher, I still am a rule follower and as I developed this study and it required me to challenge the curriculum mandated by the district, I acknowledge that it was not easy for me to question the status quo. Another factor in this was fearing for my job and how I would be viewed as a Black woman in the workplace knowing full well that Black educators are often viewed as less competent and that teaching outside mandated curriculum could enable those views from school and district leaders. These are aspects of my positionality that informed how I designed this study, analyzed data, and looked, in particular, at my own growth through the process.

Power Relationships

Finally, my positionality as a literacy coach in the school where the study was conducted puts me in a role of power in relationships with teachers but also in what can be considered a subordinate role in relationships with the school principal and district personnel who were also participants in this study. These power differentials needed to be acknowledged as they likely impacted the data that was collected and participants' willingness to share their true feelings. Each participant plays an intricate part in the research and the relationships. While I feel that my relationship with participants in this study was one of trust, I acknowledge the power differential as being potentially intrusive in those relationships.

Some methodologies express that one way the researcher can build a trusting relationship with the participants is to relinquish the sense of power. Bloom (1998) stated that "power is situated and contextualized within particular intersubjective relationships" (p. 35). While I recognized that even if I professed to relinquish a sense of power, it likely still existed in some form throughout the research. However, to attempt to alleviate it, I invited participants to engage in the co-analysis of data with me by completing member checks and looking at my observation notes and developing plans for the next steps we took as the study progressed. I hoped that this co-analysis would contribute to building trusting relationships and for those relationships to not feel like power struggles. In working with the teachers in debriefing, support, and planning sessions, I felt that having a relationship where we worked alongside each other helped with the power struggle and assisted us in addressing the injustices and inequality of education together.

This positionality affected the way I developed and conducted this study, provided support for teachers, and interpreted and wrote about data. Being aware of my positionality helped me acknowledge and draw from how I felt about rule following but also about how I felt about the injustices of the current curriculum in the lives of Black students, and I knew those may be conflicting positions that I would have to reconcile. However, positionality is a strength because reflecting on and describing it is a part of the authenticity that drives this work. I live the reasons why this work is important every day as I consider the futures of my own children, my teaching and position as a literacy coach, and the futures of the students and teachers with whom I interact. All researchers develop their studies with preconceived notions about the work and potential findings and that is why being forthright in describing our positionality is critical. No researcher can be objective, but we can explain who we are and the experiences and points of view that play roles in the way we conduct research.

Context

My research was conducted at Griffin Elementary School in Rocking District 8 (all pseudonyms) in the southeastern United States. Those contexts are described in the following sections.

Rocking School District 8

Rocking District 8 is one of the largest school districts in the Southeastern United States. Situated in a mid-sized city, the district has 20 elementary schools, three elementary centers-standalone magnet schools such as inquiry, seven middle schools, and five high schools. Some of the schools also have magnet programs such as: the arts, STEM, and dual language immersion to name a few. Within the district there are also two

child development centers for children from ages 4-5, alternative schools that focus on continuing educational needs of students while preparing them to transition back into their regular school settings, and one adult education school for students who are at least 17 years old and have received 16 credit hours and have completed two math and two English classes. The student population for the entire district is over 25,000 students.

Griffin Elementary School

Griffin Elementary School is one of 20 elementary schools in Rocking District 8, and, at the time of the study, it was going into its fourth school year of existence. It is a Title I school with 100% of its students qualifying for either free or reduced lunch. It houses one Developmentally Delayed (DD) special education class of three and four-year-olds, one Severely Intellectual Disable (SID) class for three-year-olds to fifth grade, one Multi-category (MC) class for kindergarten-second grade, one Multi-Category (MC) class for third-fifth grade-which means students have a wide range of disability categories and learning needs, three Pre-K classrooms, and five to six classes kindergarten through fifth grade.

Based on the school's Scheduling/Reporting Ethnicity Report from 2020, at that time there were over 600 students at Griffin Elementary School, most of whom were in kindergarten through fifth grade. The Pre-K programs and three-year-old special education programs are at Griffin Elementary School but are under different departments in the district; therefore, the student numbers are not factored into the student numbers when determining demographics for Griffin Elementary School or other elementary schools. Thus, the student population data that follows does not include these two programs. The student population of Griffin Elementary School as of the 2019-2020

school year was 70% Black, almost 14% Latinx, approximately 10% two or more races, less than 5% Asian, and did not include any White students, American Indian or Alaska Native (however, one student identifies as American Indian), or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. When looking at the school as a whole body, the distribution of gender was almost exactly 50%. The Scheduling/Reporting Ethnicity Report changed when the new school year began August 2020 and information was updated at that time.

According to state assessment data, students at Griffin Elementary are scoring 30% below other elementary schools in the district that do not have the same demographic make-up with regard to socioeconomic, racial identity, and ethnic backgrounds (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022a). In comparing Griffin to other schools with the same demographic make-up, socioeconomic, racial identity, and ethnic backgrounds, Griffin scored 5% below three schools with the same socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds and 2% above two other schools with the same socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022).

Griffin Elementary is also the only school in Rocking District 8 that has ongoing professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy. Our school's principal, Dr. Marzetti opened the school with the vision of meeting the needs of the students who walked through Griffin's doors. To do that she felt that although teachers had the disposition to teach all children, she wanted to provide them with know-how by staying abreast of how to best meet the needs of students. From this vision she sought the support of Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart, and the culturally relevant pedagogy cohorts (Pre-K-Grade Two and Grade Three-Grade-Five) began at Griffin Elementary School.

Participants

The participants in my study were two early childhood teachers (kindergarten and first grade) and their students, one student intern, a consultant who conducted professional development (PD) focused on culturally relevant teaching in the school, principal of the school, coordinator of district literacy coaches, and myself. When I sought partnerships with these participants, they each received a letter that explained the study and what their participation meant in accordance with the local university's Human Subjects guidelines (see Appendix A). Attached to the informational letter were consent forms also written in accordance with the university's Human Subjects guidelines (see Appendix B). When sharing the data collected, I kept the identity of all participants anonymous by using pseudonyms.

Participant-Researcher

I am a Black woman who, at the time of this research was 39 years old and had begun my seventh year as a literacy coach and my seventeenth year as an educator. Before I became a literacy coach, I taught students in preschool with disabilities, kindergarten, first and third grades. I am a doctoral student in the Language and Literacy Program at a local state university and I continue to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy. At Griffin Elementary School, I participate in the culturally relevant professional development cohorts in order to continue my own growth in this needed area of education.

Classroom Teachers

There were two classroom teachers who partnered with me in this research. One is a kindergarten teacher, and one is a first-grade teacher. They both teach at Griffin

Elementary School where I work as one of two literacy coaches. I asked the two educators to be part of my research because they showed an interest in learning more about culturally relevant and sustaining teaching to help their students be “successful” according to what public schools classify as academic success. They both are participants in the ongoing professional development work at our school that focuses on culturally relevant teaching. Their backgrounds are described below.

Mrs. Jones

Mrs. Jones is a Black woman who at the time of the study was in her early thirties, a kindergarten teacher, and had been teaching for seven and a half years. She graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood and a Master of Education in literacy. She is also a literacy endorsed teacher in our state. She taught kindergarten for six and a half years and taught first grade for one year. She taught first grade the 2018-2019 school year when she came to our school and started in kindergarten the 2019-2020 school year. I had the opportunity to meet and work with Mrs. Jones her first year at Griffin Elementary School in a teacher-coach relationship.

During her first year at our school, Mrs. Jones participated in the school-wide and small group culturally relevant professional development and expressed great interest in wanting to continue doing the work. She went out on maternity leave in November 2019 returning back in January 2021 where she continued to passionately work to learn more about decolonizing the curriculum and teaching through culturally relevant and sustaining foundations.

Ms. Pearson

Ms. Pearson is a Black woman who, at the time of this study, was also in her early thirties and a first-grade teacher. She was in her sixth year of teaching, at the time the research was conducted; and has taught in both public and charter sectors in grades first and second, and a combination of first/second. She graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood and a Master of Education in Special Education. She was also Teacher of the Year for 2018-2019 at her previous school.

The 2019-2020 school year was Ms. Pearson's first year at Griffin Elementary School and I had an opportunity to meet and work with Ms. Pearson through my role as a literacy coach. I have also worked with her in our school-wide and small group culturally relevant professional development.

Mrs. Bryant

Mrs. Bryant is a White woman who, at the time of this study, was in her late twenties and a senior at the local university and a student intern in Ms. Pearson's first grade class at the time the research was conducted. For her last two years of college, she was selected to participate in the program's Urban Education Cohort which meant that all of her education classes were taught through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy and Pro-Black practices. Following her internship with Ms. Pearson, she graduated in spring, 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education. I met Mrs. Bryant during her practicum at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year at Griffin Elementary School. When she did her full-time internship as a student teacher beginning January 2021, she and I worked closer together due to my time within Ms. Pearson's class.

Professional Development Provider

Dr. Clark is a White woman, who was in her mid-sixties at the time of the study. She had been a professor for over 20 years continuing her own growth and teaching to counter anti-Black educational practices and policies through culturally relevant, humanizing, and decolonizing pedagogies. She and I met when I was a student in her doctoral seminar in spring 2017. After that course, she and I developed a student-advisor relationship, and I had other courses under her instruction. She regularly teaches doctoral seminars and supports Ph.D. students who focus on culturally relevant, humanizing, decolonizing, and other critical and critical race pedagogies and teaches undergraduate courses in culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistic pluralism. During my time at my current school, Dr. Clark worked with teachers and me through the lens of culturally relevant teaching. This professional development took place during after school meetings and sometimes during the day within grade level meetings where she worked with individual teachers.

The summer of 2019, Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart, another local professor conducted a five-day virtual professional development for all teachers at my school as a part of ongoing PD they had been providing for the past two years at Griffin School focused on CRP. All teachers, including me, engaged in readings on culturally relevant pedagogy and learned about decolonizing anti-Blackness in schools which meant moving practices and policies away from their Eurocratic base to embrace multiple ways of being with a particular focus on pro-Black pedagogies. This professional development required us to not just listen to the professors but also to interact in the process of decolonizing the curriculum. After this summer professional development, Dr. Clark continued to work

with the K-2 teachers at Griffin School and supported my culturally relevant work with Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson. While working with Dr. Clark and attending the school professional development, I collected data using field notes and teaching artifacts (PowerPoints) to better understand the content that teachers received so that I could build upon my work.

Griffin Elementary School's Principal

Dr. Marzetti identifies as a White, second-generation Italian woman. At the time of the study, she was 60 years old, had been in education for over 30 years, and had experiences as a school director and/or principal for the past ten years. She began her career as a teacher of preschoolers and later worked as the director for the preschool programs within our district. After showing leadership in that role, she became the lead teacher at one of the district's center schools, smaller schools that specialize in a particular focus area such as inquiry. Dr. Marzetti was then chosen to open Griffin Elementary School and has been the principal since 2017.

It is at this school where I met and began working with Dr. Marzetti. Under her leadership, the faculty, staff, and children attend school in an environment that is open to culturally relevant, sustaining, and decolonizing teaching. Dr. Marzetti believes that all children should have learning opportunities that foster an environment that brings children's lived experiences into the classroom and encourages and provides platforms for teachers to teach in ways that are best for their students and provides viewpoints of those often marginalized. She also believes that deficit thinking has no place in our environment and that teachers' disposition towards our students as well as their

understanding of how to create meaningful and culturally relevant lessons are essential to students' success. She thinks that ongoing PD is key in that process.

District Executive Director of Elementary Instruction & Literacy Coach Supervisor

Mr. James identifies as an African American male. At the time of the study, he was in his late forties during the study. An African American male, he had been in education for over 20 years. He had worked as a teacher and then as a principal in our school district. After being a principal in Rocking District 8, he left and became a principal in a neighboring district. Mr. James then returned to Rocking District 8 and became the director for instruction within the elementary sector. I met and have worked with Mr. James in the area of supervisor and employee for over three years. His commitment is to have success within our district starting in the elementary grades and to research best practices within the curricula to fulfill this need. He also thinks that multiculturalism is important to implement within the school and classroom.

Students and Parents

I wanted parents and students to participate in my research to give me an insight into how students felt about the daily instruction that was taught from a culturally relevant lens as well as what parents thought about the learning their students were encountering through a culturally relevant lens. I was going to have two-family groups that consisted of family members of students in each of the classes. However, after sending home invitation letters (Appendix A) to participate in the study, teachers received ten verbal commitments across both classrooms of parents stating that their child could participate in the research; but I was not able to get written confirmation from the parents. It should be noted that data for this study was collected during a time period

when some of the students were schooled virtually and some onsite in the school because of the 2020-2021 COVID 19 pandemic.

Many parents were faced with multiple issues at home and in their own work places. Out of the parents who initially responded, only one consent form was returned which stated that they would like to be a part of my family group, but with one person there would not be enough people for a focus group, so I did not develop this group. Thus, responses of students and parents are not a part of the data in this study. I mention this void because, ideally, their reactions would be key to my findings. However, given the pandemic time in which the study was situated, I did not feel it was wise or respectful to push them to participate. In Appendix C, I include questions I would have used in family focus because I feel that they may be useful in further research that extends and deepens this work.

Research Approval

Having a person's permission to work with them is very important because it invites you into their space instead of creating feelings of invasion of their thinking and their space. So, it was important for me to get permission from all that I would work with through the research. I not only needed the approval of each participant, but I also needed approval from my school district and from our university's Internal Review Board (IRB).

District Approval

To get my district's approval to conduct research, I had to contact the research department at the district level and submit a district application (Appendix B) along with proposed invitational letters and interview questions. I first obtained approval through the research application in 2019-2020 school year. At this time my research was approved

but due to an unforeseen circumstance, I asked our research department if I could get an extension for data collection. The extension for data collection was approved until June 2021. As a part of the district's approval process, the district stated that at any time my district research committee (Dr. Marzetti, James, & district research personnel) reserves the right to terminate the study if they feel it is not in the best interest of our students, their families, or staff. Another requirement is to submit a copy of all final reports, dissertations, or publications based on the research to the research department upon completion of the study.

University Approval

I also completed the university's process for obtaining approval to work with human subjects through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To complete this process, I submitted my proposal and had a committee that advised me on what I needed to obtain to work with the participants. They also gave suggestions on data to collect. They told me that since I was in a school setting, I could use the work of the students in the two teacher classes, as well as information gained from the two teachers during the debrief, support, and planning sessions that are seen in Chapter Five.

Data Sources

The 2019-2020 school year took on unprecedented challenges. Our world encountered the COVID-19 virus and people all over the world were greatly impacted. One of the impacts that our state experienced, as well as other states, was school closure. Our school year went to a virtual platform in the second half of the school year. During this time, we began our 2020-2021 school year of teaching and learning virtually with the potential to go back to face-to-face instruction at some point during the year. We partially

went back to face-to-face instruction in November 2020. At this time students were learning through dual modality where some students and teachers were face-to-face and other students were interacting with them through a virtual platform. I began collecting data in September 2020.

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, I began working to make the components of culturally relevant teaching foundational to my literacy coaching role. I collected data about this process through a range of inter-related methods that were largely aligned with and embedded within my job as literacy coach. I was able to collect data as a regular component of my literacy coaching position because an aspect of the literacy coach position in our district is to study the process of teacher and student learning to inform ongoing supportive steps in the coaching process. The data sources used to help me address my research questions are seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Data Sources that Support Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Sources
What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Clark's Professional Development Sessions ● Conversations with Dr. Clark & Dr. Phillips ● Teacher Debrief, Support, and Planning Professional Development Sessions ● Coaching Cycles ● Interviews ● Field Journals ● Classroom Observations ● Student Documents
What barriers are experienced and how are they negotiated (or not)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Clark's Professional Development Sessions ● Teacher Debrief, Support, and Planning Professional Development Sessions ● Interviews ● Field Journals ● Classroom Observations

What support is experienced in the work to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Clark’s Professional Development Sessions ● Teacher Debrief, Support, and Planning Professional Development Sessions ● Interviews ● Field Journals ● Classroom Observations ● Student Documents
What can I learn about myself in the role of literacy coach as I attempt to make CRP foundational to my work with teachers and children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dr. Clark’s Professional Development Sessions ● Teacher Debrief, Support, and Planning Professional Development Sessions ● Field Journals ● Coaching Cycles

These spaces and sources for data collection were designed to help me gather insight into the process of making CRP foundational to my role as literacy coach. I wanted this study to be embedded as much as possible within the parameters of my role as a literacy coach so that I could provide useful information that would be doable within the field of literacy coaching. My observations, instructional modeling, co-teaching and the coaching cycle, debriefing, and PD sessions fell easily within those parameters. Interviews fell outside of my written job description, but I still saw them as a part of my job allowing me to gauge the teachers’ knowledge level and pose questions to dig deeper into their thinking. Interviews with other participants in the study—the principal and district leaders—also fell outside written descriptions of my role but, again, those interviews gave me important insights not only for my study but to clarify their views of my responsibilities as a coach. Each data collection space or source is described in the following sections.

PreK- Grade Two Professional Development (Dr. Clark's PD)

During the time of data collection, I participated in the school's PreK-grade two PD sessions, which was also called culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) Cohort, that focused on culturally relevant pedagogy. Because continuous learning is something I am committed to as an educator, I participated with the teachers in these PD sessions as a space to stay competent in my work as well as excel beyond my original competence (Crawford, 2017). This provided an important space for data collection. Dr. Clark from the local university had been facilitating this PD for PreK-grade two teachers for the previous two years and met with teachers monthly, bi-monthly, and sometimes weekly either as a PreK-grade two group or more frequently with small grade level groups and individual teachers as needed. Dr. Clark knew how important it was to understand the needs of the group of people you are working with and through her reflection, she thought that our time together would be more effective if she worked in grade levels and with individual teachers.

Initially Dr. Clark provided the readings for us, but sometimes that did not work because teachers had limited time, particularly during the COVID pandemic, which made it harder to devote time to reading between PD sessions. The materials used in these PD sessions were decided on by Dr. Clark to foster conversations of how to embed culturally relevant teaching into the programs and framework that the district and school required the teachers to use in their daily instruction (see Chapter Four for detailed description of those requirements and mandates). Dr. Clark's PD session topics, required reading and resources used, are provided in Appendix D to show the context in which my work with Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson was situated. While a timeline was set at the beginning of the

year, this was altered considerably as Dr. Clark realized that teachers' needs were not being met in the whole group setting and as explained earlier, smaller grade level and individual time with teachers was important.

I attended all of the whole group sessions and as many of the small group and individual sessions as I was able to fit into my schedule. The sessions were virtually recorded, and she gave me permission to use her PowerPoint presentations as data. In addition to Dr. Clark's planned PD sessions (with groups and individuals), she and I met regularly so that I could provide support for her planning, particularly around the district requirements and the pacing guide I created with the other literacy coach in our school.

Coach and Teacher Debrief, Support, and Planning Sessions (Research Small Group PD)

Although I attended the whole group sessions provided by Dr. Clark, I also met twice a month with the two primary participants in this study, Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson, in my role as literacy coach. This was one of my opportunities to develop and practice my ability to make CRP foundational to my role as literacy coach. During our meetings, we would elaborate more on the discussions that occurred during Dr. Clark's PD and go in-depth with how they could teach through a culturally relevant lens within their own classroom. This was a way to build on and support the professional development we were engaged in. As our time progressed, the school-wide PD was a place of reference if we needed, but the discussions among the three of us (and often Dr. Clark attended as well) began to center more on how to teach required units as well as those we developed around CRP and how to deepen our understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Table 3.2 shows the sessions and topic discussions I developed based

on Dr. Clark's plan for PreK-Grade Two PD along with my knowledge of the teachers' specific needs. As a result of initial planning with Dr. Clark, I went into the literacy coach position that year with plans for our discussions of the curriculum, but I monitored and adjusted as needed in order to help facilitate my own learning as well as the learning of the teachers with whom I was working.

One of the challenges that Dr. Clark and I discussed were the requirements of the district and of the school that Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson, and I were required to follow. Therefore, an important part of our debriefing (and classroom work) was my support for the teachers to build confidence and ability in teaching within and beyond the required pacing guides and standards. Therefore, we tried not to allow rigid interpretations of the required pacing guides (see description of district and school requirements and pacing guides in Chapter Four) to guide us but tried to use them to address district and state requirements while making instruction culturally relevant for the students.

Table 3.2 Teacher Debrief, Support and Planning Sessions Building from PreK-Grade Two PD Conducted by Dr. Clark

PD Sessions Dates	Topics of Discussion *Each session we reviewed what was discussed in the PreK-Grade Two PD with Dr. Clark, shared what they were doing in their classrooms, and planned next steps
December 9, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How they see themselves as Culturally Relevant teachers ● Barriers ● How to intentionally enhance the lesson through CRP
February 11, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Questions about not using Open Court Reading ● Using AAL (connection with school-wide PD) ● How to make Lucy Calkins connect throughout the day ● Celebrating hidden figures

February 18, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How to talk about heavy topics with children ● What is critical consciousness
March 4, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using AAL (connection with school-wide PD) ● A space needed to do the work
March 24, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using AAL (connection with school-wide PD) ● Comfort level of teachers when not following Open Court Reading
April 15, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work teacher and coach are doing ● Barriers/challenges ● Feeling about not teaching all of Open Court Reading
April 29, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussions about the grade level units ● Tying Lucy Calkins Writing with the Shared Reading lesson
May 13, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work teacher and coach are doing
May 27, 2021 (Final Meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Last meeting and extended thank yous ● How the PD experience was for them ● How they felt about teaching through a culturally relevant lens ● What they thought a coach's role should be with CRP

Classroom Observations

As a literacy coach, one of my roles or job responsibilities is to conduct classroom observations. This responsibility became a good opportunity for data collection for this study. Once the demands of the school year increased, I conducted observations through a virtual platform or face-to-face in the classrooms with each teacher every other week ranging from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the content area of the observation and which phase (referenced later) of the study I was conducting. At first, I was only going to conduct research in the teachers' English Language Arts (ELA) blocks, but we saw other opportunities to teach with a culturally relevant foundation in other content areas and we worked together in other content areas.

Because our district was operating in a hybrid (face to face instruction and online at the same time) method, teachers were recording their lessons, and this provided an opportunity for me to view the lessons when I could not get into the classrooms due to observing and helping other teachers as a part of my literacy coach's role.

During the observations, I observed how teachers and students engaged in their learning environment. Collecting data for this study, I also observed how teachers interacted with the content of the lessons and students, and whether they were upbeat or lethargic. I also looked at student participation, how many students were answering, singing, and happily interacting, although some were in masks, I was able to tell through their eyes and voices. To organize data from these observations for analysis, I divided them into three phases indicating the increase in the amount of time and interactions I had within the classrooms whether virtual or face-to-face.

Phase One

During Phase One, as required by my position as literacy coach, I regularly visited classrooms either face-to-face or virtually to observe lessons from 30-minute sessions each week in ELA. During phase one I took photographs of teachers teaching content and student work and wrote observational (field) notes of what I observed in the classroom to include: what counternarratives were used to enhance the curricula and how students engaged or disengaged with the information presented. I used my field notes to reflect upon the instructional environment to help devise a plan that encompassed CRP within instruction so that the teachers and I could do further work together.

Phase Two

Once I began Phase Two, and as required by my position as literacy coach, I observed in each classroom (face-to-face or virtually) for 30-60 minutes each session at least once a week. Again, I recorded field notes and video recorded teachers and students for the purpose of identifying teaching and learning styles. During this phase I participated in the learning process with the children, modeled instruction and/or co-taught with the teachers. My format of data collection of field notes, pictures, and video recordings allowed me to reflect on the time spent in the classroom observing and teaching as well as analyzing the findings in the data.

Phase Three

The third and final phase, and as required by my position as literacy coach, I continued with my classroom observations (face-to-face or virtually) in the classroom at least once every other week for a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of 2 hours, depending on the content area of the observation. I also continued with my field notes, pictures, recordings, modeling, and co-teaching as needed. Video recordings collected at this time allowed me to reflect on what I was able to observe about the learning of the teacher and students and the teaching of the lessons.

In all three phases, collections of observations were in the format of field notes and video recordings. After each visit, I wrote about my experience in my research journal including how cultural relevance was addressed in the teaching or within my coaching, to also include how the teachers, students, and I responded to the teaching and learning. All data collected helped in my reflections and analyses of the data to further improve my instructional delivery and support for their culturally relevant pedagogy

(CRP) work, my understanding of the concerns and issues they faced, and my ability to assist the teachers in their learning and instructional delivery. Activity during these phases and the data collection are seen in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Classroom Observation Phases and Data Collection

Phases	Duration	Data Collection
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Face to face and virtual observations only ● Visit each class once a week for 30 minutes for 4 weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Observation notes (field notes) ● Pictures ● Video recording
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Face to face and virtual observations, modeling, co-teaching ● Visit each class once a week for 30-60 minutes for 6 weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Observation notes (field notes) ● Pictures ● Video recording ● Student work
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Face to face and virtual observations only ● Visit each class once a week for a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of two hours for 4 weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Observation notes (field notes) ● Pictures ● Video recording ● Student work

Coaching Cycles

Coaching cycles are a major part of this research because, in my role as literacy coach, the teachers and I regularly engaged in coaching cycles to debrief on the lessons taught as well as the reaction of the students. Cognitive coaching cycles were originally developed by Arthur L. Costa and Robert J. Garmston (1985) and consist of teachers and coaches debriefing about lessons. The teachers and I are engaged in coaching cycles that lasted longer than Diane Sweeney's (2011) recommended 4–6-week coaching cycle. The time span was longer in order for me to collect enough data for my research. Utilizing a coaching cycle model allowed for one-to-one coaching time that gave each teacher and

myself opportunities to dig deeper into the culturally relevant nature of their teaching and to plan next steps in their learning and in the learning of their children.

Coaching cycles also allowed time for me to informally interview teachers about the culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) practices they used throughout the week, what components of CRP they addressed and what worked and did not work for them, what they learned about their students, and how they were able to address mandated curricula. During these sessions I video recorded our discussions and transcribed these data to analyze the nature of our thinking, reflection, and planning around culturally relevant pedagogy. Looking at this data provided feedback for the teacher as instructor and learner and for me as a coach and learner.

Before a scheduled observation, I met with each teacher individually to think through what a culturally relevant lesson would consist of and then planned the lessons for implementation. We discussed teaching specific skills and strategies in culturally relevant ways and issues related to teaching mandated curriculum, as well as teachers' concerns, questions, and successes, which opportunities to model and co-teach lessons were birthed. After observing the lesson, the teachers and I would meet individually to discuss our notices and wonderings from the lesson. We would also look at documents of student work and add to our discussions about the lessons and where to go next. I wrote entries in my field journal after interactions with teachers to capture my thoughts, feelings, and wonderings. To develop my findings, I analyzed the data through thematic analysis, which is detailed below.

Instructional Modeling and Co-Teaching

Instructional modeling and co-teaching are each a part of the literacy coach's job description and through engaging in them with the participating teachers, Mrs. Jones, and Ms. Pearson, I was able to conduct these parts of my role as a literacy coach. Modeling for a classroom teacher comes about when a teacher may not be sure how to teach the skill(s) or standard(s) or a new strategy and wants to see the literacy coach teach it with their students (Anderson, 2016; Vega, 2015). During the coaching cycles, Ms. Pearson and I planned for modeling opportunities where I would add cultural and critical stances to the required curriculum. The modeling experienced allowed for Ms. Pearson to observe her students and I interacting with the content and later provided time for us to discuss what she thought went well or did not go well and what where her instruction needed to go next.

The co-teaching part of the literacy coach's role is when the teacher and the literacy coach are teaching the lesson together in a "tag team" method where the teacher or literacy coach adds to the learning (Morin, n.d.). This method lets both the teacher and literacy coach demonstrate their areas of strengths while accepting areas of growth (Morin, n.d.; Vega, 2015). While working in a coaching cycle with both participant teachers, Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson, there were some planned areas for me to tag team and there were some moments that were not planned that I tag teamed in the moment of their teaching. This, however, was discussed in coaching cycles and both teachers were fine with the impromptu tag teaming provided by me.

When I modeled or co-taught with the teachers, the lessons were video recorded and captured what I missed while in the moment of teaching. This provided me with data that I could use for my data analysis that are discussed later in my data analysis section.

Interviews

I chose interviews as one of my data collection methods because they allowed me to find out what was “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 2002, p.341). I knew that the school and district had stated an interest in focusing on culturally relevant teaching, but I did not know, specifically, what teachers, the principal, and district personnel felt, thought, or knew about culturally relevant pedagogy. To assist me in understanding their thinking, I generated interview questions as a qualitative investigator, which means that they were “more open-ended and less structured” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90) than they might be in a quantitative study. Having this type of semi-structured interview allowed me, as a researcher, to respond immediately to situations, emerging thoughts, and new concepts (Merriam, 2009) and to ask follow-up questions that helped me gain further insights.

Teacher Participants

My method of interviews with Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson was to conduct formal interviews three times: at the beginning, middle, and end of my research. This provided me with knowledge about how they felt before the study, during the study, and after the study and it allowed me to gauge their knowledge of CRP, fears, concerns, excitement, and so on (see interview questions in Appendix C). I also conducted informal interviews with teachers during our coaching cycle conversations and those gave me ongoing insights into their concerns, understandings, growth, and successes. When conducting the interviews, we met virtually during a time chosen by the participants. When conducting

the interviews, I first let each participant know that the interviews were going to be recorded through our virtual platform and only used to help me with this study. This information was also provided in the informed consent form they signed. I reiterated that pseudonyms would be used when reporting information to keep their identity and the identity of the school secure. I also made them aware that I would also jot down notes during the interviews to help me capture what they were saying so that I could ask questions right then if needed. Informal interviews were conducted regularly as we met for PD and planning.

Student Teacher Participant

From January to April 2021, Ms. Pearson had an intern, Mrs. Bryant, from the local university and she, without hesitation, participated in teaching students through a culturally relevant lens. Therefore, I included her in the study by conducting an end of year interview to see if she had any barriers with teaching through a culturally relevant lens as well as the support she encountered or needed during her internship experience. During our time together, I reiterated that pseudonyms would be used when reporting information to keep her identity and the identity of the school secure (see interview questions in Appendix C).

School's Principal and District's Executive Director of Elementary Instruction

Interviews were also conducted with Dr. Marzetti, principal of Griffin Elementary where Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson taught, and Mr. James, Executive Director of Elementary Instruction and literacy coaches' supervisor for the school district in which Griffin School was situated. I conducted virtual interviews, interviewing them separately at the beginning of the school year to learn about their understandings of CRP, the

parameters they envisioned for teaching in the school and the district, and to ask them to clarify any information that was circulating in the school about what teachers could and could not do instructionally. This was important to discuss because it allowed me to gain insights into curriculum barriers felt by teachers, support given to teachers to instruct with CRP components at the forefront, our leaders' actual understanding of CRP, and their thoughts on the roles of CRP and literacy coaching. The school district where the study was conducted uses the term Reading Coaches so that term may appear in direct quotes from data used in findings chapters. The interview questions that were prepared for both supervisors can be seen in Appendix C.

Student Document-Collection

Documents collected as data in this study and as an integral part of my job as literacy coach helped me understand many ways that the participants communicated what they were thinking, seeing, or feeling. Merriam (2009) considered documents to be “written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p.139) and Hatch (2002) stated that “artifacts [documents] are objects that participants use in the everyday activity of the contexts under examination” (p.117). Therefore, I collected artifacts, such as drawings and writings that the students in each classroom used as a means of communicating and telling specific stories (Glesne, 2016) to assist me in understanding more about their thinking and learning.

As I analyzed these data, I remembered that students thought and learned differently, and therefore, the documents would look different per child and per grade level as well. Knowing these differences, these documents provided evidence of what students were learning and how they were expressing that learning. While in the

classrooms I saw the student work and did a quick analysis, but later collected the student artifacts and analyzed the documents further. To assist with getting student work, I asked the teachers to keep folders and to upload students' work completed during class. When the teachers and I met during coaching cycle sessions, we used the student work as one element of data to help us determine the next direction of our culturally relevant teaching and coaching experience.

Researcher's Field Journal

Another primary source of data was my researcher's notebook that I call my field journal. Glense (2016) noted that field journals are places where researchers document their experiences and that they [field journals] are not shared with anyone. Although they were not shared with anyone, I understood at the beginning of data collection that they [field journals] can be used in court if legal authorities subpoenaed them (Pelton, 2013). My field journals were only used as data for this study. With knowledge of this legal action and my desire to use field notes as data, I used my field journal to document my experiences in classrooms, coaching cycles, and interviews, and my own reflections, and used pseudonyms for all contexts and people.

In using my field journal after each classroom observation, coaching cycle session, and interview, I jotted down what I observed, what was said, how I felt during the interaction time together, and questions that came to mind that would help me support teachers in culturally relevant ways and that would answer my research questions. I also jotted down potential themes that I saw as patterns in the experience. I described what occurred in vivid descriptive detail so that I could experience that moment again (as much as possible) no matter when I read it over. Glesne (2016) noted that a researcher

should not be judgmental when writing field notes; but also stated that one should “jot down ideas and impressions, clarify earlier interpretations, speculate about what is going on, write down feelings, work out problems and make flexible short-and long-term plans” (p.77). Therefore, I took time to review my notes and make analytical notes to reflect my thoughts and feelings. Keeping a field journal did allow me to see changes that would enrich the research process. Some of the deductive reflection questions addressed in my field journal were:

- How was the lesson implemented from what was planned?
- Did the teacher(s) or I demonstrate academic success, culturally competence, and/or critical consciousness?
- Where do we go next with the coaching and teacher partnership?
- What did I notice about the students’ engagement?

I also used open coding, a form of inductive coding, to learn more about myself throughout my research. This type of coding was used because it allowed me to look at my data and develop codes from what I was experiencing.

Data collection chosen for this research provided me with evidence of what students and teachers were getting from this experience and what was needed to support the growth of teachers and students. The data also helped me to address my research questions in my quest to understand how to make culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to the literacy coach position as well as learning more about myself as a literacy coach and person.

Conversations with My Dissertation Chairs (Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips)

The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) was still new to me when I started my research and, although I am still growing in my knowledge, it was an area that I was not certain how to fully make foundational to my literacy coach's role. Being able to communicate with Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips throughout my data collection was very helpful because they provided me with examples of how CRP should look within instruction. Having them to talk to and share my thoughts, struggles, and wonderings with was beneficial and crucial to my own learning of CRP. Whenever I needed guidance on how to support a teacher in producing culturally relevant lessons, they were there to assist me, which provided a space for me to address my own misconceptions. Having this opportunity to communicate regularly with Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips allowed me to grow in my own knowledge, thus providing a better coaching experience for the two participants.

Organization of Data

Before beginning my research, I had a system in place for keeping data on all the teachers I worked with within my role as a literacy coach. However, for my research I developed a system to organize, store, and safeguard the data collected through usage of individual pseudonym files for each participant with whom I worked with. Each individual electronic file was secured on a flash drive that only I used for research purposes. The flash drive was password protected and securely kept in my office at school under lock and key or securely within my home also under lock and key. I also kept my field journal, video recordings and transcripts securely stored and under pseudonyms. When I transcribed the information, I did so in a place where only I was

able to hear and see the data. When listening to video recordings and transcribing them, I listened to them in a secluded area or used headphones, so that I was the only person to hear the recording.

Data Analysis

Data analysis allows the researcher to organize and make sense of all that they have seen, heard, experienced, and read during the research process (Glense, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Study.com, n.d.). Merriam (2009) suggested the best way to make sense out of data is to consolidate, reduce, and interpret what has been said, read and seen. I used my research questions to guide my coding and analysis. Using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in a deductive process, I analyzed the dimensions of CRP across my data set, noting the ways I, Dr. Clark, and participants engaged with the idea in thought and in the curriculum. Similarly, I used a deductive process to code for “barriers” and “support” across my data set in order to respond to research questions 2 and 3. I used protocol coding and open coding when I analyzed for “CRP”, “barriers” and “support.” The concepts were identified in the research questions a priori and applied to the data set. Protocol coding is the process of using a priori concepts or theories. As I was looking for patterns in the data set, I used open coding as well. Open coding is the process of coding topics in the data set (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, as I worked to respond to research question 4, I used open coding for topics as well. I engaged my data often by reading and rereading the data and finding similar codes across different data sources. I worked to keep my theoretical framework, particularly theoretical concepts from Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit, in the process, too. Theoretical ideas from each informed some of the interpretation I represent in the following chapters, for example, Black Joy from

BlackCrit. I worked inductively with some codes, for example, curriculum, language, frustrations, time and understanding. I analyzed data throughout the data collection stage, and once I completed this stage, I formally analyzed all data collected according to my specific research questions. The technique used to analyze data was reading all data collected in order to identify thematic patterns following the processes described below.

Thematic Coding and Categorizing

Thematic Analysis looks for themes and patterns within the data (Glesne, 2016). The patterns are categorized from coding similarities, dissimilarities, and contradictions (Gibbs, 2007/2010; Saldaña, 2016). I used thematic analysis with all of my data. Once I gathered my data from interviews, small group sessions, and planning, I transcribed the data in MSWord and then copied the transcripts into an online program called Dedoose. Within Dedoose I did my first round of coding line-by-line in each transcript and coded using inductive coding. Then for my second and third rounds of coding I placed codes into categories and coded deductively through the three components of CRP and inductively through patterns that were derived.

Critical Autoethnographic Representation

In my critical autoethnographic representation, I was informed primarily by narrative coding. Narrative coding takes a look into the lives of the participants by exploring their interpersonal and intrapersonal actions and experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) said that this type of analysis “examine[s] phenomena, issues, and people’s lives holistically” (p.154). Examinations of teaching and learning through the stories that are shared by participants led me to different codes that deepened my analysis, particularly as I analyzed the data to respond to the last research question.

Trustworthiness, Triangulation, and Member Checking

Merriam (2009) stated that “qualitative researchers can never capture an objective ‘truth’ or ‘reality’” (p. 215), but there are different techniques that a qualitative researcher can engage in to increase trustworthiness of the research (Merriam, 2009). For example, for me to have a study that was rigorous and trustworthy, I triangulated my data for the same reasons: so that I could cross-check my interpretations and understandings across at least three of my data sources. To triangulate, I used data from interviews, classroom observations, and coaching cycle sessions, comparing information across all three. Although triangulation is important to building trustworthiness, another big factor for trustworthiness was member checking.

Member checking is when the researcher codes, analyzes, and writes about the data and then consults with the participants to see if they feel that the researcher’s interpretations of data are accurate (Saldaña, 2016). To build trustworthiness through member checking, I analyzed the data as I went throughout my study and sent transcripts to participants for them to check to make sure that I captured what they were saying. This ensured that I analyzed the experiences in the moment and provided an opportunity for the participants to clarify their views to ensure accuracy in my interpretations of their experiences.

Because I met regularly with the teacher participants over a period of time, I would also conduct member checks with them by making sure that my interpretations of what they said, or thought was accurate by asking them to review and discuss the data I collected. This not only provided trustworthiness in the work, but it also contributed to our learning about culturally relevant teaching together. I did not meet regularly with the

other participants (principal or the District Executive Director of Elementary Instruction and literacy coach Supervisor) but used their information from their initial interview and shared my interpretation of what I thought they were saying and provided opportunities for them to add on to make sure I interpreted their thinking correctly. By verifying whether I correctly interpreted their meaning and my openness to have them correct my misinterpretation showed them that I only wanted the study to honor their views.

Ethical Issues and Reciprocity

Addressing injustices and inequities is the ethical thing to do for the students and participants in my research. Ethics proves to be something that is morally right and goes beyond just getting approval from Institutional Review Boards (IRB) which can be just “isolated choices in crucial situations” (Cassell & Jacobs, 1987, p.1). Ethics is ongoing and a part of building trusting relationships and checking with participants regularly to ascertain the accuracy of interpretations within research. My intentions were to be ethical in every facet of the research, and therefore, I was thoughtful in my data collection and how I interacted with the participants. Some ethical issues that could have occurred, but did not, were the ability to honor privacy and the consent of the participants.

Although I received consent from all participants (teachers, principal, professional development provider, and district personnel), I had to continue to be mindful of my interactions during the entire research process. In recording videos and taking still photos I had to be mindful that images captured in these modes of data collection did not reveal the names of the school, district, or participants. In addition, I also made sure that participants felt comfortable enough to talk with me about their feelings and I also let them know that at any time they wanted to withdraw from the study or delete some

information they could. Through their consent they consented to have their information shared, but this consent to participate and/or share information could be revoked, which is stated in the Informed Consent form, and is what I wanted the participants to understand.

Privacy and consent are major in research studies and if they are broken, they could cause potential risks to participants. It could potentially cause risk to the participants because their identity could be revealed, and others would be aware of their thoughts and feelings. Therefore, not being serious about the participants' rights, could have negative ramifications for the participants because someone might not agree with what the participants said or did and that could have potentially resulted in participants enduring negativity from others. For example, if someone did not agree with something a participant said, they may be viewed as not following the expectations of the district or school and could possibly result in reprimands from either place of employment.

Participants could potentially benefit from this study because they contributed to work that may further educators' understandings about the impact of and need for culturally relevant teaching being foundational to the literacy coach's role. They also benefit from learning more about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). I, too, benefited from learning more about CRP and how to enhance my role as a coach as well as how to negotiate trying to make CRP foundational to literacy coaching. I also benefited from the relationships that were developed with the teacher participants and we have become stronger in our learning and together we have been able to do more for the students at our school.

Building relationships and sharing our knowledge with others takes time and a lot of it. The amount of time that the participants gave to this study inside and outside of their school day is something that I cannot thank them enough for or know how to repay them for all that they did. Although it is not customary to pay with money (Glense, 2016), I would not have known how much money to give them that would be enough to repay them for their time. Thus, reciprocity that I was able to provide to the two teachers were lots of thanks and encouragement and acknowledgement of all that they were doing. I also provided reciprocity by planning with them and then teaching alongside them as much as possible. Finally, although I had ideas of what they considered reciprocity to mean for them, their response was that they needed nothing and that they were glad to work with me.

Limitations/Considerations

Within any study there are bound to be limitations and this study was no different. One potential limitation that could have occurred, did occur and that was parents and/or guardians not giving their consent for children to receive instruction that is not “required” by the state or neglecting to return the consent form. This could have been because of the uncertainties of COVID-19, however, there were not enough students to have the richness of student voice in my research.

Another potential limitation is the possibility that participants might leave the study. Although one participant in this study considered leaving due to feeling overwhelmed by all that was happening in our world particularly with the murder of George Floyd Jr. which occurred just prior to this study, she did not.

A huge limitation that did occur was not having enough time to spend within both classrooms as well as for preparing and teaching lessons. During this research, much of the process was embedded within my existing duties as a literacy coach, I was still responsible for working with other teachers and attending meetings, which kept me away from my time in the participants' classrooms. However, the time I had with the participants was key in helping address my research questions as I worked to understand how culturally relevant pedagogy could become foundational to the literacy coach's position.

Having two classrooms and wanting to give each class equal amounts of my time while attending to other teachers and aspects of my job was complicated. Thus, other limitations included those that shifted the timeline of the research: seen and unforeseen issues such as COVID, virtual or face-to-face learning, teachers and researcher absences, and student teachers taking over classrooms (they both had student teachers during the time of research, but only one student teacher participated in this study).

Research-to-Dissertation Timeline

The start of research to the end of data collection was ten months including four and a half months of intense time working alongside teachers and collecting data. Table 3.4 indicates the timeframe of this research from the initiation of the study to the dissertation defense.

Table 3.4 Research Timeline

Dates	Research Experiences
August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sent consent forms to all that I wanted as participants: teachers, principal, district personnel, students, and parents (See Appendix A)
September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of consent forms

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Initial interviews: Jones, Pearson, Dr. Marzetti, James (See Appendix C) ● Member checking
October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Another round of consent forms sent to students and parents (See Appendix A) ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session
November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing with Jones' initial interview
December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initial Small Group Session
February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Small Group Sessions ● Bryant (Student Teacher) joined sessions ● Coaching Cycles (Phase 1)
March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Small Group Sessions ● Coaching Cycles (Phase 2) ● Mid-point Interview: Jones and Pearson
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Small Group Sessions ● Coaching Cycles (Phase 3) ● Interview with Bryant (See Appendix C) ● Member checking
May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Final Small Group Sessions ● Coaching Cycles (Phases 1,2, 3)
June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Final Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Cohort Session ● Final Interviews: Jones and Pearson (See Appendix C)
August-December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data Analysis ● Member Checking
January 2022-October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing the dissertation ● Final Member Checking
October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dissertation Defense

Conclusion to Chapter Three

This chapter opened with an explanation of the methodological stances that guided my research which were critical race theory, participatory action research, and critical autoethnography. Through the intersection of these theories and methodologies, I connected Critical Race and BlackCrit theories directly to my methodological plan. I then detailed the setting, participants, my process for data collection, coding, and analysis.

For the remainder of the dissertation, I will explain the findings that were gathered from all participants within the study and implications for using findings to affect change. Chapter Four provides context for those findings by describing the district-required reading program, assessments, and standards for kindergarten and first grade as well as culturally relevant lessons that were developed and implemented by myself and the two primary participants. Chapter Five describes specific findings about the barriers and support that the teachers and I encountered. Chapter Six describes my growth. Chapter Seven builds from Chapters Four, Five, and Six to provide implications for literacy coaching and for further research.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE REBIRTH OF CURRICULUM: EXISTING CURRICULAR MANDATES
AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT UNITS TAUGHT IN THIS STUDY

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy

-bell hooks, (1994)

Literacy coaches are charged to support teachers so that they can design instruction that will reach *all* of their students so that, in return, their students will have academic success. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is an approach designed to address the education of students most failed by our educational system, Black students. However, culturally relevant teaching is rarely foundational to the training provided for literacy coaches and, therefore, their abilities to support teachers in supporting Black students perpetuating systems in which all students do not benefit equitably (Nations Report Card, 2019). Although the role of a literacy coach as described by the International Literacy Association (ILA) (2004), Deussen et al. (2007), Mraz et al. (2009), and Fountas and Pinnell (2018), has been developed around producing academic success for students, there is still a huge disconnect between a literacy coach's role and the academic success of Black students.

My research question asked: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* While

subsequent chapters focus on barriers and support (Chapter Five) and my own growth (Chapter Six) experienced in my work to make culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach, I offer this chapter to provide curricular context for findings presented in those chapters.

This chapter is organized by first describing the district English Language Arts (ELA) requirements for kindergarten and first grade. I provide this information because it is important for readers to understand a little bit about the programs and mandates within which the teachers and I were required to work. Then, I will discuss the primary culturally relevant lessons and units developed and taught by the teacher-participants and supported through my literacy coaching role during this study. Sharing these lessons and units provides windows into how the teachers were able to use knowledge from the school's professional development to work within and beyond mandates and required programs to be able to teach in culturally relevant ways. This information then lays the groundwork for Chapters Five and Six which unpack specific findings about the barriers and support (Chapter Five) encountered in the process of my work to support the teachers' development and implementation of culturally relevant practices and my own growth (Chapter Six) as I learned about making culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my role as literacy coach.

Reading Instruction Requirements of the District and School

Reading instruction within the district in which the research was conducted consisted of three formats of requirements. One reading instruction requirement was to use the South Carolina (SC) English Language Arts (ELA) standards; the second reading

requirement was for teachers in K-2nd grade to use the district's required reading curriculum, Open Court Reading (2016); and the third requirement was teaching through the district's Balanced Literacy Model (see Appendix E).

Standards

In 2015, South Carolina released their new state standards and, using these standards, teachers are responsible for teaching the ELA content to their students in grades K-12th. From the content that is taught students are graded according to their understanding of the lessons through teacher made assessments or computer-generated assessments that assess students' mastery of the standards. From these assessments students in our district then receive letter grades that reflect an A, B, C, D, or F. This is, however, different for our students in kindergarten and first grade because they are not given a traditional letter grade for their work, but received a M for mastery, a P for progressing, and a N for not met. These letters (M, P, N) determine how successfully students met their grade level standards and is demonstrated on their standard-based report card.

Open Court Reading

The second requirement is to teach from the district's mandated ELA reading curriculum, Open Court Reading (Open Court Reading, 2016). Open Court Reading (OCR) is described as a researched phonic-based K-3 curriculum that has three component areas of focus: Foundational Skills, Reading and Responding, and Language Arts (Blueprints, 2022). Within the district, only teachers in grades K-2nd in all of the elementary schools and one center (smaller setting for traditional elementary schools) are required to teach using OCR which emphasizes teaching foundational skills and reading

and responding sections daily according to specified amounts of time. In these sections, teachers are expected to work with students to build phonemic and phonics skills and fluency using decodable texts often disconnected from the children's funds of knowledge. Open Court Reading (Open Court Reading, 2016) was promoted as a research-based program (although it is clearly not grounded in the Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit that grounded the work I did) that provides scripted lessons for teachers to use in systematic and explicit lessons on reading, language arts and writing (Open Court Reading, 2016). Although OCR professes to systematically and explicitly teaches those three components, the district only requires teachers to teach the reading component that consists of phonics and comprehension strategies.

Foundational Skills

In kindergarten and first grade each unit of OCR consists of three weeks with each unit. At least two letters or letter patterns are focused on during the week with a review of all letters or patterns taught on the fifth day. During this time students and teachers do work that consists of introductions or reviews of phonological awareness skills. Each day there is an aspect of a phonological awareness skill but completing a warm up and decodable books are not completed daily. When warm ups are a part of the lesson, they do not follow a particular skill for the week. This means that the warm up on day one may consist of rhyming, but the next warm up within the week could consist of a letter game that does not have a rhyming focus. The decodable books provided with the program coincide with the letters or letter patterns taught in the phonological awareness section. There are many skills that are expected to be reviewed or taught each day of the

week. Table 4.1 shows how one day of the foundational skill section looks when all parts (warm up, phonological awareness, and decodable books) are taught in a single day.

Table 4.1 One Day’s Instruction of Open Court Reading’s Foundational Skills Layout

Lesson Sections	Skill
Warm Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Short vowel review ● I Spy Game
Phonological Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phonemic Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listening for short and long vowel sounds - Phoneme segmentation of individual sounds ● Phonics and Decoding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing sounds spelled with a different pattern - Creating words using different patterns - Blending - Talking about the sentences - Developing oral language skills - Guided Practice - Dictation and spelling
Decodable Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading a decodable book that has the spelling patterns that were reviewed in the lesson

Reading and Responding

The reading and responding section of OCR focuses on building background knowledge, thinking about text, developing vocabulary, and digging deeper to understand the text. There are different stories that are covered within the reading and responding section of OCR and are sometimes covered over multiple days within the same week. The only texts that are not read every day for multiple days are poetry texts which are just read aloud by the teacher on Day One. However, for texts that are read for multiple days within the same week, teachers and students practice many reading strategies to help build comprehension such as visualizing, making inferences, and summarizing. An example of what one day of reading response instruction looks like is seen in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 One Day's Instruction of Open Court Reading's Reading Response Layout

Lesson Sections	Skill
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Giving background information on the topic ● Going over the genre ● Asking an essential question
Preview the Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Browse the text ● Teacher sets the purpose of the text ● Teacher goes over the big idea of the text
Read the Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher and students read the text ● Go over a comprehension strategy (provided by OCR)
Monitor Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informally monitor the students' understanding of the text
Comprehension Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making predictions (provided by OCR) ● Knowing that spaces are between words (provided by OCR)
Discuss the Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion starter (provided by OCR) ● Essential Question (provided by OCR) ● Genre Review (provided by OCR)
Develop Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● OCR vocabulary routine ● Lesson on words and definitions

Language Arts

The language arts section of OCR looks at the writing process, but the district does not use it for writing instruction because a separate writing curriculum (Calkins, 2013) is mandated for grades K-5th. However, we are asked to use the section that focuses on grammar. Within OCR's Language Arts section there is not a grammar focus for each day of the week. An example of how the language section looks on a day that has the grammar component is seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 One Day's Instruction of Open Court Reading's Language Arts Layout

Lesson Sections	Lesson Procedures
Writing a Narrative: Editing and Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instruction ● Guided practice ● Apply

Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics: Action Verbs and Helping Verbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instruction ● Guided practice ● Apply
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All three components, Foundational Skills, Reading Response, and Language Arts, of OCR are expected to be taught each day within the design of the program. Each of the components also has opportunities to progress monitor students to see how well they are meeting the skills. Although progress monitoring can help teachers know how well their students have met a skill, it is important to note that all skills covered in OCR do not cover all of our South Carolina standards. Therefore, requiring teachers to add to the instruction so that students are learning our required South Carolina standards.

Balanced Literacy Model and AVID

The third reading requirement of the district was the Balanced Literacy Model (see Appendix E). The district's English Language Arts (ELA) framework has six focused components as outlined in the Balanced Literacy Model, according to K12Reader (2018) and Perfection Learning (2019). This model includes these components everyday: Interactive Read Alouds, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Foundational Skills/Word Study, Writing, and Independent Reading. Teachers are expected to teach these six parts of Balanced Literacy approach every day. Interactive Reading consists of reading a book and stopping to pose standard provoking questions that will get students involved in talking about the book. Shared Reading involves teachers using a grade level text that all students have access to see and read and can engage in discussions about the text. Word Study or Phonics (as it is called in the younger grades in the district) works with the development of sound-symbol relationships. Independent Reading is when students read a book of their choice, preferably on their reading level and the teacher conferences with

a few students each day about their reading. Guided Reading is a time for teachers to work in small groups with their students on their instructional reading level to continue to foster reading skills. The writing focus of the district's Balanced Literacy Model comes from the Lucy Calkins' Units of Study (Calkins, 2013).

To go along with the Balanced Literacy Model, the schools and district also followed the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) approach within instructional practices that were required by the district. AVID focuses on preparing students for colleges and careers by “reinforcing academic behaviors and higher-level thinking at a young age” (AVID, 2020a, para 1). The AVID strategies used to teach students are Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading (WICOR) (AVID, 2016a; AVID, 2016b; Boyko et al., 2016; Drumright et al., 2016, HISD, n.d.).

District Designed Pacing Guides

The 2015 state standards, the Open Court Reading (2016) curriculum, and Balanced Literacy Model are three requirements that the district holds as a non-negotiable for its elementary schools. To assist with the flow of instruction, district Literacy Specialists and a few elementary teacher volunteers created the district's pacing guide based on these mandated programs as matched with the state's standards.

The pacing guide is intended to provide a guide for teachers to clarify: the order in which to teach the Open Court Reading Units aligned with state standards that should be covered in each unit, for each of the four nine-week periods of the school year. Each nine-week pacing guide includes an instructional plan that lists the number of weeks that the teachers should teach a particular OCR unit. The district's pacing guide also lists the

phonological and phonemic awareness skills, comprehension skills, grammar usages and mechanics, and inquiry skills that are covered within the OCR unit for those weeks.

School-Based Designed Pacing Guide

Although the district provided a pacing guide for its teachers, Mrs. Robinson, Griffin Elementary School's other literacy coach, and I designed a pacing guide that was only used at Griffin Elementary School. We decided to create a pacing guide for the teachers at Griffin Elementary that would provide a day-to-day instructional guide for teachers instead of using the 45-day pacing guide produced by the district. When designing the Griffin's pacing guide, we used the district's pacing guide to guarantee that we would cover the same units and skills that were required by the district.

In creating Griffin's pacing guide, we also kept in mind that we needed to cover the same units of study that the district required from required commercial programs. For example, if the district was covering OCR's Unit One for the first three weeks of school, we also had to cover unit one for the first three weeks of school and not change the order of the units. Some teachers asked if they could change around the units in order to teach concepts required by state and district standards and OCR at the same time. For example, the first grade Open Court Reading unit on plants was not scheduled to be taught when the district's science pacing guide covered plants and the teachers wanted to make the switch so that better connections could be made for student learning. However, the teachers were told that they could not make this change and they were to follow the pacing as it was. Hence, this required Mrs. Robinson and I to create the pacing as such, with no changes to the units of instruction.

Foundational Skills

When creating the foundational skills section of the pacing guide we listed the unit, the lesson, and the day that was covered under the specific day of the week. So, if the focus for the week was Unit 9, Lesson 3, Day 2, it would be labeled under the day of the week the lesson is to be taught. An example of this can be seen in Figure 4.1.

Monday:

Unit 9, Lesson 3, Day 1

Warm Up

- Phoneme Substitution

Phonemic Awareness

- Phoneme Deletion: Initial Sounds

Alphabetic Principle

- Reviewing the Short and Long Sounds of Aa
- Listening for /a/ and Long /a/
- Building and Reading Words

Tuesday:

Unit 9, Lesson 3, Day 2

Warm Up

- Phoneme Blending: Initial Sounds

Phonemic Awareness

- Phoneme Deletion: Initial Sounds

Alphabetic Principle

- Reviewing the Short and Long Sounds of Ii
- Listening for /i/ and Long /i/
- Building and Reading Words

Wednesday:

Unit 9, Lesson 3, Day 3

Warm Up

- Syllable Segmentation

Phonemic Awareness

- Phoneme Deletion: Initial Sounds

Alphabetic Principle

- Reviewing the Short and Long Sounds of Oo
- Listening for /o/ and Long /o/
- Building and Reading Words

Figure 4.1 Example of Griffin’s Kindergarten’s Pacing Guide for Foundational Skills

Reading and Responding

We followed a similar pattern for the reading response component of Open Court Reading (OCR). The reading response component was completed during the shared reading time of our balanced literacy block. The district’s guide and OCR suggested multiple stories to read within the week. Mrs. Robinson and I decided to have one of those stories as a required reading for the week so that the teachers could instruct through this story for the entire week. We decided on this because, in conversations with our teachers, they were expressing the difficulty that they were having with getting the stories read in two or three days within the amount of time that they had for Shared Reading, which was about 15 minutes. We could only allot 15 minutes for shared reading because of the timing breakdown of all subject areas provided by the district: 120 minutes for the entire ELA block which consisted of all six parts of the district’s Balanced Literacy Model: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Word Study, Independent Reading, Guided Reading, and Writing.

Mrs. Robinson and I looked at the genres of the stories listed in the week’s lesson but did not look for cultural diversity in the texts due to the district’s requirements of completing the reading response section of the Open Court Reading curriculum. We, however, told teachers they could choose their own interactive read aloud (not a part of OCR) and I encouraged teachers to use culturally diverse texts. When creating the pacing

for the reading response section, we had a goal of providing different genres for the students to engage with, which means if we wrote in the pacing for teachers to study a fantasy story the week prior and the following week's choices were fantasy or historical fiction, we would have the historical fiction story as the focus story of the week. We also paid close attention to South Carolina standards and made sure that our students were being taught the specific state's standards. Since OCR was not based on South Carolina standards there were a lot of discrepancies between OCR and standards, and we were charged to ensure that instruction followed state standards.

When thinking of how we wanted Shared Reading to look and how to best address the standards, we decided to have one main strategy or skill from our state's standards to intensely focus on and teach for the week. The teachers, however, exposed students to the other strategies and skills recommended by OCR. Mrs. Robinson and I referred to them as exposure strategies/skills which we listed in the pacing guide as "other strategies/skills." We wanted the teachers to know that OCR skills were good to teach, but that their primary consideration should be teaching to the state's standards. We decided to bring more of a focus to the state standards and provide intense instruction using these standards because the students were tested on these standards and skills at the end of each nine-weeks and were expected to show proficiency in order to be considered academically successful. Figure 4.2 shows how the pacing guide was set up for the reading response component of Open Court Reading.

Standards:

Standard 5: Determine meaning and develop logical interpretations by making predictions, inferring, drawing conclusions, analyzing, synthesizing, providing evidence, and investigating multiple interpretations.

5.1 With guidance and support, ask and answer who, what, when, where, why, and how questions about a text; refer to key details to make inferences and draw conclusions in texts heard or read.

5.2 With guidance and support, ask and answer questions to make predictions using prior knowledge, pictures, illustrations, title, and information about the author and illustrator.

Instruction:

Unit 9, Lesson 3, Day 3-4

Rules of the Wild an Unruly Book of Manners

- Building Background
- Vocabulary
- Picture Walk

Focus Strategy/Skill

- Ask and Answer Questions

Other Strategies and Skills

- Making Connections
- Classify and Categorize
- Compare and Contrast

Figure 4.2 Example of Griffin's Kindergarten's Pacing Guide for Reading Response

Culturally Relevant Lessons in Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson's Classrooms

Passionately committed to culturally relevant teaching, our principal Dr. Marzetti, encouraged teachers to engage with the culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) PD provided by Dr. Clark for PreK-Grade Two teachers and Dr. Stewart for teachers in Grade Three-Grade Five. Initially, the PD was required for all teachers at our school but after the second year, Dr. Clark, Dr. Stewart, and Dr. Marzetti decided that it would be offered only to teachers who self-selected into it. This was to provide the PD effort for teachers who chose to engage with it with the rationale that more would be accomplished with teachers who were seriously committed to CRP.

Being a part of this learning opportunity, at the time of the study, teachers in grades PreK-2nd met every third Monday of the month for an hour and a half and Dr.

Clark also met with teachers in grade level groups and individually to support specific practices. During the monthly sessions, participants engaged with Dr. Clark by reading literature (see Appendix D) and discussing lessons they might be teaching using a CRP approach. Some topics included teaching about people hidden from typical curriculum, highlighting histories, heritage, communities, languages, and the greatness in those often left out of curricula, the importance of name stories, honoring African American Language (AAL), and posing and responding to critical consciousness issues. Emphasis was on how curriculum could be grounded in Ladson-Billings' three components of CRP: developing students' critical consciousness, cultural competence, and achievement (see more complete definitions and history of CRP in Chapters One and Two) with attention to how to do this while addressing state, district, and school mandates.

As described in Chapter Three, I conducted this research with two of the teachers I worked with at Griffin Elementary School, Mrs. Jones (kindergarten) and Ms. Pearson (first grade). Both teachers were enthusiastic about CRP and conscientious participants in Dr. Clark's PD. For this study, I kept the three components of CRP (academic success, culturally competence, and critical consciousness) at the forefront of my work with them. In this section, I describe the culturally relevant units and lessons that the teachers taught during the year of this study that I was involved in supporting, and that represent their work toward understanding and building a culturally relevant classroom. This description of the units they developed (often with their colleagues) provides context and in-depth information about their teaching that will help readers understand and appreciate the findings from this study in chapters five and six.

Grounded in the components of CRP, here I provide a look at classroom practices as we sought to (a) promote academic success for students by aligning purposeful, meaningful contexts and materials with the state standards, the OCR program and a Balanced Literacy Model as outlined by the district; (b) develop students' cultural competence by teaching about the brilliance of African contributions to the world's knowledge in kindergarten and teaching a broadened view of art and artists as well as a critical perspective on patriotic symbols and histories in first grade; and (c) develop students' critical consciousness by supporting teachers in creating opportunities for students' voices to be heard around unjust issues, as seen in kindergarten's learning about civil rights through a study based on the singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock and, during a study of Africa, learning to question stereotypes about animals and Africa; and the first grade's focus on artists left out of the world's most famous art museums and patriotic symbols left out of the Open Court unit.

Mrs. Jones' Kindergarten Classroom: Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit

Mrs. Jones and the kindergarten team developed a six-week unit based on the African American women's A Cappella singing group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. This meant deviating from the topics and materials required by the Open Court reading program, but they did so with the assurance of the school's principal, Dr. Marzetti, who said that she supported them in trying a unit that addressed the SC ELA standards and skills required by Open Court curriculum but using culturally relevant materials and topics. With this opportunity they decided that they wanted to teach reading skills through a Unit on Sweet Honey in the Rock. Two out of five members of the kindergarten team were introduced to Sweet Honey in the Rock, while attending a virtual

session offered by Dr. Gloria Boutte through her Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAAS) at the local state university.

In preparation for the unit, the kindergarten team met with Dr. Clark and brainstormed topics that could be explored using the music of Sweet Honey in the Rock as a foundation for mini units. This grew out of a range of suggestions Dr. Clark brought to the group. As a result, the kindergarten team decided to focus on three two-week unit topics: Introduction to Sweet Honey in the Rock, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Africa; and Sweet Honey and the Rock and Racial Justice. Once the units were decided on, Dr. Clark created PowerPoints with some resources, from which the kindergarten team might draw from and use as a place to begin their planning and implementation of the units. Included in Dr. Clark's resources was attention to required skills using the school's pacing guide that Ms. Robinson and I created as well as the 4th Nine Weeks' kindergarten standards-based assessment (see excerpt of assessment in Figure 4.3) to support the teachers' abilities to address district requirements outlined in the previous section.

Having this pacing guide and the 4th nine weeks' kindergarten assessment provided Dr. Clark with all district requirements and a clear understanding of what was expected for students to show academic success according to the district's standards. She developed a chart the teachers could use to guarantee that all three mini-units followed the skills within Open Court Reading, the state's standards, as well as the district's Balanced Literacy Model (see one unit in Figure 4.4). The kindergarten teachers used the chart, PowerPoints, and other resources as a beginning point from which they did further research and found additional resources to use in developing their units. The teaching of Sweet Honey in the Rock through three mini-units took place from April to May of 2021.

Topics	Category	Category	Category	Category	Category
Letters	Recognizing and naming upper and lowercase letters	Writing upper and lowercase letters	Vowels		
Phonics & Phonemic Awareness	Isolate and pronounce initial, medial, and final sounds	Produce one-to-one letter sounds	Rhyming	Count, pronounce, blend, segment syllables	
Reading	Understanding the organization and basic features of print	Ask and answer questions about key details of a text	Identify who is telling the story (narrator or characters)	Retelling beginning, middle, and end of a story	Describe characters, setting, and events
Writing	Capitalization	Punctuation	Spelling	Write arguments to support claims	
Grammar	Nouns (singular & plural)	Interrogatives	Verbs	Adjectives	Prepositional Phrases
Communication	Explore and create meaning through play, storytelling, conversation & drama				
Inquiry	Form relevant questions based on interest or need				

Figure 4.3 Kindergarten 4th Nine Weeks' Assessment Categories


WEEK ONE - WEEK OF APRIL 12 TH ADDRESSING PACING GUIDE (INTRO SWEET HONEY)						
DAY CRP TOPICS	READ ALOUDS Sweet Honey books, trade books	SHARED READING WORD STUDY Daily: Name letters, Letters-sounds high frequency words of the week		WRITING WORKSHOP (persuasive/opinion)	SOC. STUDIES SCIENCE	INDEPENDENT READING
MONDAY Introducing SwH. - First song - Who are they? - Origins - Why are they called SwH? - Rock/honey-what they mean to us as a family	Texts: Malayna's Jubilee Meet Sweet Honey Song: This Little Light of Mine	Text: (book introducing SwH; books w/songs) Who, what when where, why and how questions Refer to details to make inferences Draw conclusions in texts heard or read	Phoneme deletion (initial sounds) Short & long "a" Building & rdg words	CRP WRITING TOPIC: <u>HONEY I LOVE: WHAT I LOVE AND WHY I LOVE IT</u> Write, draw, or dictate to state topic and communicate opinion. (could start as whole class story; guided copying; also utilize interactive writing)	Maps (incorporate with CRP unit) What is a map? Animals	<i>Honey I Love</i>  <i>Meet Sweet Honey</i> <i>This Little Light of Mine</i> And other CRP books Understand plot and setting Use pictures to confirm or self-correct
TUESDAY Introducing SwH: Songs & books about identity – the importance of YOU	Texts: Meet sweet Honey Song: This Little Light of Mine	Read w/expression. Make connections. Make predictions using prior knowledge, pictures, illustrations, title, info about author	Phoneme: - Substitution - Deletion (initial sounds) Short & long "a" Short & long "I" Building & rdg words	Minilesson: adding details Plan, revise, and edit to strengthen writing.		
WEDNESDAY Introducing SwH Songs & books about identity	Texts: Meet Sweet Honey Song: This Little Light	Teach chunks: ash, ell & review word families	Syllable segmentation Short & long "o" Building & rdg words	Minilesson: spelling high frequency words. Edit and revise		
THURSDAY (asyn) Introducing SwH	Texts: Take home books	Review high frequency words	Short & long "u" Building & rdg words	Minilesson: illustrations Add illustration		
FRIDAY (asyn) SwH Review	Texts:					

Figure 4.4 Dr. Clark's chart Aligning the School's Day-to-Day Pacing Guide with Kindergarten's Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit

In Chapter Five I describe findings related to how, in the role of literacy coach, I supported Mrs. Jones as she developed and worked through these mini-units within her classroom.

Within the overall Sweet Honey in the Rock unit, Mrs. Jones developed lessons focused on: (a) A Capella and its origins in Africa, (b) American Sign Language based on the Sweet Honey in the Rock's ASL interpreter, (c) the brilliance of Africa by drawing on units she and other kindergarten teachers had created the previous summer during PD with Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart, and (d) racial justice. Mrs. Jones engaged students in these studies while addressing the three components of culturally relevant teaching *and* the district's pacing guide requirements. For example, while teaching about the brilliance and histories of Africa and African American rights and resilience through Sweet Honey in the Rock songs such as "This Little Light of Mine" (Sweet Honey in the Rock, 2000, track 5) and "Everybody Ought to Know" (Sweet Honey in the Rock, 1989, track 8), the students were developing cultural competence and a critical consciousness while simultaneously learning skills such as high frequency words and recognizing word patterns and letter-sound relationships on which students are evaluated on at the end of each nine weeks. Ms. Jones used the songs as Shared Reading texts and met the district's requirements and addressed our pacing guide.

A Capella and Isicathamiya

One of the ways students developed cultural competence and a critical consciousness was through the learning of Sweet Honey in the Rock's form of singing called A Capella. They learned that it was widely thought that A Capella originated in Italy, but it actually originated in South Africa and was developed by the Zulu people as

a concept called Isicathamiya. In this lesson, Mrs. Jones reminded her students who Sweet Honey in the Rock were from their introduction lesson about the group. She then read a book that was created from resources provided by Dr. Clark which the kindergarten team added and added to by the kindergarten team. The book was about Sweet Honey in the Rock's music and the story of A Capella and Isicathamiya in particular. Mrs. Jones read and stopped to discuss what was on the pages. She talked to them about how some musicians use instruments to make their music and how Sweet Honey in the Rock had a different instrument, their voices. She continued with the book and taught them about the vocabulary word A Capella and how Sweet Honey in the Rock's sound used A Capella as one of their signature sounds.

To teach them about A Capella, she dispelled the notion that A Capella originated in Italy. To do this she used the lenses of the three components of culturally relevant pedagogy and taught the students academically, culturally, and critically. Culturally she taught them about the continent of Africa and how people often call it a country instead of a continent and that the continent has 55 countries. She built their critical consciousness by making them aware that, although they may hear that A Capella originated in Italy, that this was not true and supported her claim with information that the Zulu people of South Africa introduced the style of singing without instruments which they called Isicathamiya.

Academically Mrs. Jones continued to prepare her students for academic success by intentionally adding the 4th nine weeks reading skills that were in the chart created by Dr. Clark based on our school's pacing guide and the kindergarten assessment rubric. In doing this she helped her students thrive in reading by using the PowerPoint/book about

Isicathamiya as shared reading material. After teaching the children about Africa and Isicathamiya, Mrs. Jones focused on using the text to reinforce words that students had learned throughout the year and also to teach new high frequency words. Some examples of how Mrs. Jones used a focus on Isicathamiya to help her students with academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness can be seen in Figure 4.5.

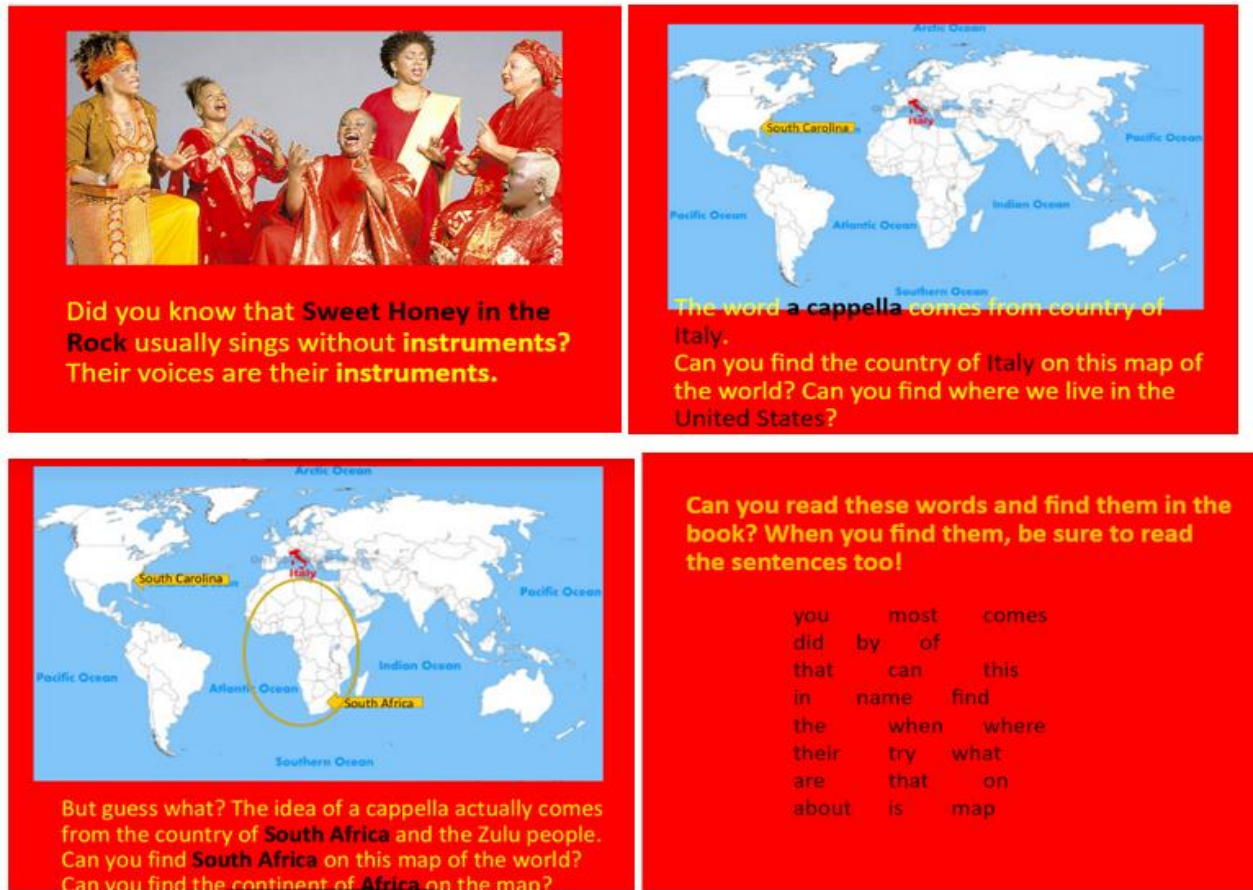


Figure 4.5 Shared Reading Book about Sweet Honey in the Rock and A Capella

American Sign Language

Mrs. Jones also provided academic success for her students within this unit by introducing high frequency or sight words through American Sign Language (ASL), a language that is expressed through movements of the hands and faces (NIH, 2021). Mrs. Jones chose to teach high frequency words through ASL because one of the Sweet Honey

in the Rock members, Shirley Childress Saxton, was an American Sign Language interpreter for the group. For each song performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock, Shirley Childress Saxton would perform the songs in ASL for all to enjoy their music.

Mrs. Jones assisted in her students' academic success of learning high frequency and sight words by first introducing Shirley Childress Saxton and showing them a video of her signing while Sweet Honey in the Rock sang. Then she talked about sign language as an important language and used sign language to help her students learn their own required high frequency words, giving them another language and movements to help the students learn the words. Her students signed and spelled their high frequency and sight words like Shirley Childress Saxton. An example of the signing videos used by Ms. Jones are shown in Figure 4.6. It is important to note that one of the ways Mrs. Jones extended her own knowledge through this experience was being introduced to the existence of Black American Sign Language as well as supporting her recognition of how the video lessons were primarily of White children signing so that she could grow in her ability to notice the dominance of Whiteness and seek alternative resources.



Figure 4.6 Some High Frequency and Sight Words Taught Through ASL

Africa

In developing students' cultural competence, academic achievement, and critical consciousness, the kindergarten teachers also drew from Sweet Honey in the Rock's African songs to focus on African histories and how music originated in Africa. The kindergarten team used some of the work that they created during the previous summer's professional development when the teachers and I each chose a topic to research and present related to African contributions to the world's knowledge. This included topics such as art, music, medicine, astronomy, and other contributions to our daily lives that originated on the continent of Africa, knowledge often left out of the White dominant curriculum. We included the development of students' critical consciousness by preparing to teach about how people of Africa were pioneers in the development of techniques, scientific and governmental processes, mathematics, and language, and talking with children about how these contributions not often taught in schools and often claimed by Europeans as their own.

One of the ways that the kindergarten team used some of the work that was created over the summer to give students more cultural and critical awareness about how many of our American customs originated in Africa, was to focus on music, a natural outgrowth of the larger study of Sweet Honey in the Rock. This focus included a look at drums, masks, ceremonial traditions like jumping the broom at weddings, and call and response to name a few. The teachers made connections to how they experience those and other contributions from Africa in their daily lives personally or through American culture. For example, when teaching their students about Sweet Honey in the Rock's Isicathamiya sound, they also brought in other forms of music and used the work I

created over the summer, *Africa Gave Us Beautiful Drums*, to inform students of the contribution of drums from the continent of Africa (Figure 4.7). While using this PowerPoint (which was created as if the slides were pages in a children's book), Mrs. Jones continued to teach the required skills by using the text to intentionally review and introduce high frequency words, more challenging vocabulary, and other pacing guide skills. Some of the other min-unit topics used by Mrs. Jones from the Griffin teachers' summer PD were: Ancient Egyptians: Hand Held Fans, The Brilliance of Africa: Princess Yennenga YENNENGA, and The Brilliance of Africa: Call and Response.



Figure 4.7 Parts of a Book Created During Summer Professional Development

Racial Justice

The development of achievement, cultural competence and critical consciousness was also seen through teaching about Sweet Honey in the Rock's focus on racial justice.

During this unit Mrs. Jones introduced Sweet Honey in the Rock's song, "This Little

Light of Mine” (Sweet Honey in the Rock, 2000, track 5) and taught her students about Fannie Lou Hamer, an activist who fought against the inequalities of voting rights for Black people. At the end of the school year, her kindergarten class performed “This Little Light of Mine” (Sweet Honey in the Rock, 2000, track 5) and shared information that they learned about Fannie Lou Hamer for their promotion ceremony. It was during this time that Mrs. Jones and the kindergarten team discussed with their classes how people protested against the injustices experienced by others. They also talked about the protests that were happening at that time due to the racial violence and the murders of Black people, George Floyd, Jr., Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery to name some of many.

In conjunction with teaching her class about Fannie Lou Hamer’s fight against injustices and the present-day fight against injustices, Ms. Jones also read the picture books, *Black is a Rainbow Color* (Joy & Holmes, 2020) and *Black Magic* (Johnson & Christie, 2000) to discuss negative stereotypes about Blackness. Mrs. Jones addressed how the color Black has been viewed negatively as bad and ugly, but through these book selections they discussed how the color Black is good and beautiful. From these discussions, Ms. Jones’ class decided to write a book to express the beauty of Blackness. Within their book they drew something that they liked that was Black and wrote using the phrase “Black is beautiful like _____.” Through their writing they were able to see how Blackness is a part of everyday things in life that are great. Some of the students’ writings are seen in Figure 4.8. After completing their written pieces, Mrs. Jones’ students also created a powerful video where they repeated the phrase “Black is beautiful.” They spoke these words in their language of choice, which were African American Language (AAL), Spanish, and Standardized English.

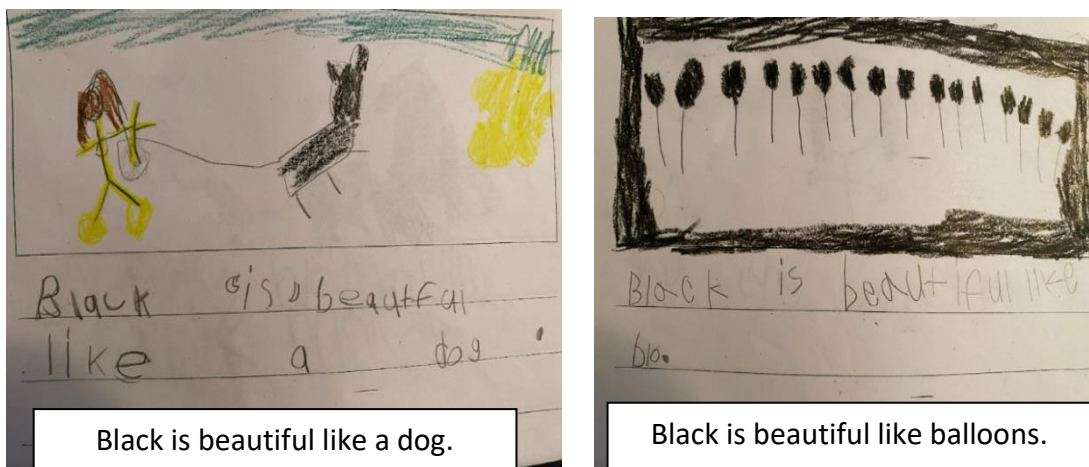


Figure 4.8 Students' Writings from Their *Black is Beautiful* Book

Sweet Honey in the Rock, in Sum

From their Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit, Mrs. Jones' students were able to develop all three of the CRP components. They gained overall academic success because they were learning high frequency words through signing and reading as well as writing. They developed a cultural competence as they learned about the contributions of Africa as well as learning about a community of citizens who use ASL as their way of communicating. They also developed their critical consciousness as they learned about the absence of A Capella originating in South Africa, how injustices are around us, but we can do something about it like Fannie Lou Hamer, and that being Black is beautiful. Specific findings around barriers and support experienced with this work are provided in Chapter Five.

African Animal Study, Maps, and Dispelling Stereotypes

As a literacy coach, I acknowledge that literacy is in everything we do and from that acknowledgement Mrs. Jones and I were able to move across content areas using our culturally relevant lens in social studies. We worked together on the kindergarten Social Studies unit about maps. Their Social Studies standards focused on students identifying

locations of specific items on a map; and with their Social Studies standards in mind and in hand, we created a culturally relevant book that was inspired by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle (1967) book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Before we began our work together on this book, I listened to Mrs. Jones' ideas and her plan to do something with a book that she had begun writing over the summer about animals on land, in the air, and in the water of Africa. When I asked Mrs. Jones why she had chosen to model her book after *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* she said:

When preparing interactive books about the brilliance from Africa, I wanted to create one that would be appropriate and on my scholars'[name used for students by Mrs. Jones] level to read successfully. Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle's book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* came to mind. I like how it includes simple repetitive language and high frequency words and so I decided to do a twist on the book using animals from Africa! (Coaching Cycle Conversation)

Going with her inspiration and creating a book with a culturally relevant lens we began to develop a version of her previously made book to address academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. We decided to divide her text into several books with the first focusing on land animals in Africa. Our instructional text was titled *Wildebeest, Wildebeest, What Do You See?* A celebration of land animals found in Africa also building on a predictable text structure that the students knew and loved in Carle's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*.

We were aware of the stereotypes of associating safaris and wild animals with Africa to the neglect of the rich histories and contributions of African peoples across the centuries, and we intentionally planned for Mrs. Jones to talk with her students about this

being a stereotype and that Africa is about much more than wild animals and, that areas inhabited with animals like those sought on safaris only represent a small percentage of the continent. To address this, we planned for Mrs. Jones to remind them of what they had learned about Africa and African peoples' contributions to the world's knowledge during their English Language Arts (ELA) Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit. Second, we made sure that we broadened the study of African animals beyond those that are traditionally associated with Africa, like elephants, zebras, and giraffes. We introduced the idea of stereotypical animals that are often associated with Africa at the beginning of the lesson. Our PowerPoint slide that initiated that conversation can be seen in Figure 4.9. And third, we did not just study animals but contextualized the lesson on an exploration of the continent of Africa geographically and its relation to North America in size and distance.



Figure 4.9 Page from the Book that Shows the Animals Often Associate with Africa

Through this unit, we were able to address a range of kindergarten social studies and ELA standards. Such as reading high frequency words (ELA standards) and identifying maps and their natural and cultural features, as well as being able to explain the purpose of a map (Social Studies standards). To teach them about maps we used a 15-page book that we created using the predictable text format from the book *Brown Bear*,

Brown Bear, What Do You see? (Martin & Carle, 1967). For this lesson we wanted the students to identify the map of Africa and its features. We had the students locate the African countries that each animal found in the book originated from and then color the location on the map.

Throughout the book, students followed the repetitive pattern of naming the animal on the page followed by “What do you see?,” which were their high frequency words. For example, on the page that has the wildebeest, it says, *Wildebeest, Wildebeest, What do you see?* The last sentence on each page says, *I see children looking at me.* Mrs. Jones and I added sidebars on each page to tell students about the region in which the animal was found on the continent of Africa, which brought in their Social Studies standard of explaining the purpose of a map as they used the sidebar to locate different countries in Africa. The page following the information about the animal informed students of the countries where certain animals were found on the continent of Africa. On the next to last page, the book responds to the animals’ repeated phrase of *I see children looking at me* when the words become *Children, Children, What did you see?* With this page we focused on the cultural competence aspect of CRP by representing children all over the world. We wanted to represent that no matter how traditions and cultures may be different, they all are capable of learning about one beautiful part of Africa. Examples of our book are shown in Figure 4.10.

Although developing a critical consciousness was addressed at the beginning of the lesson when Mrs. Jones told her students that a lot of people only associate Africa with safaris and certain animals that are usually thought of when thinking of Africa, we did not want this to be the way that we addressed critical consciousness, so we presented



Figure 4.10 Different Pages from the Book, Wildebeest, Wildebeest, What Do You See?

critical consciousness through an extended activity. Students were shown a clip from the movie *Madagascar 2: Escape to Africa* (Darnell & McGrath, 2008, 0:01-5:10) that represented poaching. In this clip, there was a flashback scene of Alex, the main character of the movie, when he was a baby. In this scene Baby Alex was captured by poachers and taken to the zoo in New York, where he lived in captivity and became a famous show lion for the zoo. After viewing that clip, Mrs. Jones explained what the poachers did. After this explanation she then posed the question to students, should animals from the wild should be captured and brought to zoos for us to look at them or if they should remain in their habitat and why. We chose this question because this is a discussion within the United States as whether or not we should have zoos and how some zoos do not take proper care of their animals (Kate, 2022; Sencer, 2016; Time for Kids, 2021). Figure 4.11 shows some of the responses from the students.

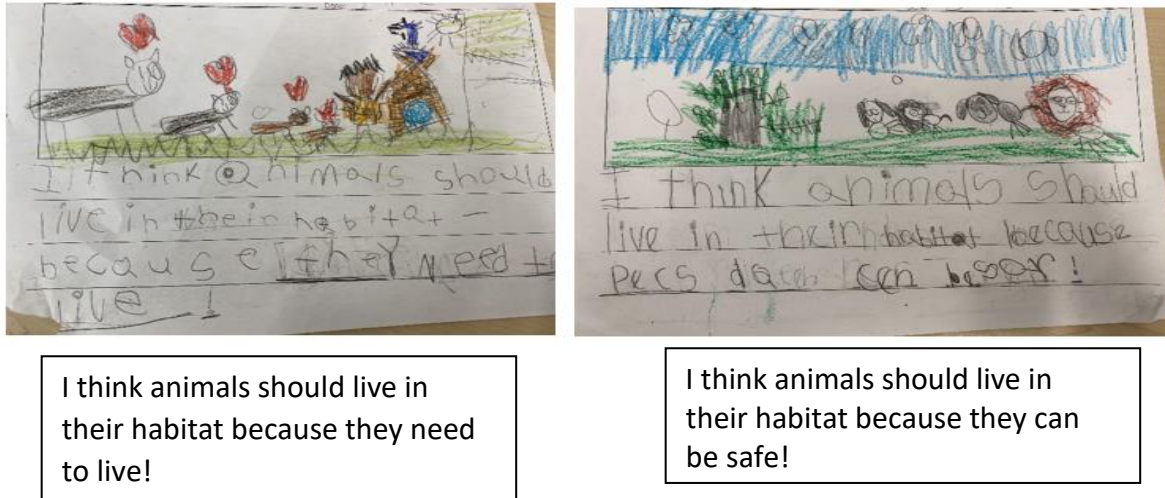


Figure 4.11 Students' Writing to Critical Consciousness Question Posed by Mrs. Jones

To help her students further understand the usage of maps Mrs. Jones showed her students a world map and helped them identify where we live by first looking at the continent of North America and then at our state of SC. Once they located us on a world map, she then showed them the continent of Africa and began to discuss with them the size of Africa in relation to North America, the distance between the two continents and how one would be able to travel to Africa from SC by boat or airplane.

After showing students the world map, she then showed a map of Africa and taught her students about 55 countries on the continent. She then worked alongside her children and referred to the maps while reading and coloring the countries the animals originated from. As they read and discussed the countries, Mrs. Jones used a document camera to help students locate the countries and then directed them in coloring designated countries in their own book (Figure 4.12). After we debriefed about the lesson Mrs. Jones and I felt that we could have gone further with discussing what region of the map were most of the animals within our book from, which was something that she and I noticed after the map was colored in. In retrospect, this would have been a good opportunity to

discuss with students the misrepresentation of Africa and how the continent of Africa is often shown smaller than other continents to project a dominance of other countries like North America.

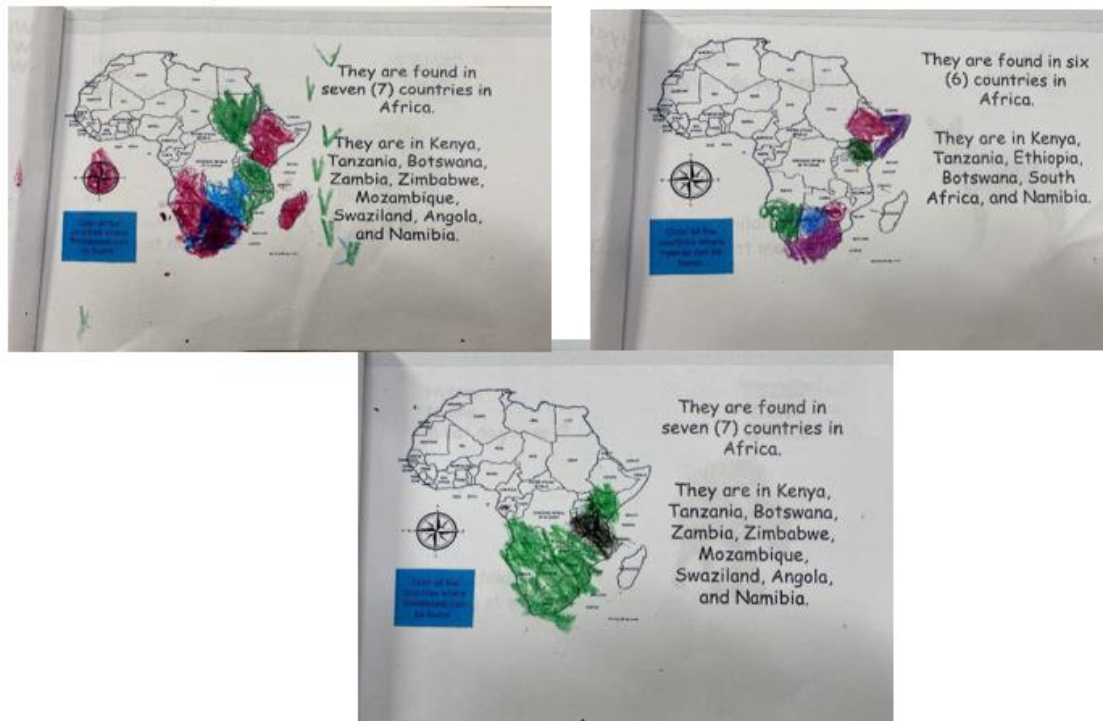


Figure 4.12 Scholars' work from the Wildebeest, Wildebeest, What Do You See? Book

In planning this Social Studies lesson, we kept the three components of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) at the forefront of our minds. We used repetitive/predictable text, text that features the same sentence patterns throughout the book with one or two changes added in the sentence, (Illinois Early Learning Project, n.d.; Jessica, n.d.) because it supports reading fluency, recognition of high frequency words, and understanding word patterns, all elements of literacy achievement in kindergarten (NCTE, n.d.), word patterns, and challenging words in a meaningful context and not in isolation. Although this was taught during the time of the day set aside for Social Studies,

it provided a cross connection for not only ELA and Social Studies, but it also met ELA standards which require students to use ELA skills in another content area and the ability to make the connection that what is learned in one area can be used in another area. This further addressed the CRP component of supporting academic success for the students as they read the book during read alouds, independent reading, and high frequency word and word pattern minilessons meeting ELA requirements as well as the state Social Studies standards.

Ms. Pearson's First Grade Classroom: Enriching Open Court Reading Through a Culturally Relevant Foundation

Ms. Pearson and some of her first-grade team members were also a part of the whole group culturally relevant PD through our school with Dr. Clark. Through those sessions and Dr. Clark's small group meetings with Ms. Pearson and two other first grade teachers, Ms. Pearson and her team decided to incorporate culturally relevant teaching as a way to address the Whiteness of the Open Court Reading (OCR) program. According to the school's pacing guide that was developed from the district's pacing guide, from March through May 2021, the first grades were required to teach three units from Open Court Reading (OCR) entitled: Red, White, and Blue; Stars and Stripes; and Art for All. During this time, Ms. Pearson and her student teacher, Mrs. Bryant, taught two of the three units together-Red, White, and Blue and Stars and Stripes. The last unit, Art for All, was taught by Ms. Pearson because Mrs. Bryant's student teaching term had come to an end.

To be an American

The first grade's pacing requirements from March-May 2021 required the first-

grade team to teach two units that taught students about being an American citizen, however, the units as presented in the Open Court Reading (OCR) program only looked at being an American from the Eurocentric perspective as is typical in all U.S. public education curricula (Au et al., 2016; Lysicott, 2017). Coming from a Eurocentric perspective, students were taught about customs and traditions that “citizens” do such as standing for and singing the National Anthem as well as reciting the pledge of allegiance. The unit did not take into account religious or cultural beliefs of other Americans or how other Americans might take a stand by kneeling or raising a fist against racial and ethnic inequalities.

Initiating the Red, White, and Blue Unit Ms. Pearson and her intern, Mrs. Bryant began teaching the lesson as it was originally intended to be taught according to the Open Court Reading Teachers’ Guide with a focus on American government. While they were in the middle of this unit, Mrs. Bryant joined one of our teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions, also attended by Dr. Clark. During that session, we discussed how the need to look critically at the messages that were being taught through the curriculum and messages that were not mentioned such as America not symbolizing freedom and citizenship for all. As a result, Ms. Pearson and Ms. Bryan took a more critical and cultural look at U.S. history and current events and made alterations and additions to be able to teach a culturally relevant version of “Red, White, and Blue.” Components of those additions are explained in the following sections.

Who is Sarah Mae Flemming?

Before our teacher debrief, support, and planning session, when we discussed the Red, White, and Blue OCR unit, Mrs. Bryant had planned two lessons that emphasized

American citizens from a narrow perspective as put forward in the OCR program. However, after working with me and Dr. Clark, she made the Open Court Reading lessons more culturally relevant. To do so, she talked with the students about what it meant to be a citizen and how as citizens we have rights and then introduced them to Sarah Mae Flemming. She explained to them that 17 months before Rosa Parks and the Bus Boycott that began in Montgomery, Alabama, Sarah Mae Flemming was a young Black woman in Columbia, South Carolina who was assaulted by the White bus driver after trying to get off the bus after the bus driver embarrassed her for sitting in the seat of a White woman who had just gotten off of the bus. Fleming sat in that seat because she thought it was in the Black people's section of the bus since there were two Black women seated to the left of her (Columbia City of Women, 2022).

In this lesson Mrs. Bryant was not disregarding the mistreatment that Rosa Parks endured but was taking an anti-visibility narrative stance (Au et al., 2016), in other words, pushing back against reinforcing that only one person whom the White culture selects for our society to signify is important. Instead, she enhanced students' learning by introducing a person who normally would be an invisible narrative (Au et al., 2016), one who is absent from discussion. By introducing their students to Sarah Mae Flemming, within this lesson Mrs. Bryant was addressing the critical consciousness component of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) because she provided students with information about another person who was just as influential as Rosa Parks in desegregating buses. It was because of Sarah Mae Flemming's recent lawsuit against the bus company, that Rosa Parks and her lawyers were able to prevail in their lawsuit in Montgomery, Alabama (SC African American History Calendar, 2022) because it showed the mistreatment of Black

people while on the bus. With this lesson she also addressed the cultural competence component of CRP by positively developing the students' cultural identity and, if they were not African American, building appreciation for people beyond their own cultural and racial groups. She was able to do this by teaching them about another influential Black woman and by providing them with knowledge of a person from their state who helped end transportation segregation.

In learning about Sarah Mae Flemming's connection to their state the students showed pride through their smiles and comments such as "She was from here!" They only knew about Rosa Parks as the hero of the Bus Boycott because the South Carolina Social Studies standards for kindergarten and first grade only focused on Rosa Parks for this historical change. After learning about Sarah Mae Flemming, they expressed their thanks for her contribution in the desegregation of buses, although it took place during the Montgomery Bus Boycott with Rosa Parks, by making thank you hands to show appreciation for what she did (Figure 4.13).

With this lesson, Mrs. Bryant taught the students that being a citizen is standing up for what is right and not just singing the national anthem and saying the pledge of allegiance. She did this by telling students that although the laws were unfair and required Black people to sit at the back of the bus, Sarah Mae Flemming was following the laws but was mistreated by a White bus driver, who did not treat her as a human or a citizen even though she was following the unjust rules and being respectful. This is one of the ways that Mrs. Bryant and Ms. Pearson's lessons used but expanded the OCR focus on patriotism to be culturally relevant.



Figure 4.13 “Thank You, Sarah Mae Flemming” Hand Prints

Change in Leadership

Also, during the time of this Red, White, and Blue Unit, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris became the newly elected leaders of the United States; and Mrs. Bryant wanted to do a lesson on introducing the students to our new leaders and bring to the students’ attention that our Vice President was a woman and Black. Within another teacher debrief, support, and planning session, I was able to work with Dr. Clark alongside Mrs. Bryant in thinking about ways to teach this lesson with a critically conscious lens. When discussing Vice President Kamala Harris, she wanted to bring to the critical consciousness the discussion of Whiteness and gender. She presented the students with an image that represented all 49 Vice Presidents from American history, seen in Figure 4.14. After showing them the image, she then presented their first-grade students with the question: “What do you notice in this picture?”



Figure 4.14 Image Shown to Students of the 49th Vice Presidents

From that question their students began to talk about race and gender. Students first said, “There are a lot of men that were presidents,” “They were all White Vice Presidents,” and “Kamala Harris is the only woman” (written in Mrs. Bryant’s notes). Later in speaking with Ms. Pearson, due to other literacy coach obligations I was not able to do a classroom observation this day, she shared with me that the students also noticed that Vice President Harris was the only Black person [Vice President Harris identifies as Black and South Asian] in the picture. While students viewed the image, Mrs. Bryant had students talk with each other and then as a whole class talk about their feelings pertaining to what they noticed in the image. During their discussion the students expressed that it was not right that there were no other women or Black people who were Vice Presidents. To further develop the students’ knowledge about Vice President Harris, Mrs. Bryant and Ms. Pearson engaged students in books written about her, *Kamala Harris Rooted in Justice* (Grimes & Freeman, 2020) and *Superheroes Are Everywhere* (Harris, 2019).

After engaging students in books about Vice President Harris and in discussions about inequalities that were seen within the Vice Presidency, students then drew pictures of Vice President Kamala Harris and how they viewed her job as the Vice President. Some of the students' pictures can be seen in Figure 4.15.



Figure 4.15 Students' Drawings of Kamala Harris as Vice President

Mask or No Mask?

During the time of the Red, White, and Blue Unit, our state's governor decided that we were no longer going to have a mask ordinance to wear masks at school. However, at that time our district's superintendent made the decision that we would not remove the district's mask-wearing ordinance for the remainder of the school year. The afternoon of the district's decision, Ms. Pearson and I planned what we were going to do the next day in class if students asked why our superintendent did not have to follow this rule- not wearing masks- if it was the governor's decision. To help us in planning, I set up an interview with Ms. Pearson and my dad, who was a town councilman at the time, so that we could learn more about government and policies. The insight that we gained from our time with my dad was that, in spite of the governor's decision, school district

superintendents had the ability to control whether their districts were to continue to wear masks or not.

After meeting with my dad, we continued to work and planned out the lesson for Ms. Pearson's students. Continuing to teach students about the leaders in our local government, Ms. Pearson began her lesson by discussing the jobs of our Governor and Mayor. She then talked about the Governor's decision to end the mask-wearing ordinances. To share this information with them, she showed news video clips of our governor speaking about his decision. She also discussed that our district's superintendent had sent out information telling us that we would still wear masks as a school district. After watching the video clips and discussing the decision of the district's superintendent, she asked students, "How do you feel about wearing masks?" Ms. Pearson and Mrs. Bryant then went around the room and listened to the thoughts of the students. They did not tell the students what they thought was the best decision but told them to take their time to create a poster that had an illustration and a written piece to support their views about wearing a mask or not wearing masks.

After completing their posters Ms. Pearson had her students share their work with the class. At the end of the presentations one student asked, "Why do we wear them and why do we have to continue wearing them?" Ms. Pearson acknowledged that some students thought that masks should still be worn in school and some students felt that we should not have to wear masks in school. She then told her students that it was okay that they did not agree that masks should be worn, but that in our district we still had to wear them because it was a rule decided on by our superintendent. After sharing that with her students, she told them that, although their posters could not change the decision made

right now, she wanted them to learn how to use their voices and stand up for what they believed. Students' posters are seen in Figure 4.16.



Figure 4.16 Ms. Pearson's Class's "Should We Wear a Mask or Not" Posters

Symbols: Does it Mean that for Everyone?

The second unit of the Open Court Reading (OCR) program for this time period was called "Stars and Stripes" and it focused on American symbols. Students were to learn about the American symbols and what it means to be an American from the perspective of the OCR publishers. The American symbols that were focused on in the OCR lessons were the flag, Bald Eagle, Statue of Liberty, and the Liberty Bell. While helping Ms. Pearson get some ideas together, I started creating a book for shared reading that used those symbols and would be a book that the students could read. Before

completing the book, however, I spoke with my doctoral advisors, Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips, about my idea and shared the beginning of the book with them. In reference to the symbols meaning freedom and strength, Dr. Phillips asked me, “Does it mean that for everyone?” From those words, my thoughts were shifted and after working with the two of them, a new plan arose for a way that I could work with Ms. Pearson on this Unit.

Since Ms. Pearson and her first-grade team were still teaching from the Open Court Reading (OCR) program, she wanted to teach the symbols as they were introduced in the program, concerned that this was a district and school requirement. She and I discussed ways that she could still make the required connection to American symbols by broadening what counts as an American symbol and paying attention to other symbols that are important to people’s daily lives. In planning this extension lesson, we talked about what was relevant to her students’ daily lives so that we would enrich the instruction by addressing the cultural competence component of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). We also talked about symbols in ways that would address the critical consciousness component of CRP and we looked at symbols the students were likely to see in social media images, news, game apps, and academics. We ended up choosing the Black raised closed fist symbol for #BlackLivesMatter and the rainbow symbol for LGBTQIA+ rights.

During the lesson, Ms. Pearson explained to her students that symbols are used to represent something instead of writing the words out; and that they mean different things to different people. She then held up each symbol that we planned one at a time and asked students what the symbol represented and what it meant to them if they were to see this symbol. During this time Ms. Pearson did not require all students to answer her

questions, therefore, students could choose to answer both parts of her question or just one part of the question. After she finished going through the symbols one at a time, she gave them a sheet that consisted of all the symbols on it and told the students to choose a symbol that spoke to them the most. After the students made their choice, she asked them to cut out and then paste the symbol on a piece of handwriting paper and told them to write about why that symbol was of importance to them. Some of the students' symbols of choice along with their writing is seen in Figure 4.17.

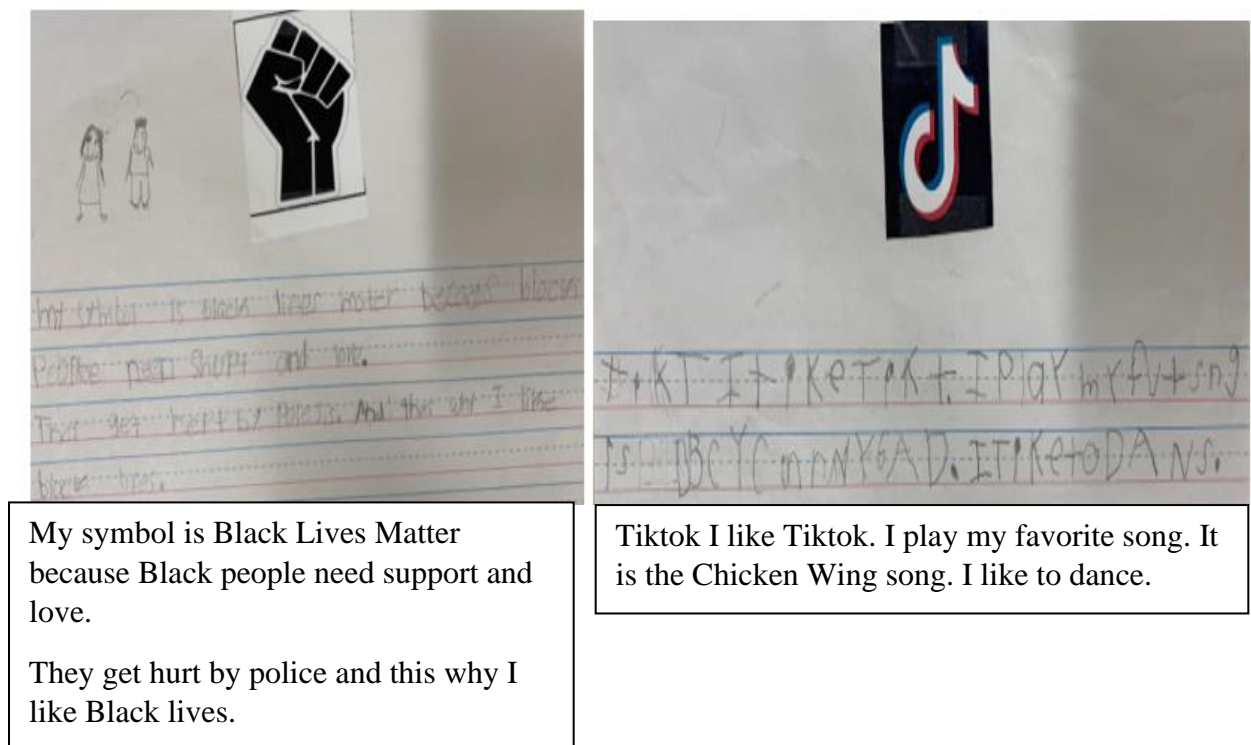


Figure 4.17 Students' Writing about What the Symbol Meant to Them

Art for All

Art for All is another unit from the district's reading program, Open Court Reading (OCR). The Art for All Unit included stories of children as artists. It featured an art museum which represented typical art museums around the world which are largely populated with art by and about White people. Responding to this narrow view of what

counts as art, some members of the first-grade team wanted to share the world of art with their students by studying Artists of Color throughout the world. With this idea, three of five first-grade teachers, who were a part of Dr. Clark's PD sessions, decided they wanted to work on this unit with Dr. Clark for their culturally relevant unit. For this Unit, the three team members and Dr. Clark created a unit that addressed OCR program skills and an introduction to artists, but through a culturally relevant lens. I met with them as well so that they could share their ideas of how they wanted their students to learn about different artists from around the world. From this meeting Dr. Clark gathered resources and provided them for the first-grade teachers. They looked at the resources together and the teachers used them as jumping off points for planning their own units.

The resources provided by Dr. Clark and myself for these three weeks of instruction were, again, aligned with the school's grade level pacing guide. For example, after meeting with the teachers and me, Dr. Clark provided a range of information about the Whiteness of major art museums and about Artists of Color particularly those from Africa and the African Diaspora including Amy Sberald, Kehinde Wiley, Bisa Butler, Augusta Savage, Faith Ringgold, Kenesha Sneed, Tyree Guyton, and Alma Thomas to name a few. Then she demonstrated how they could teach the skills listed in the pacing guide and that were the focus for OCR Shared Reading lessons each week, while developing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness through a focus on Art for All. Dr. Clark also focused on adding resources for teaching from the district's writing curriculum, Lucy Calkins' Units of Study Writing (Calkins, 2013) within the Art for All Unit. This decision was made because the first-grade teachers discussed with Dr. Clark how they wanted to align the Art for All Unit with the Lucy Calkins writing skills.

As a result, Dr. Clark charted the required skills (Figure 4.18) and from this chart the first-grade teachers then developed how they wanted to teach the lessons to their students.

Pacing Guide Skills Across the Unit 11: May 10-28			
<p><u>Shared Reading</u></p> <p>Every Week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture walk • Build vocabulary <p>Weeks 1 & 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe characters' feelings & actions • Make connections: compare characters' experiences to readers' • Describe setting • Describe cause & effect • Predict and confirm predictions • Sequence <p>Week 3, Add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarizing • Fact & opinion • Who, what when, where, why questions • Make inferences 	<p><u>Word Study/Green Band</u></p> <p>Every Week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review letters & sounds • Review words • Blends & digraphs • Syllables <p>Week 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, short e • Dictation & spelling • Build fluency • Word families (ate, eel) <p>Week 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word families (ide, ine) <p>Week 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • r controlled • Word families (ife, ile) • Blending 	<p><u>High Frequency Words</u></p> <p>Week 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know, old, them, put, think <p>Week 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open, over, take, some, them <p>Week 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • once, thank, walk, then, round 	<p><u>Writing</u> (Realistic Fiction)</p> <p>Weeks 1 & 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study realistic fiction • Write with chapters • Recount sequenced events • Include details • Provide closure <p>Week 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edit and revise • Punctuation • Illustrations • Meet the Author page • Celebration
<p>OC: Art and Artists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on art together; what can you learn? • 			

Figure 4.18 First-grade's Three-week Art for All ELA Plan Provided by Dr. Clark

Although previously Ms. Pearson and Mrs. Bryant had taught through a culturally relevant focus, they did so with individual lessons within the OCR program rather than entire units. However, with Art for All they made CRP foundational to the entire unit. To begin the unit, Ms. Pearson used the OCR's unit opener, a video that introduced the students to the unit Art for All. She then asked students what art was and virtually showed them the inside of different museums and art galleries. It was at this time, during the unit's introduction, that Ms. Pearson initiated a focus on developing the students' critical consciousness by showing them an image (Figure 4.19) that represented different racial groups of artists whose works are found within museums around the United States. After having students look at the image, she then explained to the students that out of

every 100 paintings in the most famous art museums in the United States, there are only approximately 87 paintings by White artists, 8 by Asian artists, 3 by Latinx artists, 1 by a Black artist, and 1 by a Native American artist.

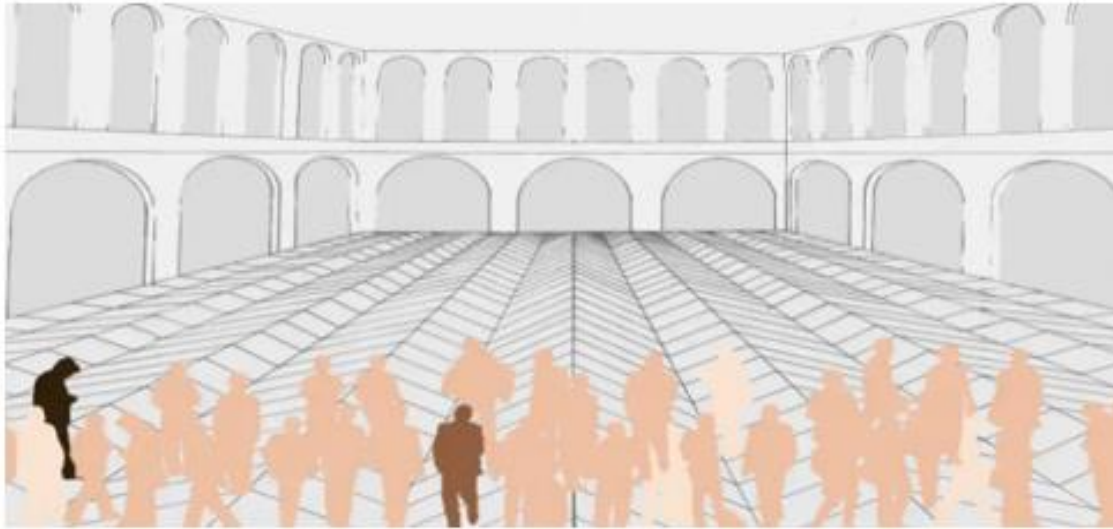


Figure 4.19 Image Shown to Demonstrate Racial Make-up of Artist's Work in Museums

Through the discussion that the students and Ms. Pearson had about the inequities of other ethnic and racial artist groups being under-represented in art museums, Ms. Pearson was able to introduce her students to Carmen Morgan and Courtney Harge, two activists working to increase the number of Black and Brown artists' works seen in museums. After introducing her students to these two activists, Ms. Pearson then taught her students about many Black and Brown artists featuring a different artist each day within her classroom. In featuring the artists, she drew from resources provided by Dr. Clark but also her own research into artists beyond those resources. Ms. Pearson's teaching process was to show a picture of the artist, show a world map and engage students in finding where the artist lived, mark that place with an image of the artist (Figure 4.20), and share and discuss images of the artist's work. Each day she shared information about different Black and Brown artists and each day she taught through the

cultural competence component as she gave her students information about the lives of the artists from different continents, ethnicities, race, and cultures, and a critical consciousness as she introduced students to artists typically marginalized in or left out of dominant culture art books and museums.

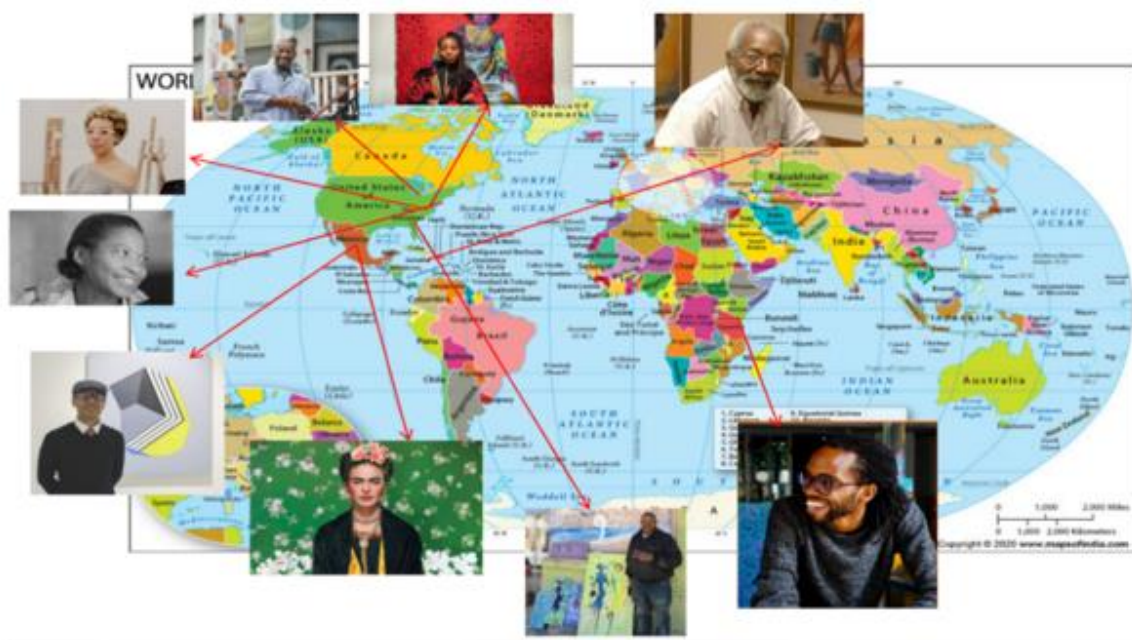


Figure 4.20 World Map that Showed Where Some of the Artists Featured Lived

There were two featured artists that Ms. Pearson presented to her students along with an extension activity to deepen their learning. One of the artists was Mexican artist Jaime Dominguez. Ms. Pearson featured Jaime Dominguez as she did the other artists but did a cross curricular lesson in math because one style used by Jaime Dominguez was to incorporate shapes in his artwork. At that time, the students were also in the midst of a shape unit in math; therefore, she had students create pieces of artwork using shapes as Jaime Dominguez did. Students worked to have their artwork resemble Jaime Dominguez's artwork and created their own art gallery in the classroom. Figure 4.21

shows artist Jaime Dominguez, his work, and the students' work that was inspired by Dominguez.



Figure 4.21 Students Created Artwork to Resemble Artist Jaime Dominguez

The other artist the students studied in-depth was local Black artist Ernest “Chicken Man” Lee. Ernest Lee is a native of our state of South Carolina and although they were learning about Black artists, they were culturally learning about an artist who was raised and lived in the same state as them. To share what they had learned about the “Chicken Man,” they created a cartoon strip presentation of him, and one student’s work is seen in Figure 4.22.



Figure 4.22 Cartoon Script Presentation of Artist Ernest “Chicken Man” Lee

Partnership within the Classrooms

Through the culturally relevant units developed and taught in these kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson, and I were able to expand our minds and knowledge and work together to figure out what would work best for them and their students. Although Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson had actively participated in PD with Dr. Clark over the same period of time, they were different in their needs and in the needs of their classes, so the time that I spent with each teacher as a literacy coach committed to culturally relevant teaching was critical in providing what they needed to have the best outcomes for themselves and their students. To provide this support, we took time to plan lessons, first considering cultural relevance and then addressing the pacing guide requirements so that required skills could be taught through a culturally relevant lens as each teacher executed lessons that gave their students experiences that were not originally taught in OCR program for kindergarten or first-grade.

Through our time together, we encountered both barriers and support for this work. Findings regarding those barriers and support are presented in Chapter Five and my own growth through this process is explicated in Chapter Six with implications for the role of the literacy coach and educational leaders in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS/ NAVIGATING THROUGH BARRIERS AND SUPPORT

Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one.

-Paulo Freire (1970/2000)

As described in the previous chapters, while culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) has been documented as supportive of the literacy achievement of Black students, it has not been foundational to the preparation or the role of literacy coaches who typically works in support of teachers in schools. As an elementary school literacy coach, I studied culturally relevant pedagogy and issues of racial equity in my doctoral program. Building that knowledge base and concerned about the statistics around literacy proficiency for African American students, I began to wonder how culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with a particular focus on educating Black students might anchor this role. As a result, I developed this study through which I asked: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* Two of the subquestions that followed this overarching research question are addressed in this chapter:

- (a) What barriers are experienced and how are they negotiated (or not)?
- (b) What support is experienced in the work to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach?

Described in Chapter Three, data were collected from September 2020 to June 2021 through a partnership that was experienced by working with two amazing teachers, Mrs. Jones (kindergarten) and Ms. Pearson (first grade). Through my study, we embarked on being change agents within our lives and our students' lives in our work to understand and enact culturally relevant teaching with each other and as a part of the school's K-2nd grades professional development activities focused on CRP. Chapter Four provided a thorough look at the district and school mandates and requirements for literacy instruction in the school and district where the study was conducted as well as an in-depth look at the culturally relevant lessons and units developed by and with the Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson during the time period of this study. Chapter Four provides important context for this chapter that looks at the barriers and support encountered within the context of mandates and the development of culturally relevant lessons through my work as a literacy coach.

In this chapter, I share findings from two of my research subquestions which focused on barriers and support encountered in the process of making CRP foundational to my position as literacy coach. Although the barriers and support discussed here are specific to the teachers' experiences because my job was to support the teachers as literacy educators, I had to build awareness of the barriers and the support that they perceived, felt, and experienced so that I could address and learn from them in my role as literacy coach. In addition, the barriers faced by classroom teachers were also faced by me as I worked to support them. In response to the subquestions about barriers and support, I constructed seven findings from my data analysis (Table 5.1) which also constitute the subheadings that guide readers through this chapter.

Table 5.1 Findings from Research Subquestions 1a and 1b

Research Questions	Findings from Research Questions
<p>What barriers are experienced and how are they negotiated (or not)?</p>	<p>Partial Knowledge of CRP as a Barrier to Choosing and Promoting Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Success • Cultural Competence • Critical Consciousness <p>Contradictions and Mixed Messages as Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contradictions at the District Level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contradictions Around Voiced Commitments to CRP and Opportunities for Professional Development ○ Contradictions Around AVID ○ Contradictions Around Literacy Coach Training <p>Contradictions at the School Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contradictions Around School’s Vision ○ Contradictions Around Teaching Through a Culturally Relevant Lens <p>District and School Contradictions: A Summation</p> <p>Fear as a Barrier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fearing Reprimand and Negative Evaluations: Trained to Follow the Rules • Fear Resulting from Mixed Messages • Moving Through Fear <p>Concerns About Teaching the Critical Consciousness Component of CRP as Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about Parents’ Acceptance of the Work • Needing to Build Confidence in Teaching About Issues of Justice <p>Time as a Barrier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time for Personal and Professional Growth • Time for Preparation
<p>What support is experienced in the work to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach?</p>	<p>Support for Culturally Relevant Teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Through One-to-One Coaching and Learning in a Small Group • Support Through Immediate Literacy Coach Feedback to Classroom Observations • Student Learning, Motivation, and Enthusiasm as Support • Support Found in Their Own Teaching, Jumping in and Trying • Support to Teach Across Cultural Groups

Barriers to Culturally Relevant Teaching

Teaching through a culturally relevant lens often incurs obstacles because our education system does not fully support curricula that places Black and Brown people, histories, and communities at the core of learning. This is not supported because most curricula were designed and are designed to have all things center around Whiteness (Au et al., 2016; Lyiscott, 2017), reflective of the moves made by European colonial powers who sought global control from the 15th century. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994/2009), follows her study of successful teachers of African American students, calls for teachers to be dedicated to supporting students' academic success, ability to learn about themselves and others particularly those most marginalized from the curriculum (cultural competence), and to identify and take a stand against injustices (critical consciousness). As we have seen by the push around the country in the name of anti-Critical Race Theory legislation (Alfonseca, 2022; Ray & Gibbons, 2021), CRP is not what many White people and some people of Color (those who are in a Eurocratic state of mind and who have internalized messages of Whiteness as a norm to be attained) want within educational settings because teaching in this way goes outside of traditional education systems that perpetuate White perspectives as reflective of universal truths, as the norm.

In my school district, we follow the traditional education system and project the White perspective to our students as the truth and what is normal. Teachers in kindergarten through second grade classrooms are required to use state standards and Open Court Reading (OCR) program to meet the instructional needs of their students. Literacy coaches are required to support teachers in meeting these goals. Standards and

the OCR program are two non-negotiables, meaning teachers are required to use them when developing their reading instruction. This requirement comes with the belief that if all children receive the same instruction, they will all attain academic success. The problem that lies within these expectations is that not all students in this district are walking away successful, and the educational gaps are continuing to grow. In this section, I write about the barriers experienced by the teachers in this research study which were therefore barriers in making CRP foundational to the role of literacy coach as we worked together to create classrooms that practice culturally relevant teaching.

Partial Knowledge of CRP as a Barrier to Choosing and Promoting Programs

Through my role as a literacy coach and studying curriculum, I do not think that making decisions about the next curriculum that teachers will use within our district is an easy task or one that is taken lightly. For Mr. James, Executive Director of Elementary Instruction and literacy coach supervisor, and district literacy specialists, finding the next “best” curriculum that is “sure” to help our students learn how to read, involved putting a lot of time and consideration into this important process. He explained that, as he searched for the “best” curriculum, he and the district literacy specialist gave some thought into choosing culturally relevant programs. Mr. James stated in my interview with him that he and the district literacy specialist “contact the publishers and asked the publishers if their curriculum was culturally relevant before making a commitment to purchase particular programs” (James, Interview, September 24, 2020). However, as demonstrated in the following paragraphs, a limited understanding of CRP made it difficult for Mr. James and other district leaders to determine whether or not a particular program was culturally relevant or not. This provided a barrier to my ability to make

culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my position as literacy coach because I felt torn between my own job security, fulfilling my role as a literacy coach who supported district initiatives, and providing opportunities for Black children to have Black Joy.

Mr. James said that prior to the district's decision to purchase Open Court Reading (OCR), the company sent him and his literacy team, district literacy specialists, a report about how culturally relevant pedagogy was already embedded in the curriculum (James, Interview, September 24, 2020). According to Mr. James, the report indicated cultural relevance in OCR because it explained that the alphabet letter cards that come with the program and that are used to introduce letter sounds featured people who were "minorities" (Mr. James' terminology) and some stories in the textbooks highlighted different cultures around the world. The example Mr. James gave was that the alphabet card representing the letter "n" depicted a male nurse who was supposedly "a minority person" (Interview, September 24, 2020).

While looking for signs of the diversity in the curriculum, I had also noticed that the Nn card represented a male nurse and that the hands holding the camera for letters C and K were hands of a person who did not seem to be of European decent (shaded darker than hands depicted on other cards). This led me to conclude that representatives of the OCR program and Mr. James thought that a few images of "minorities" and stories highlighting different cultures around the world constituted a curriculum that was relevant for all students' races and backgrounds.

Viewed through the lens of my theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and BlackCrit, it was clear that this mere nod to diversity was so limited that the OCR program could hardly be called culturally relevant. Worse, any such claim to

cultural relevance only serves to perpetuate an educational system that invisibilizes anti-Blackness (Coles, 2020) by (intentionally or unintentionally) covering up pervasive anti-Blackness through tokenized images and stories of Black people that convince those who have not studied CRP that an image of or story about a person here and there is “enough.” Cultural relevance is not attained with the inclusion of an image or two people who are not of European descent on alphabet cards and a story or two about people of Color. Packaging such curricula as being culturally relevant also shows a lack of knowledge from the sellers’ perspective and/or savvy marketers who know the language to use to attract some buyers while maintaining a strong Eurocratic base to attract others.

Although this is only one example, it is representative of the tokenized, limited view of CRP that many educational leaders within our nation, district, and schools seem to hold. Thus, while the district professed a focus on choosing a curriculum that was culturally relevant, neither the teachers nor I can say that the curriculum resembles culturally relevant practices. In fact, in reviewing the data from my interview with Mr. James, and in reviewing the OCR program, I found very limited, if any, connection to cultural relevance in rich and sustaining ways. In the following sections, I break down the disconnect between what the district said, what OCR claims, and what actually constitutes CRP according to each of the three components of CRP: developing students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Organizing findings in this way, I do not intend to communicate that culturally relevant teaching exists void of any of the three components – they must all three be foundational and inter-related. I organize according to components for clarity.

Academic Success

The students' academic success seemed to be a primary reason voiced by Mr. James that the district chose OCR. While the goal of academic success without developing cultural competence or a critical consciousness misses the point of culturally relevant teaching, Mr. James seemed to see it as the determining factor in choosing Open Court Reading as our foundational reading curriculum. He also did not seem to have knowledge of the research that shows that academic success is more effectively promoted through culturally relevant teaching, not through programs that require the same lessons in the same moment for every student and uses texts that many students cannot relate to.

Mr. James explained in my interview with him (September 24, 2020) that academic success was believed to be obtainable by all students through this program because it was “research-based” which typically means that it has been proven through research studies to teach practices that are effective in supporting positive age-appropriate learning outcomes for children (ECLKC, n.d.). After seeking further clarification on what research-based meant to him, he said that it was evidence-based (September 19, 2022), meaning that its practices are examined through extremely thorough research (Wingate Institute, 2022). Mr. James also stated that he believed it would promote academic success for our students because it was grounded in the science of reading, which is an “interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing” (The Reading League, 2021, para 1).

As I investigated OCR's claims of being research-based, I found that the last confirmed research-based status was in 2014 when they were cited by What Works

Clearinghouse (McGraw Hill, 2022) as meeting criteria from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for being research based. However, the ESSA (2015) requirements for being considered effective is having at least one finding that has strong evidence in the areas of meeting What Works Clearinghouse's standards without reservation, having a positive effect, having at least 350 students and at least two educational sites to meet the criteria. Being without reservation meant that the study was conducted with a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and was considered well-designed and well-implemented by experts and had no participants to drop out of the study (IES, n.d.).

Thus, while the OCR program professed to be research- or evidence-based, in fact this was only determined by two studies and no qualitative studies that looked at differences in test scores, instruction, and assessment measures according to cultural relevance or student demographics. The two studies that were conducted consisted of 1,113 students who were in grades one through three from six different states (McGraw Hill, n.d.) and the states were not identified. The concern with this is the unknown of the demographics and population of children with whom the proven success was determined as well as the void of studies from What Works Clearinghouse using the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to determine the effectiveness of all students.

Another reason that Mr. James believed that using OCR throughout all elementary schools would be supportive for the district's students is that it would provide all students with the same instructional material (Dresser, 2012; Ralabate, n.d.) and if they utilized the resources to reach their students, they would have growth (James, Initial Interview, September 24, 2020). His belief is that this would provide academic growth that would be consistent across the board. However, the consistency of academic growth through the

usage of OCR has not been the case. Moustafa and Land (2002) found, through a study of children in urban schools in California, that OCR did not foster higher achievement in reading for students. Students in this same context also scored lower on assessments than those who did not use any scripted program.

Although academic success for all students seemed to Mr. James to be an ideal rationale when deciding on using OCR, that has not been the case. Within the five years of our district using OCR, the district and our school's academic success has not proven to have been improved amongst enough of our Black students. As determined by the 2021 South Carolina annual end of the year output assessment, schools in our district that have the same demographics as Griffin Elementary all scored with less than 35% of the students meeting the goal of passing the assessment at the end of the year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022).

In addition, third graders in the 2020-2021 school year were the first group of students who had been taught by the district's OCR reading curriculum for three years (K-2nd). According to our state's annual end of year output assessment, almost 60% of our third-grade students did not pass the state assessment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022), which means they did not score high enough to meet the state's standards. The 2020-2021 school year was the first time that the students had been tested since our district went to virtual instruction from March 2020-November 2020 because of the COVID 19 pandemic, and then hybrid (some children were in the classroom, and some were at home learning virtually from the same teacher) from November 2020-June 2021. Even though this change in delivery was a challenge and required adjustments in all areas of education, students during this time were still taught using our district's

reading curriculum through the electronic teaching tools provided by the curriculum. Although OCR enhanced their electronic portion of the curriculum to assist with virtual instruction, this produced an environmental problem once students were learning from home. OCR was already disconnected from the students' lives in terms of content, and this disconnect was more apparent when students were learning in their home environments and still were not making connections to their lived experiences.

Cultural Competence

Another reason given by Mr. James for the district's choice of using Open Court Reading (OCR) as culturally relevant was that he felt that there was a representation of cross-cultural stories embedded in the program. When discussing how the OCR's representative reported that OCR was culturally relevant and how he noticed the diversity in the sound cards, he also stated that "the stories themselves" (James, Initial Interview, September 24, 2020) were culturally relevant. If there had been a rich representation of authentic (not stereotyped) stories by and about Black children, people, histories, events, etc., and related engagements that involved students in studying these topics, this might have constituted one aspect of building students' cultural competence. However, the inclusion of these stories seemed tokenized. For example, in kindergarten some of the stories were about traditions passed down from a Latinx family. A story about the Chinese New Year and a story featuring a Black girl who walked through her neighborhood of Harlem with her grandmother were two other examples. In the first-grade curriculum, some stories featured schools around the world, perspectives on how life is for people in the city and in town and highlighted the different types of dances performed by children of different ethnic groups.

Thus, even though OCR embedded stories within the curriculum that showed characters of different cultural groups, there were not many stories that represented cultures and races other than European American - White. This made stories that were not of the dominant race seem as though they were tokenizing and essentializing other cultures and not sharing stories of different cultures to provide knowledge of other cultures or to normalize them. When looking through the stories for kindergarten and first grade, more than 75% of the stories in each grade had main characters who were White, animals, or objects. The kindergarten OCR curriculum consisted of 69 stories with only 23% of the main characters who were Asian, Black, Brown, or Latinx. The first-grade curriculum consisted of 97 stories with only 24% of the main characters who were Asian, Black, Brown, or Latinx.

To arrive at these percentages, when animals or objects were the main character(s) of the story but an image or a picture of someone from a racial group was placed in the text, I also included that racial group as a main character because the picture or image represents a message of importance to the reader. Also, research shows that children typically position animals as White because of the normalization of Whiteness that they experience in toys, books, and other materials (explained later in this section). Figure 5.1 shows the representation of all main characters that were seen within the 69 stories within the kindergarten curriculum. The representation of all of the main characters featured in the 97 stories within the first-grade curriculum are captured in Figure 5.2.

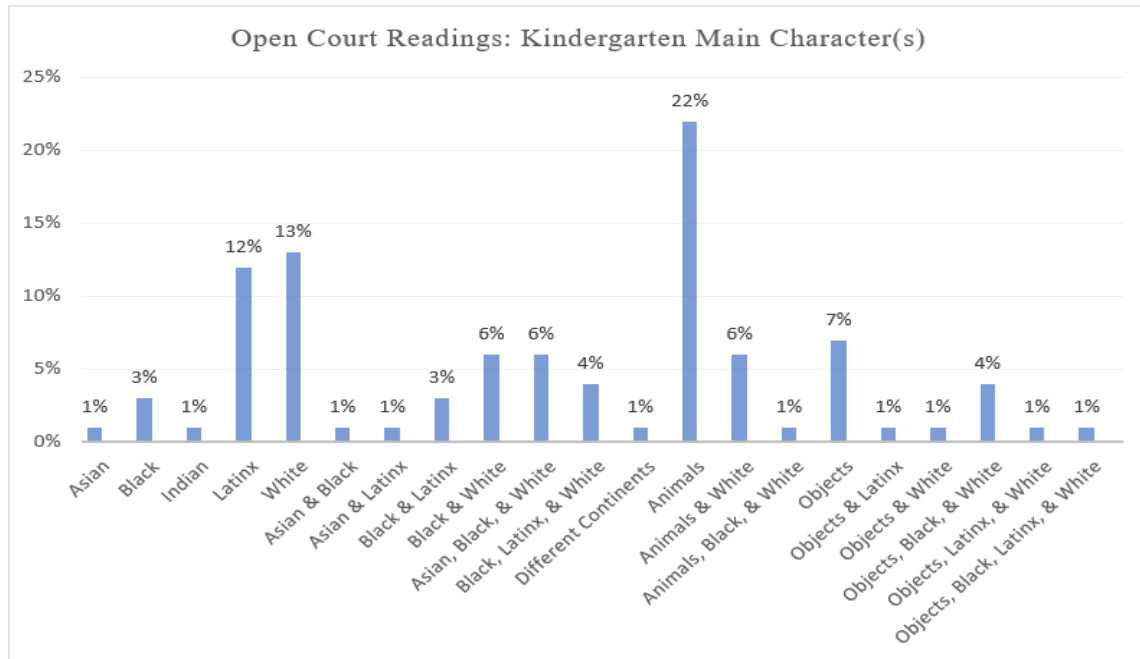


Figure 5.1 Open Court Readings: Kindergarten Main Character(s)

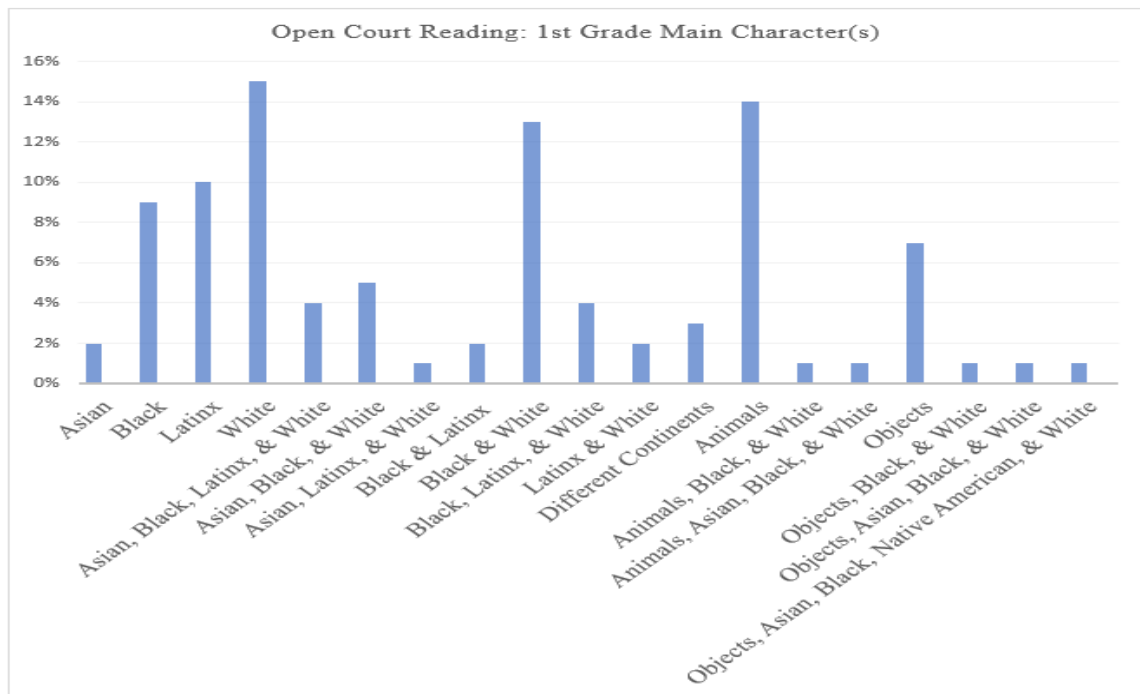


Figure 5.2 Open Court Readings: 1st Grade Main Character(s)

Representation is important, therefore what is being represented is what matters. However, having representation here and there does not expunge the message that

Whiteness is right, and all other racial groups are less important. This is one reason that the OCR reading program cannot be said to build students' cultural competence. It does not truly encompass what Ladson-Billings (2014, 2017, 2021) considered to be culturally relevant pedagogy. She defined culture "as an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief system" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75) that "involves every aspect of human endeavor, including thought, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 143). Meaning that students must understand "their own history, culture, customs, and languages" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 5). Thus, while the OCR program provides a few experiences of what Bishop (1990) calls mirrors and windows, there is not enough literature about those who are African American, Asian, Latinx, and other ethnic groups, placing the dominate race in power. Kindergarten and first-grade students interacting with stories from OCR could go throughout a whole unit, 15 days/3 weeks, and not see an image of a person of Color.

In addition, while there are differences, race and cultural experiences, with the main characters represented in the OCR stories for kindergarten and first grade (seen in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2) it can still be misleading unless you look deeper at the reading materials. When I was initially looking at the stories for both grade levels, I thought that there was a better representation of diversity within the curriculum than I am reporting here. However, after looking deeper at the representation with the knowledge that animal characters mirror the values and prejudices of the dominant culture (Sparling, 2021), therefore, animal characters are typically perceived as White whereas mischievous animal characters take on characteristics of those who are not White, particularly of Black culture (Brooks, 2016, Pérez Huber, 2021). I began to think differently about the

cultural representation of the curriculum. When placing animals in the category with White people since White is the dominant racial group, I was able to get a better depiction of how culturally diverse the curriculum stories were for kindergarten (Figure 5.3) and first grade (Figure 5.4). By digging deeper into the materials, I was able to determine that the curriculum was not as diverse as I had originally thought when only looking at main characters and separating White characters and animals. Thus, contrary to what the OCR representative stated to Mr. James and the literacy specialist, OCR does not promote cultural competence.

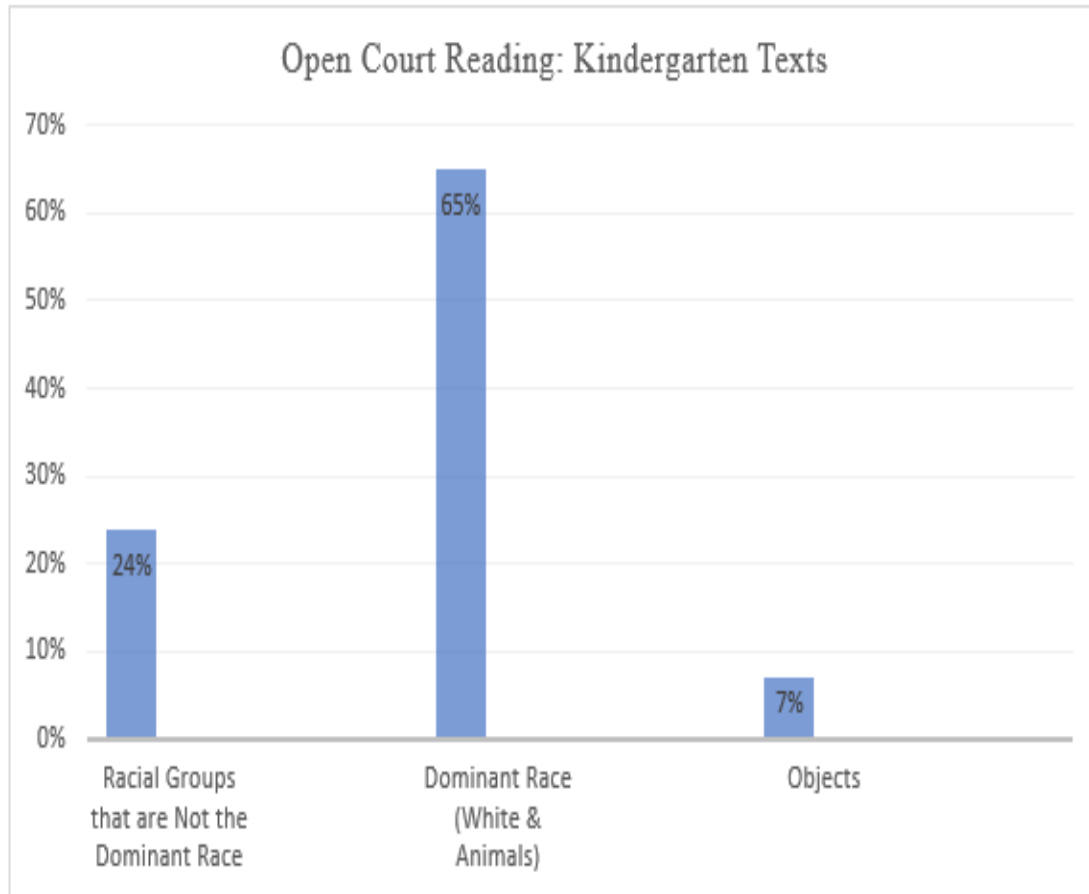


Figure 5.3 Open Court Reading: Kindergarten Texts

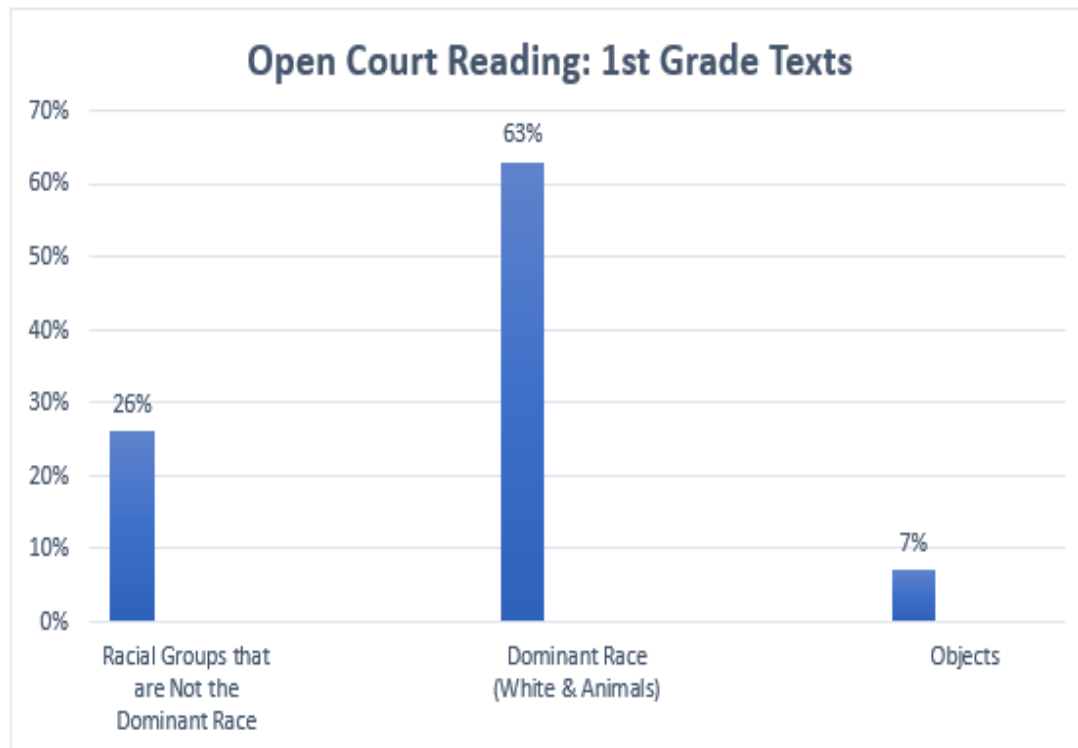


Figure 5.4 Open Court Reading: 1st Grade Texts

Critical Consciousness

While Mr. James gave academic success and cultural competence as rationale for our district's view that Open Court Reading (OCR) is culturally relevant, there was no mention of the third component of culturally relevant pedagogy –developing a critical consciousness. In addition, I did not see opportunities to develop students' critical consciousness present anywhere in the OCR. Critical consciousness means providing students with opportunities to analyze, apply, synthesize, and critique their own environment and/or the problems they may encounter, experience, or witness in the larger world, and then use strategies to stand against injustices (Ladson-Billings, 2021). This was not seen anywhere in the required curricula. Within the three curriculum components promoted from the district and in OCR – Foundational Skills, Reading and Responding,

and Language Arts - I was not able to locate any evidence of lessons that would support the development of students' critical consciousness. In addition to content from history, in the most recent years there have been many headlines that would be identified as social inequities that could be explored in content for reading instruction. Colin Kaepernick's stance against systemic ethnic and racial inequities, the murder of Trayvon Martin, and initiation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement occurred prior to OCR's latest publication, 2016, yet these social inequities were not mentioned in the curriculum nor were any justice-related events further back in time. Nor was there any mention of issues of justice children face every day: bullying, unkindness, playground unfairness, racial injustices, hunger, to name a few.

Years of injustices and injustices children meet every day in their lives could have been important elements in the OCR curriculum as well normalizing conversations about what is going on in students' local, national, and global lives. Having critical consciousness elements can help students develop comfort in noticing injustices and responding to them. For years there has been bullying; people unfairly arrested; homelessness; language discrimination; systemic injustices regarding education, hiring, housing, health care; and political movements to promote justice for all, but they were not found in any section of the curriculum. By not addressing these topics students do not build capacity to stop, think critically, or take action by raising awareness of and acting against injustices that have happened and are continuing to happen within our state, country, and world, thus they are not being "prepared to be effective members of society" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p.7).

In sum, the messages that Mr. James received from the OCR representative about the program being culturally relevant do not hold up when judged against definitions of cultural relevance and equity. In addition, the claim that the program will help improve the success of all students sounds good, but that is not the case when looking at the scores of Black students in our district over time. Finally, OCR literature tells us that the program is designed for homogeneous groups which, when looking at the history of curriculum alongside the program itself, really means they are designed for the dominant group - White middle-class students - and do not meet the needs of all learners, particularly Black students (Ralabate, n.d.). Thus, requiring teachers to teach through a one size fits all instructional model such as OCR's scripted curriculum (Dresser, 2012; Ralabate, n.d.) leads teachers to teach the program and not the child who lives within and represents a richly diverse and complex society.

Contradictions and Mixed Messages as Barriers

Particularly problematic barriers to culturally relevant teaching as findings in this study were the contradictions and mixed messages the teachers and I felt we received at both the district and the school levels. On one hand, we heard about commitment to CRP, on the other hand, we heard about fidelity to verbatim delivery of the OCR program. In this section, I outline barriers caused by such contradictions.

Contradictions at the District Level

For over four years, our district's superintendent has represented a vision to have culturally relevant practices within each of our schools. Expressing this belief and through this belief, department leaders for elementary, middle, and secondary schools have hired consultants to provide different workshops in culturally relevant teaching

throughout the years. Although the vision expressed by district's leader was to have culturally relevant pedagogy as a part of our school district, there are contradictions between that vision and its actual implementation which constituted barriers to the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy as a part of my position as literacy coach.

Contradictions Around Voiced Commitments to CRP and Opportunities for Professional Development. One way the district exhibits an interest in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is by instituting year-long courses in culturally relevant pedagogy. This course began annually in 2018 with one teacher per school selected to attend this professional development. The instructor of the course is Dr. Carson who is a professor at a local university well known for her expertise in many areas of educating Black students, including culturally relevant pedagogy.

To learn more about this professional development and why only one teacher per school can attend, I spoke with Ms. Houghton (March 18, 2022), the district's professional development coordinator who started this position after Dr. Carson's professional development group had begun. She stated that to her understanding, Dr. Carson wanted to have a small group setting of no more than 50 participants because she preferred a lower number of participants to guarantee an atmosphere where teachers could freely learn and express themselves. I talked with Dr. Carson (October 5, 2022) who said that she initially wanted to work with one or two schools or critical masses from one or two schools. However, the decision was made to offer this course to all schools and in opening it to all schools Dr. Carson wanted to have a limited number of participants; and when she spoke with the initial coordinator, the idea for this course was for the school's representative to share what they had learned with their colleagues. Using

this model would have provided an increase in the number of faculty who had completed the course, thus adding to the school's knowledge of CRP.

Within this course, one teacher from each school in the district meets once a month with Dr. Carson to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) through deep diving conversations that address race, culture, language, and teaching Black children. Teacher participants also have to complete an online assignment once a month to show how they are using CRP in their classrooms. From my conversations with teachers who have participated in this course they felt that the time in this course provided them with deeper knowledge about culturally relevant pedagogy and how to implement it in their classrooms. One teacher told me that they learned that culturally relevant practices should not be viewed as add-ons but viewed as foundational to daily instruction (June 2, 2022). Another teacher (June 2, 2022) said the same and that a powerful strategy used was that teachers in the course shared their work with each other to show how CRP was used in their classrooms.

I understand Dr. Carson's reasons for having a smaller group size. Research (Harvard Kennedy School, n.d.; NCTE, 2014) and my own study corroborate the importance of smaller groups (see section on Support). However, if the district is truly committed to culturally relevant pedagogy, there are elements missing in making it foundational to education across the district, one of them being the limited number of teachers who can access professional development; another being the absence of professional development for administrators including those who make programmatic decisions for the district and those who train literacy coaches. Providing an opportunity for only approximately 3% of the faculty and no administrators in Rocking District 8 to

study CRP long-term is not demonstrating that culturally relevant pedagogy is a top focus of the district. The district has not hired other consultants to come to our district to provide yearlong courses alongside Dr. Carson or support day-to-day in each school nor has it invested in sending educators to conferences or offering graduate courses where we could learn more about culturally relevant pedagogy as they do with programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID, 2020a) and most recently Orton-Gillingham (n.d.) training for teachers all teachers and coaches in the elementary sector. In fact, since this study, the state has invested funds in whole faculties of schools with low achievement scores to participate in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) (Lexia Learning, 2022) a program focused on the “science of reading” mentioned earlier. LETRS requires every teacher to engage in PD every week for a year and yet, in a district that professes to support CRP, it is not possible to receive funding for similarly in-depth work.

Another contradiction between the district voicing a commitment to CRP and opportunities for professional development so that teachers can deeply learn CRP comes in the focus of district professional development days when all teachers attend district-wide full-day PD. In speaking with Dr. Moore (March 18, 2022), Chief Diversity and Equity and Inclusion Officer, I learned that our district provides opportunities for culturally relevant learning during these workdays, however, this is in the midst of many other choices and also only brief, 90-minute sessions. One full day in August and October our district holds these professional development teacher workdays and during this time teachers and specialists choose four sessions that we want to attend. On each of these days, there are multiple ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies sessions that are led by

teachers, literacy & math coaches, and consultants. During these professional development days there are some sessions available on culturally relevant pedagogy. Since August 2020, sessions have been virtual and there has not been a maximum number of participants set for each session. I attended one of the sessions taught by Dr. Carson in October 2021 and including myself there were only 34 participants. This is approximately 2% of educators from elementary to secondary in our district who attend the PD days. Again, because this is not a required session and it was only chosen by 2% of our teachers, this contradicts the professed commitment to CRP for the whole district.

Contradictions Around AVID. Another way our district professes to include cultural relevance is through its commitment to a non-profit program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID's mission statement "is to close the opportunity gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society" (AVID, 2020a). Every school in the district is required to be an AVID school. AVID in elementary schools teaches and reinforces academic behaviors such as self-advocacy, organization, study skills, and communication as well as higher-level thinking skills intended to prepare young children for success in middle school, high school, and college (AVID, 2021). Being an AVID district also means that schools are required to send teachers to AVID trainings in state and out of state with the biggest training push taking place during the summer for AVID's summer institutes. Through this four-year training program, teachers learn about the foundation and implementation of AVID, but it is not until their third and fourth years that culturally relevant pedagogy is introduced and even then, it is an option, not a requirement.

In the first year of AVID training, teachers are introduced to the curriculum framework of AVID, which is WICOR: “AVID’s foundational strategies for helping students succeed” (Drumright, et al., 2016, p. XIII). WICOR stands for Writing to Learn, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to Learn (Boyko, et al., 2016; Drumright, et al., 2016). In the second and third years, teachers are trained in other parts of the program such as WICORize It!, a strand where experienced AVID educators develop engaging and rigorous instruction that embeds WICOR strategies and AVID methodologies into everyday lessons (AVID, 2020a) and The Art of Inquiry where “experienced AVID Elementary educators who are ready to delve deeply into strengthening their students’ and their own abilities to think critically and question systematically across content areas” (p.5).

In the third year of training for teachers and fourth year for administrators, educators can choose to take sessions on what AVID calls culturally relevant teaching through two strands. One strand is called Transforming Educators and Empowering Students. Within the Transforming Educators, they learn how to conduct self-examination with their schools by focusing on culture and how to address issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and accountability through a growth mindset focus (AVID, n.d.). Administrators are provided with a framework that has “effective methodologies that validate the cultures of all students in the classroom and on the campus” (AVID, n.d., Culturally Relevant Teaching: Transforming Educators). The other culturally relevant strand is Empowering Students and “this strand brings educators together to explore strategies and lessons that help empower students through examination, validation, and celebration of their own and others’ cultures” (AVID, n.d.,

Culturally Relevant Teaching: Empowering Students). This strand focuses on empowering students in the classroom and throughout the school by engaging administrators in community building activities as well as critical conversations that are around race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and other topics that are culturally relevant (AVID, n.d.).

With our district being an AVID district and a district that professes (according to some administrators) to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy, the question is how do the two align? First, the very fact that cultural relevance is not touched upon until the third and fourth years of training sends a strong message that it is not considered to be foundational in the AVID program. Although I have not attended AVID's culturally relevant teaching strand and cannot effectively answer whether AVID's training aligns with what I know about the three components of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), I have read descriptions of what is offered within the strands which seem to show a focus on honoring differences among the students within the school buildings and preparing them to take on inequities within our world.

In my research about the culturally relevant teaching strand of AVID, I read the book *AVID Culturally Relevant Teaching: A schoolwide Approach* (2016b). Within this text they cite Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Geneva Gay (2010/2018), and Zaretta Hammond in an interview with Elena Aguilar (2015) to explain what culturally relevant teaching is and why it is necessary. Boyko et al. (2016) also reference Ladson-Billings' (1994a) article, "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" and how she [Ladson-Billings] stressed that culturally relevant teaching is all about good teaching as teaching that focuses on knowing your students-who they inside

and outside of the school building, making their and other cultures known and not just mentioned, as well as addressing issues that cause hurt, pain, and exclusion all while providing academic success for all students. However, not attending the training firsthand of AVID's culturally relevant teaching strands, I cannot say exactly how much they align with Ladson-Billings' vision of CRP.

Since this finding is about contradictions from the district around CRP, it is important to reiterate how commitment to AVID may contradict a commitment to CRP. First, the fact that AVID does not focus on CRP until years three and four of training belies a commitment to it. Second, the CRP-focused strand is optional and, while our district annually sends large numbers of teachers out of town for multiple days of AVID training, I had not heard of anyone attending the CRP strand until my interview with Mr. James, Executive Director and literacy coach supervisor, when Mr. James said, "some of our literacy coaches have gone through AVID training where they had culturally relevant pedagogy" (James, Interview September 24, 2020); he also said, "I actually had training myself last year from AVID trainers who were specifically there for culturally relevant teaching (James, Interview, September 24, 2020).

The reality is that many teachers do not get to year three of the training which allows them to take the culturally relevant teaching strand. From my experience and in speaking with other teachers who have attended AVID training, principals usually send someone for one or two years and then send other teachers in their schools to receive the two-year foundational and implementation strands of AVID. Thus, I am confident in stating that there are not a lot of teachers attending AVID training within our district who experience any development around CRP through that training. I am left to infer that the

foundational implementation strands instead of the culturally relevant teaching strands are a priority for our district.

Contradictions Around Literacy Coach Training. Related to district contradictions, the lack of focus on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in literacy coach trainings in our district was a tremendous barrier to making CRP foundational to my work as a literacy coach. As a district literacy coach, we met monthly with our district literacy specialists to discuss expectations of the district, making sure schools are following the district mandated ELA curricula (OCR), but not much training was placed on how to effectively coach teachers through an equity lens. We had a virtual book study on Elena Aguilar's (2020) *Coaching for Equity, Conversations that Change Practice*, where we conducted conversations in break out rooms and all together. During this book study, I would have liked to have had more in-depth conversations about how this looks in classrooms and how to support teachers with this type of coaching. Analyzing data from my own reflections as a literacy coach, it was clear that our district literacy specialist sees the importance of providing equity in our role as literacy coaches; but they also need their own support to lead us in making this a part of our role. However, any study of culturally relevant pedagogy as foundational to our role as literacy coach was nonexistent; and this created a barrier for me because I was not receiving training on how to add CRP to my role as a literacy coach.

Contradictions at the School Level

Since the opening of Griffin Elementary School in 2017, the vision of Dr. Marzetti, school's principal, has been for the school family to meet the needs of all of the students. With great effort and initiative to continue to strive to reach the vision, Dr.

Marzetti has continued to support the learning and implementation of CRP to which she is strongly committed. With the majority of her teaching staff being “White, middle class and coupled with the lack of CRP taught in many [teacher education] institutions” (Dr. Marzetti, September 17, 2022) and also recognizing that there can also be “cultural incongruences” (Howard, 2001a) between Black teachers and students, Dr. Marzetti along with Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart (PD providers) put forth a plan to make her vision of CRP as foundational for the school come true. Through the plan, Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart provided the PD as outlined in Chapter Three including working alongside teachers on developing unit studies and deepening their knowledge of both culture and language. However, contradictions emerged through the work as Drs. Clark, Stewart, and Marzetti worked to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational within a system that mandated OCR and other programs that were not culturally relevant.

Contradictions Around the School’s Vision. Dr. Marzetti was supportive of our work to make CRP foundational to teaching across the day. The fact that she invested in ongoing professional support for us provided by Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart and purchased professional literature and children’s books to help us deepen our knowledge provided evidence that she was supportive of this work. She consistently has teachers’ backs when justifications need to be made to parents and district personnel about culturally relevant content and emphases. Aligned with Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994/2009) components of CRP, Dr. Marzetti believes that culturally relevant pedagogy in our school and within our lives should focus on high expectations for student learning, building students’ cultural competence, and operating with a critical consciousness. That is, to be aware of our sociopolitical climate and what is going on in our world as it relates to the students we

serve; meeting students' needs by making teaching relevant to them; and teaching cultural competence in students' own and other cultural groups.

To teach in culturally relevant ways, she believes that educators must learn from and with students and their families and community (Interview, September 16, 2020). Dr. Marzetti believes that everyone, students, faculty, and staff members, all come into our school as who we are; but she believes that we must have the core disposition to want to learn and grow to be better human beings for society and within our school's walls. She feels as though we all should "operate with a core disposition that allows us to operate with a strength-based perspective, avoiding notions, like "they can't," "they don't," "those kids," "these kids" (Marzetti Interview, September 16, 2020). She understands that to adopt this type of pedagogical approach we must be equipped with the right tools to help us learn and grow; but teachers have to want to gain more knowledge and implement it within their classrooms.

To support teachers in developing this pedagogical approach the PD partnership with Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart began. In the beginning the entire faculty was initially mandated to attend the after school professional development once a month. During professional development many teachers did not participate verbally, did not complete assignments, and appeared to be disengaged. Therefore, after the second year of professional development, Dr. Stewart and Dr. Clark suggested that they work only with teachers interested in doing the work. As a result, the CRP professional development became optional for teachers to attend, and the 30 original PD participants are now reduced to approximately 11 faculty members. Having a lower number of participants in the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development and allowing other faculty to

choose another focus for their required PD makes me wonder how a school attains its leader's vision for a school-wide focus on culturally relevant pedagogy. Is it possible? Or does it happen in smaller contexts within the school? And what is the impact of the district's less-than-intensive focus on and investment in CRP a reality at the school level? At the same time, Dr. Stewart, Dr. Clark and Dr. Marzetti all feel that the smaller groups get more accomplished and better results are achieved when teachers are committed to the work.

As with Mr. James at the district level, Dr. Marzetti at the school level seems to see that culturally relevant pedagogy is the foundation of learning. Since this is a professed belief, she is providing opportunities for teachers to learn and grow in their abilities around culturally relevant pedagogy, however, there are not enough people in attendance to make a school-wide change. Looking at our school's participation in culturally relevant professional development, Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson too wondered if their students would be taught through a culturally relevant pedagogy lens as they left their classrooms to go to the next grade.

Contradictions Around Teaching Through a Culturally Relevant Lens. CRP has not yet been fully implemented into our daily instruction and there lies confusion amongst the teachers who are a part of the CRP cohort and want to do the work in their classrooms. There is confusion because, while Dr. Marzetti supported CRP and wants to see implementation of CRP in the classroom, other administrators who were new to our school and had not yet gained knowledge of CRP, did not relay the same messages to teachers. Instead, they relayed messages, for example, that the OCR program must be followed verbatim not deviating from the teachers' guide script, materials, topics, or

timeline. As a result, teachers received mixed messages about instructional beliefs and requirements.

Ensuring that our school's pacing guide matched the district's pacing guide was important for our school's administration team, some more than others. Within that team, some administrators were fine with making some culturally relevant changes to the format of Open Court Reading Curriculum (OCR). For example, some administrators were okay with teachers implementing CRP within their instruction with culturally relevant lessons that were not a part of the OCR script, like adding a different decoding story to be more relevant to the students, as long as they followed the OCR unit topics chronologically. Then there were administrators who did not want any additions or changes and wanted teachers to follow the routines and scripts as written by OCR. The administrators who felt that the instruction had to be verbatim from the OCR teachers' guide held on to the message that was constantly given to teachers by district personnel including myself, that following the OCR program was non-negotiable.

Mixed messages from what administrators constituted to be the curriculum expectation at Griffin Elementary School, whether perceived or real, created problems for teachers who were a part of a school's voluntary CRP PD including myself and the two teacher-participants in my study. As teachers participated in the CRP cohorts with Dr. Clark and Dr. Stewart, they grew in their CRP knowledge and tried to construct their lessons to be more relevant in order to honor the lives of their students. At the same time, they were met with internal challenges. Challenges occurred because at times, when observed by some administrators who used the district walk through observation form, they would receive lower scores on their observations when deviating from the OCR

program. This caused the teachers to feel the impact of the administrators' differing views-having knowledge of CRP and not having knowledge of CRP.

Data that demonstrated confusion as a barrier showed teachers' willingness to engage in culturally relevant work but did not know whether to apply it to their daily instruction or not. In an example often heard from other teachers, one teacher, who was not a part of my research but who was one of the teachers I served in my position as literacy coach, asked, "Am I supposed to do what we learned in the [CRP] cohort or follow Open Court?" As a literacy coach who wanted to coach through a CRP lens, I first acknowledged what the teacher had done within their lesson as a positive, looked at what her particular students needed, and then I gave additional suggestions of ways that I thought would support students' relevance while adhering to the district's requirements, but this teacher felt defeated and did not want to try my suggestions. They said, "I'm just going to do it the way the book says because I'm being evaluated." Having some administrators relay the message that you can address the skills from OCR and other mandated curricula in culturally relevant ways, and others relay the message that required curriculum should not be changed, caused confusion for teachers wanting to be culturally relevant but also wanting to receive a good evaluation (explained more in this chapter).

Clearly Dr. Marzetti was in a difficult position also trying to negotiate messages from the district and differences in school-based administrators' beliefs and experiences with her vision for CRP to be foundational across the school. It is important to note that it is through her courage and tenacity that any CRP PD is possible in our school at all, and she was instrumental in creating a related arts position for African Studies which every student at Griffin in grades K-5 attend every week. However, the barriers and

contradictions she confronted were also barriers I experienced in my position as literacy coach, both of us with the desire to make CRP foundational to our school and, for me, to my position as literacy coach.

District and School Contradictions: A Summation

The district and school both have a vision of teaching students through a culturally relevant lens. However, as described in the sections above, there are contradictions to that vision in the form of mixed messages received by the teachers and by me as a literacy coach. The mixed message from the district was that we are a district committed to culturally relevant teaching, however, the programs mandated for instruction, the amount of investment in CRP PD, and the lack of understanding about how to recognize CRP in mandated programs, demonstrate otherwise.

The district wanted to build a foundation for all our students and decided to use what was promoted as a research-based curriculum in hopes of building this foundation. Although Mr. James and his team asked the Open Court Reading (OCR) representative if the program was culturally relevant, their knowledge of how Gloria Ladson Billings defines CRP was limited so they were not able to adequately evaluate the program based on the representative's responses and their own review of the program. Therefore, expectations to teach OCR with fidelity (verbatim from the teachers' guide) *and* voicing a support to culturally relevant ways were conflicting messages. The school's mixed messages about when CRP was acceptable and when it was not, were also a part of the contradictions found through this study. This led to confusion, uncertainty, and fears for me and for the teachers as described in the following sections.

Fear as a Barrier

In the education field we are constantly being evaluated on our job performance. This evaluation can be fearful for some because it could communicate that you are not doing something “right” and, in turn, that you are not an effective educator. Teachers are concerned about what will happen if they are not following the curriculum when someone from the district or from the administration staff walks into their rooms. This created the barrier of fear for Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson because teaching through a culturally relevant lens was not foundational in the mandated curriculum. Although the teachers felt that making changes to the Open Court Reading (ORC) curriculum was needed, they were fearful of what might happen if they did make those changes. This, in turn, created barriers for me as the literacy coach working to support them. I understood and experienced their fears as well.

Fearing Reprimand and Negative Evaluations: Trained to Follow the Rules

As a result of inconsistencies across leaders’ statements about CRP, teachers worried that observers, from the district and within the school, could deem that they were not following the required curriculum if they deviated from it. They worried that this, in turn, could cause them to have a lower performance score on their observations. This made them fearful of going fully into teaching through a culturally relevant lens although each teacher felt this in different ways and at different levels as described later in this dissertation.

Following the required curriculum was where both Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson thought they had to stay in order to avoid being reprimanded. This was something they had been trained to believe over the years in our district. Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson

both entered our district and were teammates (both teaching first grade) during the 2019-2020 school year before Mrs. Jones moved to kindergarten. They both were required by the district to go through Open Court Reading (OCR) training and they both felt that the clear message they received from their training was that they had to only use OCR and use it verbatim as written in the teachers' guide. Ms. Jones said, "They [district trainers] made it seem like that was what we had to go by" (personal conversation). She also said that once opening the district's pacing guide that was aligned with the OCR program, she felt that she "had to follow it" (personal conversation). Mrs. Jones shared that during her first year in the district, when district personnel came to observe, she "felt nervous to not follow the curriculum because I felt it would be marked off on my evaluation" (personal conversation).

Ms. Pearson agreed with Mrs. Jones with regard to feeling expected to follow the required curriculum and fearing ramifications if mandates were not followed. During her Open Court Reading (OCR) training, she was told by the district presenter that this is what we use in the district for grades K-2nd (personal conversation). Because this statement was made throughout the training, she felt that this was the only program she was to use. This was confirmed again when Ms. Pearson asked me if she and her first-grade team could change the order of units as presented in the Open Court Teachers Guide for the 2021-2022 school year. I spoke with an administrator who said they could not change the curriculum and that it had to be taught the way it was presented through the district's pacing guide (Meeting with a member of the administration team, April 1, 2021). The administrator did say that they could work with me to create culturally relevant books and PowerPoints or the teachers could create them and present them to me

for my approval, but that this could be done only periodically (Meeting with member of the administration team, April 1, 2021), meaning that it could not be done every week because they wanted the students to be exposed primarily to the text in Open Court Reading.

Fear Resulting from Mixed Messages

Building from discussion of contradictions and mixed messages earlier in this chapter, teachers' uncertainty as a result of those contradictions led to fearfulness about not fulfilling requirements of their jobs. For example, Mrs. Jones held onto the view that she could only teach the curriculum the way it was presented in the Open Court Reading (OCR) program, until she and the kindergarten team were given the okay from the Principal, Dr. Marzetti, who had received permission from Mr. James, to not teach OCR verbatim from the Teacher's Guide. When I spoke with Dr. Marzetti about receiving permission to not follow the curriculum verbatim, she said that she had addressed her concerns about OCR with Mr. James and shared why she believed CRP instruction would help our students grow and he told her she could support teachers in trying out what they were learning about CRP and student achievement. I found this to be an aspect of interest convergence (Bell, 2004) because the conflicts with challenging the district's curriculum that I expected and did experience, were finally resolved and provided with relief and hoped to bring about a curriculum change in our district.

When Dr. Marzetti and I spoke of this we were preparing for the fourth nine weeks and therefore, we decided to take this window of opportunity and support the kindergarten team in creating CRP embedded lessons while using Open Court Reading (OCR)'s phonics focus, the district's Balanced Literacy Model, and Lucy Calkins' Units

of Study (Calkins, 2013) writing curriculum. This is when Mrs. Jones and the other kindergarten teachers developed and taught the three two-week units around the singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock (see Chapter Four).

However, in spite of this lessening of requirements, while Mrs. Jones felt comfortable teaching mandated skills in culturally relevant ways, Ms. Pearson and the other first-grade teachers did not feel as though they could stop teaching the full OCR curriculum. This was primarily because they were getting conflicting information as one administrator told them that they would not be able to deviate from the way the phonics portion of the curriculum was written, the order of the units, and that the only change they could make would be to some of the stories used for instruction, with the support of me. Therefore, instead of replacing culturally irrelevant OCR lessons with relevant ones (to teach the same skills), Ms. Pearson and her first-grade colleagues who participated in the CRP cohort did both: they taught the lessons prescribed in the OCR curriculum along with (rather than instead of) the culturally relevant lessons developed with Dr. Clark in the Art for All Unit (see Chapter Four).

Having to follow the curriculum as a non-negotiable was a message that was received by not only Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson, but also Mrs. Bryant, Ms. Pearson's student teacher. This became clear one afternoon when meeting for the teacher debrief, support, and planning session, Dr. Clark shared what we had discussed in her CRP PD about using culturally relevant texts to teach the letters and sounds instead of using the OCR program's letter card and discussed that the OCR letter cards (a) represented the dominance of whiteness in the representation of people and (b) taught the sounds of letters out of the contexts of real reading and therefore in less effective ways.

In spite of the research shared by Dr. Clark during the PD, the power of mandate from the administrator was still very strong for the teachers. I asked Ms. Pearson and Mrs. Bryant how they could teach skills using culturally relevant texts in their class and Mrs. Bryant said, “My first question is, are we allowed to use this instead of Open Court” (Bryant, Small Group, February 11, 2021). It was apparent that she too had received the message and did not want to do something that was not “right.” It is important to note that Ms. Bryant was coming from a teacher education program that focused heavily on the concepts and practices Dr. Clark taught during PD and, even with that knowledge, the mandates still caused confusion and fear.

Before conducting my research, I knew that these fears lay heavily in teachers’ minds, so I tried to get to the bottom of these contradictions in my interviews with Mr. James and Dr. Marzetti at the start of my research. When interviewing Mr. James, I asked about his expectations as well as other district personnel’s expectations of teachers when observing them. My initial question about expectations of teachers following the district mandated curricula was asked when we were discussing our required writing curriculum, Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study Writing (Calkins, 2013), and I asked:

If you were to come in or someone from the district office were to come in and a teacher was not following the script of the connection or teaching point that is written down, would you feel a need to have to talk to the teacher or would you be okay if they were using something that was more relevant to the class or the situation, environment of their class. (James, Interview, September 24, 2020)

Mr. James responded, “I don’t think we are robots” (James, Interview, September 24, 2020). He continued by saying, “As long as they can utilize the resources to reach

their students for growth within the framework, I'm okay" (James, Interview, September 24, 2020). I then asked Mr. James if that was the same for Open Court Reading. Not indicating that he was talking about culturally relevant teaching, but other programs and lessons teachers might find online, he said, "When you start utilizing non-evidence-based practices, non-research-based practices, and you're buying things online and those things that are just popular and not proven, that's what we have problems with" (James, Interview, September 24, 2020).

When interviewing Dr. Marzetti, I also asked her about her expectations for teachers to take what they learn about culturally relevant pedagogy and apply those practices to the curriculum that they are required to teach and she said, "Teachers have to operate from their authentic place too. So, it has to be organic to that teacher and the students in their classroom" (Marzetti, Interview, September 16, 2020). However, in a leadership meeting, I have heard Mr. James state that we have to use our curricula with "fidelity" which typically means following the prescribed program verbatim. To me, operating organically and from an authentic place would not offer the fidelity that Mr. James was expecting, so I asked Dr. Marzetti what fidelity meant to her. She stated that fidelity was "practicing in the way that the company or that curriculum is asking us to engage in it" (Marzetti, Interview, September 16, 2020) which adds another layer of confusion. Does this mean that teachers may or may not diverge from the OCR topics and materials?

Since I knew how strongly Dr. Marzetti felt about teachers doing what was needed for the individual students, I asked her what she would recommend for teachers and/or for myself to say to district personnel if they came in and teachers were not

teaching through those curricula pieces with fidelity. Dr. Marzetti's explanation was that we should say, "I am using this, this is how this is meeting their needs, and this is the concepts that are being taught" (Marzetti, Interview, September 16, 2020). She also said that she felt strongly that if students' academic results were good that the district would be okay with adding resources to enhance the lessons and that if "the district came in they would be okay with it to be honest" (Marzetti, Interview, September 16, 2020). Note, however, that she specifically said we could *add resources to enhance lessons* and not *replace culturally irrelevant resources with relevant ones to transform lessons* which are two very different approaches.

In interviewing Mr. James and Dr. Marzetti (separately) about their views regarding teachers not following the curriculum, they both seemed to support the idea of teachers doing what is needed for their students. Mr. James said that teachers need to step out of the box or, better yet, that it was "best not to get in the box" (James, September 24, 2020). However, this became one more contradiction: Whether stepping out of the box or not getting in the box, there was a limitation placed on how far out of the box teachers could go. For example, Mr. James said that teachers needed to utilize the resources of the required curriculum to reach "growth within the framework" (James, September 24, 2020). When Dr. Marzetti was asked about following the curriculum, she said that she wanted teachers to think outside of the box and find other areas to use culturally relevant pedagogy if their ELA block where OCR was mandated would not allow for culturally relevant pedagogy. She said:

I argue constantly that if you are thinking about CRP as only tied to ELA then you are missing the point because CRP and culturally relevant teaching is

foundational to what you are doing, so you embed it in everything. (Marzetti, Interview, September 16, 2020)

Thus, in this instance, although Mr. James and Dr. Marzetti shared their support of teachers not being in a box, their support came with limitations (teachers must use ORC materials and find other areas for teaching CRP). Having these limitations placed on what they could do and experiencing these confusing and sometimes contradictory statements regarding the curriculum is why the teachers felt fearful in doing something other than the required curriculum. Their hesitancy came from the messages sent at the OCR training and not having the support of some school-based administration to change curriculum from what the district had set forth as what they should use for teaching. However, even though they had fears of not following the mandated curriculum, they found some ways to move through this fear.

Moving Through the Fear

Mrs. Jones who has repeatedly said, “I am a rule follower” (personal conversation) wanted to follow what she heard and interpreted at the Open Court Reading (OCR) training; but found relief and joy in teaching with the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit described earlier. She felt relief, that took away some of her fear, when she heard that Dr. Marzetti had received permission from Mr. James for teachers to move away from strictly teaching from OCR, in Dr. Marzetti’s words “for a short period of time.” What constituted a “short period of time” was not clarified, but when we were given the go ahead it was the 4th nine weeks, the last nine weeks, of the school year. Ms. Pearson on the other hand, did not get as much relief from Dr. Marzetti’s announcement that they

could deviate from ORC in some ways because the first-grade teachers received the message that they could not change the curriculum from another administrator.

Thus, when Ms. Pearson and the first-grade team taught the Art for All Unit (described in Chapter Four) in culturally relevant ways, they also taught the unit as prescribed by the OCR. So, in effect, they taught the unit twice. Ms. Pearson said, “I’m going to do what I am supposed to do” (personal conversation) and therefore, she did double work: Art for All CRP Unit and Art for All OCR Unit. In the end, both teachers felt responsible for teaching required skills to a high standard and they both followed the rules; however, Mrs. Jones was able to leave her fear of getting a bad evaluation (personal conversation) and be “more creative in my way of teaching when I didn’t strictly go by the script of Open Court” (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021). Support they found to be helpful in moving through these fears is described later in this chapter in response to the research question about support.

Concerns About Teaching the Critical Consciousness Component of CRP as Barriers

As I wrote in Chapter One, my theoretical frameworks are critical race theory and BlackCrit, and according to Yosso et al. (2004) an aspect of critical race theory (CRT) is to work toward social justice; and BlackCrit according to Dumas and ross (2016) is to acknowledge and fight against anti-Blackness and these lenses were used to determine this finding about critical consciousness. Viewed through these lenses, another barrier to successful culturally relevant teaching was the teachers’ hesitancy in incorporating the development of students’ critical consciousness.

My research was conducted during turmoil within our country and nation. Across televisions and social media, we were constantly inundated with reports of the senseless murders of innocent Black people such as Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13, 2020), and George Floyd (May 25, 2020). These were only a few of the many other important lives lost because of racial profiling during the time of my research that are not named here. Protests were taking place all around the world as people stood in solidarity with Black people who have, for centuries, been treated with excessive force. Watching George Floyd, Jr. die as a police officer pushed his knee into his neck, provided a window for many White people into the daily lives of Black folk and the importance of the words, “Black Lives Matter.” It was also during this time that we experienced the combination of the COVID pandemic and public institutions closing (i.e., schools and other workplaces), thus Americans were at home, engaged more with media, and were forced to see how racism is still prevalent. With all that was going on it seems as though it would have been a particularly important time to teach through a culturally relevant pedagogical lens to honor what children and adults were going through and to help to raise new generations who are aware of injustice and capable of standing against it.

However, during this time, because of the COVID pandemic, Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson and I were teaching children and meeting with each other virtually and face-to-face while we too, were struggling with witnessing the constant anti-Black racial discrimination and unjust treatment against our race. This became a source of discussion during our debriefing sessions particularly as we talked about the component of culturally relevant pedagogy that asks teachers to develop students’ critical consciousness and how

they felt about it in a time when we were watching continued violence against Black people and feeling as though nobody cared about us as people. During Mrs. Jones' initial interview, the one thing she stated she would not feel comfortable talking about "would be political stuff" (Jones, 3rd Part Initial Interview, November 17, 2020) largely because she did not know how parents would feel about their child's kindergarten teacher addressing such heavy topics in the classroom. Ms. Pearson expressed her feelings this way, "Stress level was up because I think me just personally, I wasn't ready to deal with a lot of the issues that were going on overall, but I'm getting there" (Midpoint Interview, March 26, 2021).

As described in this section on Support for Culturally Relevant Teaching later in this chapter, both teachers ultimately built their confidence in bringing critical conversations about race into their classroom. However, when we began to approach teaching through a critical consciousness lens, the process of building this confidence included discussions of their fears and concerns as well as challenges and our own emotional involvement as Black women and mothers, sisters, daughters, spouses of Black men. When discussing the component of critical consciousness, we spoke about whether their scholars' (students) families would be accepting of these discussions within the classroom as well as their own confidence in talking about issues of injustice. To further discuss this finding, the following sections explore those two challenges.

Concerns About Parents' Acceptance of the Work

Both teachers in this study initially experienced uncertainty about engaging students in critical conversations when thinking about whether parents would accept this type of teaching. They knew that the type of teaching they wanted to do would require

dismantling much of the curriculum and transforming students' education within and beyond the state standards and prescribed programs and materials by telling stories of all people and not only White people or the stories deemed appropriate by White people or what Au et al. (2016), call visibility narratives. They wanted to give students a look into the lives and histories of Black people that have been intentionally omitted or marginalized in the curriculum and/or standards from the time of colonization (Au et al., 2016; Muhammad, 2020; Woodson, 1933/2010) and they wanted students to understand why those inequities occurred. During times of racial violence in our country, they wanted their classrooms to be safe and constructive places to discuss those events and issues.

Their concerns about parents were first voiced during COVID when they were teaching some students in a face-to-face setting in their classrooms while also teaching students virtually. This left Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson wondering if the parents sitting at home with their children while they learned virtually would be fine with them having deep critical conversations. Reservations were revealed from Mrs. Jones during part two of our initial interview due to her worry about the pushback that could occur with teaching from a critical lens because she felt that some families would feel that kindergarten students are too young to learn about and discuss heavy topics that are sometimes viewed as "grown folk business." She said, "I do become concerned with that pushback of 'I don't want my child learning about this.'" (Jones, September 30, 2020). The most recent injustices such as the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd were the areas she felt she would receive pushback from by parents.

Although she described concerns about having pushback from parents, Mrs. Jones also spoke about why it is important to have these discussions in the classroom, so that we can have more James Tysons in the world. Tyson was the White activist who stood with Bree Newsome, a Black activist who took down the Confederate Flag that flew on South Carolina's State House grounds in 2015 (Jones, September 30, 2020). Later in the research, Mrs. Jones again expressed concerned about the pushback from parents especially after hearing that another educator at our school had "experience[d] backlash from parents like, we don't want you to talk about this or talk about that stuff" (Jones, Initial Interview Part 3, November 17, 2020).

Like Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson also had reservations about bringing critical consciousness topics into the classroom. She felt that parents would push back on topics of injustices. She not only felt that parents would feel it was too much for their children, but she felt that all the recent injustices we were encountering were too much for her. In our February 18, 2021, professional development meeting she said, "it was too much for me and that is why I didn't want to bring it in because there may be families that have not crossed that with their children." Ms. Pearson wanted her students to "just be kids" and initially felt that "being a kid" meant not having to face racial realities through discussions in and out of the classroom. She explained:

[There's] the drive for everyone encouraging to talk about things and I'm like, in one aspect I get that I need to have them aware and if they have already been aware with watching the news with their parents or not, but at the same time, I look at it, my students don't talk about a lot of that stuff on their own in here. So,

then my mindset is just let kids be kids. (Pearson, Mid-Point Interview, March 26, 2021)

Ms. Pearson wanted her kids to be kids, did not know how much the parents wanted their children to be exposed to, and did not want to “step on any toes” (Pearson, Mid-Point Interview, March 26, 2021). She felt that parents should introduce their children to the heavy injustices instead of her within the classroom.

Both teachers began this research with concerns about having push back from parents. However, by the end of the study, there was only one parent who Mrs. Jones contacted about their child during the George Floyd discussion. Mrs. Jones noticed that one of her Black students who was attending class virtually, exited off the screen when they were talking about George Floyd the day after Derrick Chauvin’s guilty verdict. She contacted the parent to check in on the child, to see if they were okay or if there was a connection problem. She did find out from the parent that the student had asked if they could get off and was told yes because they seemed sad with the discussion about George Floyd.

In speaking with the child’s mother, Mrs. Jones found out that the child was aware of what was going on, but this was stressful for them. Mrs. Jones said that the mother was not upset and was appreciative of what she was doing, but it was just too much for her child at that time. When talking with Mrs. Jones about this, she felt good that the parent was appreciative of her teaching about social justice, but she also felt sad for the student. She was glad that the student was able to have a safe place by getting off the computer, but that caused both of us to wonder what to do when other students do not have a safe place to go because they are in the classroom. This, however, did not change

her stance on the importance of teaching through a critical lens as she felt it was still important to develop students' critical consciousness. There were no other known concerns from any parents in either of the two classes.

Needing to Build Confidence in Teaching About Issues of Justice

The challenge regarding worries about parent reactions discussed in the previous section had much to do with the teachers' confidence as they developed their abilities to teach in culturally relevant, and specifically, critically conscious ways. Ladson-Billings (1994/2009, 1995a, 1995b, 2011, 2021) explains that often the most difficult CRP component to teach is critical consciousness and therefore, it is more frequently omitted. This was found to be true in the study, thus, leading to a specific finding around the topic of confidence. In Mrs. Jones' words, teaching about injustices "can be scary if it's something that you are not confident in. It's something you have to be very, very confident in" (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021).

There are many definitions for the word confidence, but the definition that I will use is from Oxford Languages (2021) and defines the word as a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities. I have chosen this definition because it best depicts how the teachers wondered about their self-assurance in teaching through this lens as well as how they evolved into having confidence.

Critical consciousness is about noticing the injustices, discussing them, and then doing something about that injustice. Regrettably, there are a lot of social justice issues within our world today and our schools need to be a place where students can safely share their thinking. However, as described earlier, conducting my research at a time that was stressful for many people in the world, including the teachers, students, and me, critical

consciousness was an area that the teachers did not initially feel confident in teaching. The political and racial positions intersecting with all of these matters (racial injustices around police profiling and murder as well as health care and employment as seen during the COVID pandemic) made teaching through a critical conscious lens an uncertainty for Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson.

Another reason that teaching through a critically conscious lens was difficult for both teachers was because, at first, they did not feel confident in addressing critical topics with young children. Early in the study during my initial interview with Mrs. Jones, she said:

I am concerned with teaching the most relevant information with the things that are going on because I am a kindergarten teacher. It does become a challenge when it comes to the age that I am teaching and sharing with them the things that are going on. (Jones, 2nd Initial Interview, September 30, 2021)

While Mrs. Jones believed that her kindergarten children were probably aware of what was going on with the murder of George Floyd, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement because they may have seen it on TV or heard it at home (Jones, 2nd Initial Interview, September 30, 2021), she did not know how she would address it in the classroom. During an initial interview, I could see that Mrs. Jones was having a struggle within herself. She was concerned about her abilities to teach critical consciousness but she also felt that the children needed to learn about injustices now and strategies for addressing them so they could grow up and be leaders who stand up against injustices. She said:

If they hear about it now then they won't be equipped to survive in this society that has merged from everything that has happened. Umm just economically, socially, from our government, everywhere. They need to have an understanding, so that number one if they are Black, they know how to respond and number two if they are not Black you know or do not have to face what Black people do even Hispanics or other ethnic groups do then they can be more understanding to maybe be that one. (Jones, 2nd Initial Interview, September 30, 2020)

Teaching through a critical consciousness lens was harder for Ms. Pearson. As discussed previously, it was a challenge, as she called it, for her to teach in critically conscious ways. In my initial interview with Ms. Pearson, I asked her if she was a culturally relevant teacher she said, "I don't know and the reason why I say that is because I am still working that part out" (Pearson, Initial Interview, September 15, 2020). At that time, she seemed to emphasize the cultural competence element of CRP: "I always made sure to bring in materials that still went with the curriculum but dealt with cultures that were not exactly in my classroom" (Pearson, Initial Interview, September 15, 2020) and explained a sort of tourist approach to teaching "what some other people do as well as far as customs" (Pearson, Initial Interview, September 15, 2020).

Ms. Pearson was particularly reserved about critical consciousness topics. However, she did plan with me a critically consciousness lesson about Black Lives Matter and the LGBTQIA+ community within her Stars and Stripes Unit from Open Court Reading (OCR). In preparing this lesson to teach about "American" symbols (see Chapter Four), she was still feeling a little hesitant about broadening the OCR curriculum to use symbols beyond the Eurocratic symbols in the OCR program. But she persevered

and presented symbols representing Black Lives Matter (raised Black fist) and the LGBTQIA+ community (rainbow) calling them the “challenging symbols” because “when it gets into those deeper talks like that it’s more challenging for me to have those conversations with my students at this age” (Pearson, Small Group, April 15, 2021).

While Ms. Pearson felt that both symbols - fist raised and rainbow - were challenging, she showed the most concern about the rainbow symbol. She was worried that she would have to explain what it means to be from the LGBTQIA+ community and was not confident that she could or should. I reminded her of our prior conversation when I said that she would not have to tell her students what the symbols were:

But to ask the students what this means to them cause when you come to the rainbow they might say, oh it’s a rainbow and some might not say anything. Or you might have a student who will say something and have a student who might say something else and to be prepared not to say I agree or disagree, but that there are some people who use this symbol to represent love for each other. (Frazier, Small Group, April 15, 2021)

Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson are not the only teachers who showed some concern with teaching through the critical consciousness component. The literature in this area demonstrates that many teachers are afraid to address critically conscious topics within the classroom because they do not want to get “too political” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p.6). However, not discussing critically consciousness topics does not provide a safe space for students to share their inner thoughts or to feel that issues they see and hear about are not ignored. Also, not discussing issues of justice and injustice does not mean you are apolitical. In fact, silence is also taking a political stand and often communicates

to students that issues impacting them and the world around them do not matter (Smith, 2014). Having confidence is needed to be able to teach through a culturally relevant lens, in particular a critical consciousness lens. Both teachers had their own level of confidence for teaching through a critical conscious lens. Although they started in different places with their confidence, they both showed growth during this research and are still growing.

Time as a Barrier

As I used this study's theoretical framework as the lens through which I looked at data, it became clear that the issue of time was a barrier to culturally relevant teaching and culturally relevant coaching. BlackCrit theory asks me to consider what data might mean in terms of, in this case, curriculum presented in schools and its origins during days of colonization when its purpose was to uphold the Whiteness and to subordinate Black and Brown people; thus, creating messages of anti-Blackness. To make changes to the curriculum in pro-Black, culturally relevant ways, the teachers had to develop their own knowledge and have time to decolonize the curriculum so that it sent messages of Black joy, brilliance, resistance, and resilience. During this study, the teachers expressed that they wanted to learn more so they could effectively teach their students through a culturally relevant lens. However, to learn more so they could teach more effectively, they needed time to learn and time to prepare their instruction.

Time for Personal and Professional Growth

When speaking of time, it has been said, “there is not enough time” and there was no difference in my findings on time. Time for personal growth was needed to help in building confidence in teaching through a critical and culturally relevant lens. Mrs. Jones said, “I don’t want to misinform them [students]. I want to be solid in what I know, and it

is going to take a lot more reading” (Jones, 2nd part of initial interview, September 30, 2020). Mrs. Jones, although ready to address critical consciousness issues, still had moments where she felt she did not know enough herself and needed to dig a little deeper in her understanding. As an educator and a presenter, she always wanted to go deeper, and read more to get a better understanding because she felt stuck where she was and needed to learn more (Jones, 2nd part of initial interview, September 30, 2020).

Dr. Clark found this in her work with the CRP PD at the school and we discussed this as a mutual frustration. We knew that it was difficult for many teachers to find the time to read, and that some were not particularly motivated to read, and so we sought alternative ways to help them make time. For example, one way was to create space during PD sessions for teachers to read an article or book chapter rather than asking them to do so between sessions. However, even finding time to meet was also an issue. In Chapter Seven, I suggest ways that literacy coaches might create time and space for teachers to grow their knowledge.

Time for Preparation

A lot of great discussions and growth occurred within the small group sessions, but another barrier related to time that I found was the need to have time for preparation. To teach through a culturally competent and critically conscious lens while building academic excellence, teachers must dismantle and replace curriculum which means they must research and plan for counternarratives to the existing curriculum. Even though this takes a lot of time, it is deeply needed. During a small group session, Mrs. Jones spoke about using a book to teach the word family *ock* and made this statement about time:

I mean that was the perfect example, but now it's just finding more books or making more books or making more books so that all those things can be in there. But that would take time. I would honestly like to be able to have time to take the pacing guides, standards, and CRP to match it together, especially since I already know a little bit more about kindergarten here in this district (Jones, Small Group, December 9, 2020).

Mrs. Jones wanted to find ways to help make the connection between all the things they were responsible for, standards, pacing, and making lessons relevant for students.

Although "Dr. Clark so graciously helped us" (Pearson, Small Group, May 13, 2021) in the preparations of units, there was still work to be done by the teachers. Mrs. Jones stated, "it's a struggle doing everything because I am making it from scratch, but I am trying to tie in everything to Sweet Honey in the Rock" (Jones, Small Group, April 29, 2021).

Preparations for the lessons also proved that the teachers wanted to have more time with me to plan, come up with ideas, and help to build their confidence. Mrs. Jones said she wanted to work with me to provide help with covering skills she is expected to teach that she may have questions about (Jones, Small Group, April 29, 2021). When speaking of our time together she also said that she "would have loved even more time with us working together in the classroom" (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021). Ms. Pearson also wanted to have more time with us working together because it helped with her learning more about culturally relevant pedagogy. Her words were, "if I had to do things by myself, especially this year with it feeling like such a tedious year, I probably wouldn't even do it" (Pearson, Final Interview, June 9, 2021).

Support for Culturally Relevant Teaching

Obstacles occurred during the work to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my position as literacy coach and, as described in the previous section, were most prevalent in the barriers that the teachers and I found to bringing cultural relevant to day-to-day teaching. These kinds of barriers probably occur because not everyone understands and appreciates what it means to be a culturally relevant teacher and support for the work varies from school to school including conflicting messages about its implementation. Political issues around this kind of teaching have heightened in the last years as people became defensive about teaching about cultures and injustices that go against a public education system that supports the dominant, European and European-American culture (Center on Education Policy, 2020; Chen, 2021). This has opened doors for people to fight against inclusion and change.

With the possibility of people not supporting culturally relevant teaching in the classroom there needs to be support for educators and this leads me to my second subquestion which asked about the kind of support I found in my work to make culturally relevant teaching foundational to my role as a literacy coach and thereby, foundational in teachers' classrooms. In this section, I discuss support as my data analysis identified it to be: (a) support through coaching and learning in a small group; (b) support provided by immediate coach feedback after classroom observations; (c) support gained by witnessing student enthusiasm, motivation, and learning; (d) support found by jumping in and trying; and (e) support to teach across cultural groups.

Support Through One-to-One Coaching and Learning in a Small Group

As the teachers participated in this research, they grew as learners of culturally

relevant pedagogy. I found that having a smaller setting (research professional development) and one-on-one learning was better for them as they deepened their knowledge about culturally relevant pedagogy and how to become teachers of it. When discussing which setting, they liked, Dr. Clark's larger professional development group or our smaller professional development group, both teachers preferred the opportunity afforded to them in the teacher debrief, support, and planning small group setting.

Ms. Pearson said that being in the big group felt very broad, "but this [small group professional development] is specific to me and my students" (Small Group, May 27, 2021); which made it easier to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy and how to implement it in her classroom. Mrs. Jones said that the small group professional development "was a safe place" (Small Group, May 27, 2021). During this teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions development, Mrs. Jones also added that just as children needed a safe place to learn, it was important for teachers to also have a safe place to learn (Small Group, May 27, 2021). Just as students needed and had safe places to learn about and discuss cultures and injustices of our world in age-appropriate ways, both teachers needed a place that they could do the same.

Our teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions also provided that safe place for them as learners. Mrs. Jones said that she was able to elaborate more on her thinking and was able to apply it in her class immediately (Small Group, May 27, 2021). In our small group, they were able to express how they felt and ask questions to deepen their knowledge of the components and how to implement them in the classroom. Having a safe place for them to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy was important, but I also found that it created a place where they could safely acknowledge where they were in

terms of readiness to implement, for example, issues around developing students' critical consciousness. Our small group sessions provided a safe place for confidence for both Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson to build their confidence and teach through a critical conscious lens.

One example of the impact of one-to-one coaching and our small debriefing group emerged when analyzing my initial interview with Ms. Pearson. After the interview, I noted her work to build students' cultural competence at her previous school, so I wanted to know how I could help with her teaching from a critical consciousness lens. Therefore, when we returned for part two of her initial interview, I was prepared to follow up with questions I thought might support her ability to teach from a critical conscious lens. I started by asking, "What do you see as helpful ways to help you learn more about CRP?" (Frazier, Pearson 2nd part of Initial Interview, September 29, 2020). Ms. Pearson responded:

Being open minded and being open to learning something new and interact with new people and learning about people and learning more about their culture and learning about them and what is going on in our world today, different topics and different things that may not be lite and cheerful and have some sense of what is going on even though it's heavy and maybe kind of sorta on the negative side or the challenging side I would say. (Pearson, 2nd part of Initial Interview, September 29, 2020)

Ms. Pearson was open-minded and said that having the opportunity to work in the teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions with me and Mrs. Jones was good for her, because she got lost in Dr. Clark's larger group PD sessions. She said that the smaller

group, teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions made her more comfortable (personal conversation & Small Group, May 27, 2021). Within this comfortable area she was able to take things at her own pace and her confidence began to grow. This comfort also made it possible for her to express what worried her about CRP and where she lacked confidence which made it easier for me, as the literacy coach, to know what to introduce next.

A further example demonstrates how our small group debrief sessions supported the teachers. One is from our session on February 18, 2021, also attended by Dr. Clark. During the meeting, I asked for clarity for myself in teaching through a critical conscious lens because this too was a hard area for me to coach through (I discuss my own growth in confidence in Chapter Six). My understanding of critical consciousness at that time was limited to thinking it could only focus on issues of racial discrimination - standing up for things that were discriminating and hurting people, issues like those surrounding the murder of George Floyd or football player, Colin Kaepernick taking a knee and refusing to stand for the national anthem. I expressed this in the February meeting.

Both Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson shared this impression. Dr. Clark then explained that building children's critical consciousness might have to do with larger national and local issues around racial discrimination but that, at its core, it is helping students learn to notice when anything is unfair or unjust and learning that they can do something about it. It could be bullying on the playground, environmental issues, language discrimination, noticing the lack of books about certain groups of people in a classroom book collection, etc., but not to shy away from the larger issues. She talked about how, when the classroom is established as a space where injustices can be brought up and addressed

regularly no matter how big or small, it becomes less scary to discuss larger events when they occur (Small Group, February 18, 2021). With Dr. Clark's explanation and being in the safe space of our debriefing session, Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson, and I had a shift in our thinking about what it means to be a critically consciousness teacher and fears were reduced for us. It was helpful for us to understand that helping students take critical stances to speak up can range from reacting about someone in their class who is not being treated fairly to addressing a national injustice and grows from a culture that educators normalize in their classrooms.

Support Through Immediate Literacy Coach Feedback to Classroom Observations

In my role as a literacy coach, I found that my immediate feedback on lessons that I observed was appreciated by Mrs. Jones. Although I did not construct the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit with Mrs. Jones, I supported her through observations, providing feedback from what I observed about her teaching of the lessons, and from the feedback I provided her with next steps in teaching her lessons. This is something that Mrs. Jones liked, receiving feedback from me after I observed her classroom (Small Group, May 27, 2021; Final Interview, June 9, 2021).

After each observation, I would write on my feedback form that consisted of a compliment(s), asking a question(s), and providing support and suggestions. A template of the feedback form can be seen in Appendix F. I used this form so that I could communicate these points with teachers and use them as talking points when we later met to debrief the lesson. These points were also used to help with planning for the next lesson. Providing feedback on this form and with the classroom was something that Mrs.

Jones appreciated about our partnership. This was evident in her final interview when she said:

I loved your academic feedback. It was quick feedback whenever I taught, there were so many. I really, really appreciate it. Whenever you did come in and observe and your feedback and the suggestions that you gave because it really helped me out to reflect on how I am teaching, so I really, really enjoyed that.

(Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021)

Mrs. Jones also liked when I would give impromptu feedback in the middle of her lessons and wanted to do more co-teaching with me. For example, during her final interview I asked if there was anything she could change about our time together for the research what would it have been and her response was:

I know because of COVID it was hard, and you did teach with me on the screen some, but I would have loved even more time with us working together in the classroom so that, you show me and then I do and you correct me right then and there because I'll start bad (*voice drop in a joking way*) habits or whatever, but having you in there to quickly give me pointers and everything, I loved that whenever we were able to do that. (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021)

Listening to what worked for Mrs. Jones opened a door for us to continue working together the next school year. I told her, that I was glad “that it was helpful and co-teaching is definitely something that we can do together next year” (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021).

Student Learning, Motivation, and Enthusiasm as Support

Mrs. Jones showed so much excitement for teaching through a CRP lens with the

Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit. While observing her class, I saw excitement and motivation from the students as they learned through the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit. I saw students smiling while working on phonics skills through songs and changing sounds within words. This is an example of how the students' enthusiasm for culturally relevant teaching was highly supportive of the teacher's motivation to continue with the work. In our teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions development, Mrs. Jones described her students' learning experience:

My kids are loving the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit! They are coming to life and building their confidence with their skills. They love talking about Sweet Honey in the Rock. They are a little more willing to do the work. (Jones, Small Group, April 29, 2021)

Her students enjoyed the lessons she presented, and they performed well on the assessments of required skills. Figure 5.1 represents how Mrs. Jones introduced the word family *-ock* and used Sweet Honey in the *Rock* from a unit they loved to support the students learning the skill of phoneme manipulation, substituting sounds to create new words.



Figure 5.5 Changing the Initial Sound and Producing Rhyming Words or Word Patterns

To teach and review phoneme manipulation by substituting the long vowel sound in the middle of a word, students also engaged in using a Sweet Honey in the Rock song entitled *Everybody Oughta Know* which they first learned and came to love in its original form and to talk about concepts like freedom, justice, friendship, and happiness as used in the song. Mrs. Jones then used the song to continue working with phoneme manipulation by teaching them how to substitute the long vowel sound in the middle of a word. Figure 5.2. demonstrates how students used long e, spelled ee, to read/sing the word freedom. When changing the middle vowel sound, they produced words Fraedom, Friedom, Fruedom, and Froedom. These are what some people call “nonsense words” and while most literacy scholars see them as unnecessary and even counterproductive in the teaching of reading, the reality is that some of the more Eurocratic assessments of early literacy require abilities to apply phonics and phonemic awareness knowledge to “sound out” words that have no meaning and just follow particular phonemic patterns. Teaching phonemic segmentation in this way, starting with something the children already loved, motivated them in the work to learn skills they would need to know for literacy assessments. This, in turn, motivated Mrs. Jones to continue with the CRP work.



Figure 5.6 Chant Used to Change the Medial Sound to Support the Long Vowel Sound

When observing Ms. Pearson's class, I also witnessed students' motivation to read, illustrate, and discuss as they engaged in discussions about Sarah Mae Flemming, their thoughts about wearing or not wearing masks, and learning about Black and Brown artists. These were lessons that members of the first-grade team developed with Dr. Clark anchored in but responding to the required units entitled Red, White, and Blue; Stars and Stripes; and Art for All, described in-depth in Chapter Four. During our April 29, 2021, small group meeting, Mrs. Pearson shared that her students were engaged in the learning through these units and "getting really involved in it by asking questions" which also, in turn, motivated her to continue with the CRP work as her students' questions led to further learning and engagement in the units of study.

Working with these teachers at this time showed that they were really engaged and enjoyed teaching these units. When speaking about the Sweet Honey in the Rock and teaching about the brilliance of Africa; Mrs. Jones said, "I feel like I was sleep [before]. I didn't know and I was just going through the motions of teaching" (Jones, Final Interview, June 9, 2021). She said that her creativity came out. I, as an observer in the classrooms, could also see and feel a shift in how the teachers were motivated and students as well!

Support Found in Their Own Teaching, Jumping in and Trying

Another way my data demonstrated support experienced by the teachers for culturally relevant teaching was when they jumped in and tried it. In those instances, I noticed their growing confidence. This occurred particularly when both teachers worked on teaching through a critical consciousness lens engaged in teaching units that they worked on with me and Dr. Clark. For example, when kindergarten taught their Sweet

Honey in the Rock Unit, Mrs. Jones, who had previously been hesitant to teach about issues of injustice, freely had discussions with her kindergarten students about the contributions of Africa but also racial injustices. Even though Ms. Jones continued to express mixed feelings about teaching a critical consciousness throughout this study, each time we did an interview, had a small group meeting, planned, or I observed her class, I noticed that she was teaching more and more from a critical lens and gaining confidence as she taught.

Mrs. Jones expressed that the students “need to have an understanding [of realities of society]” (Jones, 2nd Initial Interview, September 30, 2020) and she implemented a lot of critical consciousness topics through the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit. Through this unit, she grew significantly in her confidence of teaching through a critically conscious lens as she saw the students engaged in the topics and were “getting it” when she had worried that they were too young to understand issues of marginalization and injustice. This also impacted her own thinking as the incorporation of CRP is what made Mrs. Jones, as she stated, become “woke” within her teaching.

However, the teachers needed support if further confidence was to be built. As they taught lessons that were critically conscious, they would often ask if they were “doing it right” to make sure that they were not offending anyone (Jones, Initial Interview, September 2, 2020). They definitely wanted the approval of me and Dr. Clark because feeling were still anchored in that “one right way” mentality that hindered breaking away from mandated programs. Thus, even as they built confidence and made growth, they still often wondered if their teaching was “right.” This is where other

elements of support mentioned earlier were essential, particularly a space to feel safe talking about CRP and immediate feedback following observations.

Ultimately, although a lack of confidence did bring about challenges when moving forward in planning critical conscious lessons, throughout the period of this research Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson began to feel more comfortable addressing topics of injustice through teaching re-developed OCR units such as Ms. Pearson's Red, White, and Blue; Stars and Stripes; and the Art for All units (see Chapter Four), and Mrs. Jones' Sweet Honey in the Rock units. In fact, Mrs. Jones jumped into teaching through a critical consciousness lens when, on April 21st, Derrick Chauvin, the police officer charged with murdering a Black man, Mr. George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for almost ten minutes, was found guilty of murder. This led Mrs. Jones and her kindergarten team to react. At the time, they were in the midst their Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit on Civil Rights. Through her discussion about Civil Rights, Mrs. Jones led into present day Civil Rights and showed images of protests and talked about George Floyd and his daughter. Her students then wrote letters to George Floyd's six-year-old daughter Gianna to show her some love. As indicated in Chapter Four, Ms. Jones also incorporated a critical consciousness into many aspects of the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit as they focused on activists like Fannie Lou Hamer, contributions of African culture into cultures seen on each continent, embracing the beauty of Blackness, and as she taught the unit on African animals and engaged the children in discussions about African images as stereotypes focused on safaris and particular animals and also being critically conscious of the welfare of animals in captivity.

Support to Teach Across Cultural Groups

Throughout my research, the teachers both believed that academic success was important and that students should know about other cultures. During our interactions they said that, although it was important to teach about Black history and literature, it was as important for them to learn about and teach their students about other marginalized cultural groups. Ms. Pearson shared that at her last job placement, she always brought in things to introduce her students to cultures that were different from their own (September 15, 2020). She also shared that “it was always having to bring in and tie in some of everyone in my class at all times and not just one” (Midpoint Interview, March 26, 202).

Mrs. Jones also mentioned that she teaches about everybody, meaning that she provides window and mirror experiences for her students. She stated, “then everyone else in the class is able to learn about each other and we all celebrate each other. And I don’t just, do African Americans I include everybody” (Part 3 Initial Interview, November 17, 2020). With information gathered from these two teachers it is an important finding that teachers need support to teach about more than one cultural group, while not losing the emphasis on Black students who are the most under-served, misrepresented, and criminalized in the United States. They both recognized that our curricula have Whiteness at the center (Au et al, 2016, Lyiscott, 2017) and, at its heart, that is likely the foundational reason that they wanted to grow in their abilities to teach in culturally relevant ways.

Conclusion to Chapter Five

In this chapter, findings were reported in answer to the questions about barriers and support experienced in my work to make culturally relevant teaching foundational to

my position as literacy coach. I described different barriers that arose for both me and for the teachers over the course of the study including contradictions between the district and school's understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and mandates or statements made by school and district leaders; fears and concerns about teaching through a critical consciousness, building confidence, and needing time for professional study and preparation. My findings reported here also demonstrated elements of the experience that supported the work to emphasize culturally relevant teaching: working together in a small setting, the coach providing immediate feedback to observations, being motivated by students' enthusiasm and learning, and support for teaching across cultural groups while sustaining a focus on Black people, histories, heritage, languages, issues that are not normalized in typical curriculum.

Some teachers want to teach their students to become the best students they can be through the use of standards and prescribed curriculum. Then there are some teachers, like Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson, who, through their study of culturally relevant teaching wanted to teach their students to become the best students they can be through a curriculum that will cause them to be enlightened about the world and come to value who they are as children of Color within systems that constantly devalue them. These teachers are also cognizant of the need to teach White students about the realities of being a person of Color in a White dominant world. In the process, we all met challenges or barriers but also understood the support that kept us moving forward. Those have been described in this chapter as the two two teachers and I worked to provide support—in my role as literacy coach—for students to grow in academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In the next chapter, I explain the findings about what I learned

about myself in this role of a literacy coach as I placed CRP at the foundation of my work with teachers and children.

CHAPTER SIX

A LOOK INWARD

Your willingness to look at your darkness is what empowers you to change.

-Iyanla Vanzant (n.d.)

Literacy coaching is an experience taken up by many educators to help assist in the daily instruction provided by teachers. For me being a literacy coach is a rewarding and challenging job. During a regular school year there are many challenges that come with assisting teachers. For example, there are some teachers who think that working with a coach means that they are not successful teachers, and to keep from being viewed in this way, they choose not to work with a literacy coach and say, “I’m good” (something that teachers say to me when I approach them to work together usually meaning, that they feel that they are fine and do not need the support). Challenges also occur when receiving pushback from professional development (PD) sessions that I conduct. This can look like teachers making no attempts to implement what was presented in the session, and sounds like, “This is not going to work,” or simply, “I’m not doing it!”

Through those challenges, I learn about myself as well as my job. In the same way, when analyzing data from this study, I discovered a lot about myself as a literacy coach and my commitment to making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my role as a literacy coach. I first had to look at my understanding and where I was with

culturally relevant pedagogy. On December 3, 2020, three months into this study, I wrote about my beliefs as a coach and as an educator. Those beliefs, seen in Figure 6.1, were that children need to know about their own and other cultures (cultural competence), something needed to be done to help our [Black] students succeed academically (academic excellence), and counternarratives were important to give students different perspectives to one encounter (critical consciousness). A key finding is that I still had a lot to learn and gain confidence about with regard to culturally relevant teaching, particularly the critical consciousness component (explained in detail in this chapter). And, although I believed and still believe in the three components of culturally relevant pedagogy, I felt that I was not doing enough to provide a culturally relevant daily experience for students and teachers in my position as a literacy coach.

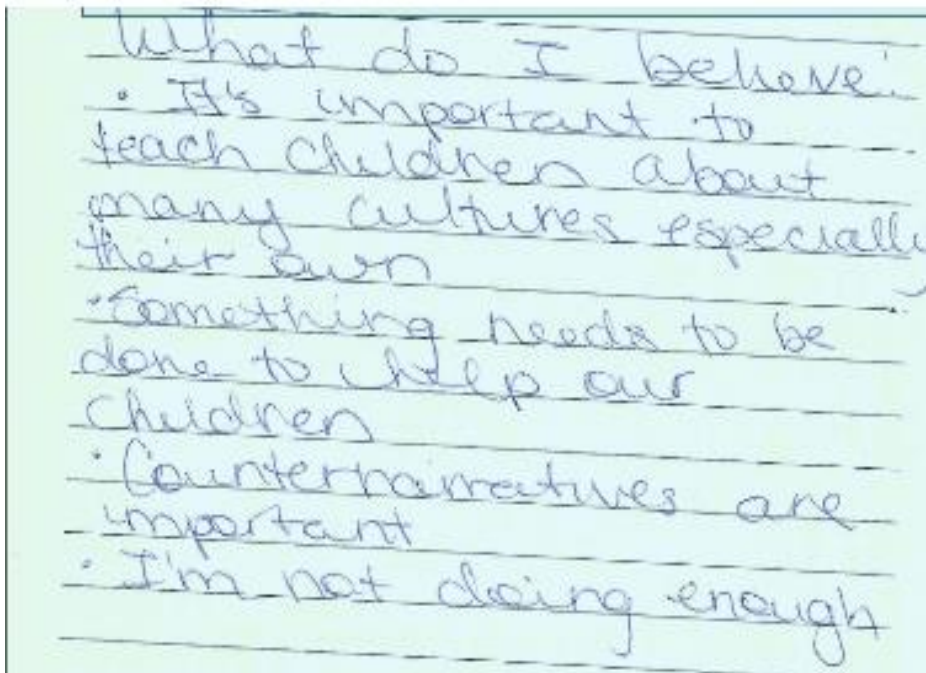


Figure 6.1 Field Journal Entry: Where Do I Go from Here?

In my role as a literacy coach, I am to support teachers and assist them where needed. Throughout my study, I realized that I was able to coach teachers when it came to assisting them with our district's required curriculum in reading. I was able to provide immediate assistance with reading instruction aside from culturally relevant teaching without any hesitation and all assistance was done with ease. This was possible because I am knowledgeable in the reading and writing process as well as theory behind the practice. It was also easy to assist with the reading curriculum of Open Court Reading (OCR) because I have had recurring training on our district's chosen reading curriculum. However, as a culturally relevant literacy coach, I found new challenges. For example, as explored in this chapter, while it was easy for me to see how to add cultural competence to the work that the teachers and I were doing (adding counternarratives to African stereotypes was one way), digging deeper to become a critically conscious literacy coach was hard.

Although I faced some challenges as a literacy coach during this study, like getting comfortable with teaching through a critical consciousness, there were also many rewards that came with the work. For example, I experienced rewards when a teacher and I partnered together to figure out ways to bring academic success to their students. Not only was the partnership a reward, but the growth of the students was a major reward for me. Having teachers participate in a culturally relevant literacy focus and come to me beaming with pride or coming up to tell me about their latest success is rewarding in itself. As a literacy coach these experiences make the challenges a little less heavy to carry.

Challenges and rewards such as these are at the forefront as I write this chapter

because it is dedicated to answering my study's third subquestion: *What can I learn about myself in the role of literacy coach as I attempt to make CRP foundational to my work with teachers and children?* In the following pages, to answer this question, I explore three categories of findings resulting from my analysis of data: (a) self-realizations and navigation of barriers, (b) learning that literacy coaches need coaching too, (c) the importance of a caring literacy coach.

Self-Realizations and Navigations of Barriers Experienced

Waldman (2013) classified the ideal student, as one who did not externalize problems, challenge the rules, complain, or talk excessively; and I was the “good” student. However, as I got older, no longer in elementary school, and began to grow into my own identity, I was viewed differently. The once sweet, mannerable, smart little Black girl was now too talkative and not considered the “good” student of her younger days. Not only was I viewed differently, but I also felt the difference. I would like to say that the ideal conformed student in elementary school and the slightly conformed student in later years ended 22 years ago as I exited high school; but sadly, that is not my story. While speaking up more and more as in this dissertation for example, in many circumstances I continue to conform in school (college) and in the workplace to keep from being viewed as “the disrespectful Black woman” because that has a meaning all on its own. Present day, I have come into more self-realization about myself as a Black woman, mother, wife, and educator.

When I consider self-realizations that are central to the findings of this study, one of the most important is recognizing that I was capable of negotiating barriers I experienced to the work of making culturally relevant pedagogy central to my job as

literacy coach. My theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit address the issues of oppression and anti-Blackness which requires engaging in work that is hard and challenging because it draws attention to the injustices of educational system and our world. This caused barriers as I worked to make a change in my position as a literacy coach. My experiences with those barriers and my navigation of them are discussed in the following subsections exploring my worries about developing students' critical consciousness, the need to give myself grace as a learner, and envisioning coaching through a critical conscious lens.

Mother and Educator: Do I Want to Support a Critical Consciousness?

Through this study, as I continued to grow in my knowledge from conversations, I initiated with Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips, my doctoral advisors; during the teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions; and working with teachers to develop lessons, I developed a deeper understanding about what critical consciousness means and what it can look like in the classroom. While my BlackCrit foundation and the purpose of this dissertation focuses my work on justice and Black people, I also came to understand that building a critical consciousness can address any aspect of life that causes injustices on someone or a group of people, whether based on race, class, social, gender, etc. And I deepened my understanding that this means that when injustices occur, you cannot just notice and talk about them, you have to act upon them and support students in doing the same.

However, while I was able to support teachers in their social justice stances and encourage them to use children's literature that promoted taking a stand against injustice, I was having an internal battle about teaching deeper content especially when the lens

focused on injustices that dealt with racial violences occurring at the time of the study. Although racism has been around for over 400 years, the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin brought the perpetual cycle of the profiling of Black people to the attention of the wider public as did the murder of George Floyd in 2020 during a pandemic when more people were attentive to social media. Devastating news as more and more experiences within the Black community began to circulate through news outlets educated more White people about the ongoing existence of racism in this country. Other hate crimes spanned across this nine-year time period just as they had in the decades before, but as mentioned in Chapter Five, the murders of George Floyd in addition to Breonna Taylor, Andre Hill, Manuel Ellis, Rayshard Brooks, Atatiana Jefferson in 2020 alone were happening within months of each other and for me, it was too much. It was too much for me as a Black woman, wife, mother, and a literacy coach.

As a mother to two young Black men, I struggled with whether our youngest children should be involved in discussions about such heavy topics about what was going on in our world. My oldest, Caleb, was 12 ½ and 13 years-old at the time of my data collection and we had many discussions and pulse checks about how he was feeling about things in the world and had been doing so for years. However, it was Jordan, my youngest, who was four and a half and five years-old at the time of data collection, who made me question if young children should be exposed to all of the violence and hatred in our world through discussions at home or in school. Since Jordan's birth there have been too many senseless murders, which is no different from what was happening at the time of Caleb's birth, but at that time, most of the violent encounters experienced by Black people were not widely visible to the world through social media and cell phone footages.

Lives were taken and families had voids placed on their lives, but for the first five years of Caleb's life he never encountered anything in the ways that children did who were born after February 26, 2012, the day that Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman, a community watch member, as social media made the realities of being Black in America visible to many people.

Year 2020 was Jordan's fourth year of life and during this time he had been inundated with visible hatred in this world and anti-Black violence. In a matter of four months of his being four, he began to think that being Black was negative due to news coverages and family discussions of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, as well as reading books and discussing the lives of Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at home. It is because of Jordan's struggles with the hatred of the world, that I began to wonder, like the teachers in this study, if the students were too young to discuss these issues of racial violence and murders in the classroom, particularly if their parents had not talked to them about this hatred. Those questions constantly weighed on me and, in my field journal, I wrote, "Focusing on critical consciousness [,] how do I do this daily w/ young children [?] They are aware, but what do I do?" (Frazier, Field Journal: How to do all 3 components, n.d.).

Those questions continued to ring in my head and although the critical consciousness component was a barrier for me, I was able to navigate through my feelings by being honest with myself and asking for support. During one of our teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions PD session, I said:

Critical consciousness is where I still need help with and to grow in because as we talked before, it's easier to look at the academics or cultural awareness and that critical

consciousness is a harder piece for teachers to talk about with their students, especially with the racial part and injustices that we face daily. (Frazier, Small Group, February 18, 2021)

Ladson-Billings (2011) stated that critical consciousness is “the most difficult to convey to teachers who wish to develop their own practice” (p. 39), and this was absolutely true for me. It was hard for me for reasons that are probably different than they are for White teachers. As a Black woman, I know that many people have negative thoughts about Black people and although I have conversations with my children about racial inequities, I did not want to speak about the racial violence enacted on Black people because I still wanted Jordan to be aware but not feel that he was not great or deserving of being treated fairly; and I wanted him to enjoy being a kid. The feelings of protecting my child were very over powering and it also made me think about the other Black boys and girls in classrooms. I wondered if this was too much for them and if it would be putting pressure on them by causing their brains to fill with anxiety and fear and thus taking the joy of being a kid away.

While working with the teachers, I continued to reach out for support in my own navigation of critical consciousness and spent time with Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips, my doctoral advisors. My time with these two professors pushed me out of my comfort zone and I was able to understand different ways to address social justice issues in age-appropriate ways, so that I could help Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson teach through all three components of culturally relevant pedagogy.

An important example of the support found in my advisors can be found in Dr. Phillips’s words to me because she is a Black mother, and she gave me some comfort in

doing this work and being a Black mother:

It's a lot. In age-appropriate ways we have to have these conversations with them and say this is how society views you, but this is how you really are and this is who we are. And that's when you incorporate the Black Joy and Black resistance, and that's when you incorporate the Black excellence, and this is who we are. It's not just teaching about the Black men and women who have been killed, but it's also teaching about how we still find joy and ways to achieve the goals we want to achieve. As a teacher and as a parent we never just teach the atrocities.

(Phillips, Long, Phillips, Frazier #2, June 1, 2021)

This also helped me become more confident in teaching and supporting teachers through critical consciousness lessons with younger children. I came to understand that I *do* believe in teaching a critical consciousness with young children and that it includes teaching about Black Joy, Black Resistance, and Black Excellence because we are more than the trauma we face in a racist society!

Needing to Give Myself Grace

Through this process, I learned that I am my own worst enemy and I often stopped my own growth because I was not where I thought I should have been. I felt that, as a literacy coach attempting to support culturally relevant teaching, I needed to be completely fluent in all three components of CRP and experience no challenges to the work. Instead of giving myself grace and acknowledging the steps I was taking, as I am new in learning about culturally relevant pedagogy, I was in a deficit mindset. I felt like a failure (Frazier, Field Journal: How Coach Does This Work, n.d.). I wondered if I knew how to be a literacy coach of culturally relevant pedagogy (Frazier, Field Journal:

Response to Another Teacher, February 16, 2021), and often wondered if I should do this [be a literacy coach of culturally relevant pedagogy] (Frazier, Journal: Jones Yes, Me Wondering, November 1, 2020; Frazier, Journal: Wonderings, November 16, 2020; Frazier, Journal: Feeling Frustrated, January 8, 2021). I would worry because I did not see myself as knowledgeable as this person or that person and did not allow myself to be a learner alongside the teachers.

Although I am still working on coaching through a critical conscious lens, I made growth through this experience even when I thought that I had not. I know that growth was made because, without knowing that I needed validation of my growth, Dr. Clark came with words that pushed me further. When speaking about needing to build my confidence, Dr. Clark said, “You have [grown] though Jennipher. You have grown so much as I have watched you in these meetings” (Clark, Meeting, May 27, 2021). It was great to be told that I made growth when I was feeling that I was failing as a literacy coach of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Worrying About District Expectations for My Job

I shared my personal reasons as to why I felt like a failure, but there was also a struggle on the professional side and feeling inadequate. I struggled professionally as a literacy coach for my school district because we have a curriculum that we are required to teach, but the curriculum is not speaking to the critical consciousness or cultural competence that is needed for all students to see themselves and learn about others. Developing empathy was missing from the curriculum, and while working with two teachers who wanted to truly teach and give students the knowledge of a more complete (American) history, CRP was often not viewed in positive ways by other teachers. Other

teachers, not my participants, were apprehensive about teaching through a culturally relevant lens because “when they got observed [they] got dinged for it [culturally relevant teaching] because they were not doing what was in Open Court Reading (OCR)” (Frazier, Meeting After 1st Grade Meeting, May 19, 2021). The contradictions in beliefs and expectations at the district and school levels (discussed in Chapter Five) meant that having someone observe their teaching who was not in agreeance with CRP made other teachers who wanted to do the work feel uneasy about teaching through a culturally relevant lens.

Not only did the teachers feel that way, but I too felt frustrated because I believed that culturally relevant work was and is needed, but often felt that I was in the middle and being pulled in two different directions. Our school’s principal, Dr. Marzetti, believed that we needed to make culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to our instruction, but the requirements of the district did not seem to leave room for that to effectively happen. For example, the first-grade team that I discussed in Chapter Five came up with a plan to make the lessons connect more for their children’s learning, but because it was not following the guidelines of the district’s curriculum, I felt that I had to live up to my “job description role” and tell them that they were not able to make these changes. That was a struggle for me because I saw how their plan could help make connections for students, but I felt voiceless because I thought of my own family and needing to keep my own job.

This was a place that I felt I was in, wondering what would happen to my job security if I told teachers not to follow the curriculum. Therefore, to navigate through this barrier, I spoke with our principal Dr. Marzetti (Principal and Literacy Coach Meeting,

March 10, 2021). She said that she had voiced her thoughts that OCR was not working well with our students and Mr. James, Executive Director of Elementary Instruction and literacy coaches' supervisor, had given us permission to do what we thought would work best for our students for a little while. Hearing this made me feel better about my job security because I was given permission to do something different than what was required and to make culturally relevant teaching foundational to teaching required skills and knowledge instead of just adding culturally relevant practices in addition to the district's required curriculum.

Although the kindergarten team was given permission to not teach through Open Court Reading (OCR) they still felt compelled to use the phonics focus (the letter cards and other materials and lessons) from OCR each week. Since culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is not about ignoring pacing guides but teaching the required standards and skills in culturally relevant ways while working to dismantle standards that stand in the way of culturally relevant teaching, I worked with Mrs. Jones on planning to teach OCR's Foundational Skills from the chart Dr. Clark created (previous shared in Chapter Four) for the Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit. In using the chart and coaching through the skills on the chart, I felt that I was still complying with the expectations of the district and felt a sense of security as well.

Literacy Coaches Need Coaching Too

Support comes in diverse ways, but it assists the receiver in getting to the next place they need to be. As a literacy coach, it is my job to support teachers in reaching their next desired step professionally. The question is who is there to help me get to my next desired step? To support those teachers who want to teach through a culturally

relevant lens, it is important that districts support the learning of literacy coaches in the area of building a foundation in culturally relevant pedagogy. For literacy coaches, including myself, we need to have support in our learning of culturally relevant pedagogy so that we can provide adequate professional developments and coaching cycles to prepare teachers who impact the lives of students daily.

While interviewing Mr. James, District Executive Director of Elementary Instruction & Literacy Coach Supervisor, he seemed to understand that the literacy coach's role is one of supporting teachers (James, Initial Interview, September 24, 2020). Through this supporting role he stated that coaches should be hands-on with teachers and provide training for them (James, Initial Interview, September 24, 2020). If, however, the district is true to its professed commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), then they need to make that foundational to literacy coach training. This is a key finding from my study: For a literacy coach to be able to coach teachers to be culturally relevant, it is imperative that literacy coaches also receive professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

Since Mr. James was in support of literacy coaches in our district receiving professional development in CRP, I inquired about possible culturally relevant pedagogy professional development for literacy coaches. Mr. James stated that he did have professional development set up, but those professional development plans were changed once we encountered the pandemic. Mr. James said that he was looking at doing virtual training for literacy coaches, but the allocated funds for the literacy coach department were not available and therefore, the literacy coaches were not able to receive this training (James, Initial Interview, September 24, 2020).

Support in learning about culturally relevant pedagogy on the district level was very much needed as I made the commitment to have culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my role as a literacy coach. Without the support of my doctoral advisors, Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips, I would not have made the growth that I made to support the teachers. Having time with Dr. Clark for professional development with the larger faculty group and as she joined my research group sessions allowed for all of us to learn as we all are taking this journey together.

During our small group time, it was obvious that support for a literacy coach who is new to learning and coaching through culturally relevant pedagogy was needed. This was evident within our sessions because I would often ask questions which I categorized as seeking guidance when I would say:

That question that Jones asked about with critical consciousness is where I still need help with and to grow in because as we talked [about] before, it's easier to look at the academics or cultural awareness and that critical consciousness is a harder piece for teachers to talk about with their students, especially with the racial part and the injustices that we face daily. (Frazier, Small Group, February 18, 2021)

It was also obvious that support was needed for me as a literacy coach when I would also ask, "Dr. Clark am I heading in the right direction?" (Frazier, Small Group, March 4, 2021), and "Do you have any help for me Dr. Clark?" (Frazier, Small Group, April 30, 2021). Having small group time with Dr. Clark, but also initiating opportunities to meet with her and Dr. Phillips on my own, allowed time for me to be even more vulnerable in my learning in a safe space which, as did with the teachers in our small group, led to

growth. If there was something that I was having difficulty with, I could express that to them and receive guidance on the next steps that I needed to take. For example, when I worked with Ms. Pearson on developing a book about American symbols that went along with their required OCR curriculum unit, Stars and Stripes, I was excited that I was making a book because it was my first time using what I was learning about being a culturally relevant literacy coach and implementing it on my own. However, that excitement soon dissolved. As I shared the book with Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips, I realized that I still had a way to go in creating culturally relevant text. My book in Dr. Clark's words was "Eurocentric" (Clark, Phillips, Frazier #1, April 12, 2021).

It was in my vulnerability at that time that we were able to talk about the differences between the books that Dr. Clark had created with teachers for the Sweet Honey in the Rock kindergarten unit and the book that I was attempting to make. I listened and understood, and they shared ideas with me for how I could make the lesson one that challenged Eurocentrism. As a result of that experience, ah ha moments were made. This occurred again during planning for the Red, White, and Blue unit with Ms. Pearson and the lesson on American symbols. Dr. Phillips asked me if the symbols meant freedom and happiness for everyone and Dr. Clark told me to keep going back to the three components of CRP to ask if what I was teaching reflected those components (Clark in Clark, Phillips, Frazier #1, April 12, 2021). It is after this that I spoke these words:

I need support [,] like walking through this in my mind, to help me help her or any other teacher. Like having Phillips ask me those questions, you know it did help me say, 'oh yeah, I wasn't staying with it' [culturally relevant 3 components]

I need that support in order to support. (Frazier in Clark, Phillips, Frazier #1, April 12, 2021)

With their assistance I was able to gather my thoughts and assist Ms. Pearson with a lesson that focused on symbols that were meaningful to the students and that also allowed them to think critically about how we represent or do not represent the concerns of all people through symbols considered to be American.

Having Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips to support me through this process is where my last finding on support lies. For me, to be an effective literacy coach, because I was still learning about CRP, it was important to have a highly knowledgeable person to constantly work alongside me. When referring to the growth of Jones, Pearson, and myself, Dr. Clark said that “it takes three-four years to really grasp onto it [culturally relevant pedagogy] and you all have done so well and it is great” (Clark, Small Group, May 13, 2021). If research says that it takes three to four years to grasp new concepts and put them fully into practice, then this means that as a literacy coach, I need the same amount of time to learn and truly implement literacy coaching through a culturally relevant lens.

The Importance of Caring and Differentiating Literacy Coaching

While learning and implementing literacy coaching through a culturally relevant lens, my analysis of data revealed how important it was for the teachers to know that, in my position as literacy coach, I cared about them, their students, and our learning together. For me, caring about the teachers means that you look at the teachers as individuals, get to know them as people and teachers, and then provide support for them. The support that they need. Throughout this process, Mrs. Jones, Ms. Pearson, and I were

at different places in our learning and our implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. No matter what our level of comfort was, it was always important for me to support them at their comfort level. It was and is important for me to work with the individual teacher and meet the teachers where they are.

For example, when Ms. Pearson expressed how she felt about all that was going on in the world, I knew that she was not ready to step out into a heavier focus on critical consciousness teaching because I was feeling that too. It was, however, in that discussion that I made a shift in how I was coaching her and knew that I needed to meet her where she was. I captured my thoughts about meeting her where she was in my field journal, and they [thoughts] are seen in Figure 6.2. Meeting Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson where they were was the best thing that I could have done for them and for me, and I believe it is an example of a literacy coach exhibiting a caring attitude. Caring about them as individuals and providing what they needed was important because it allowed for our relationships to continue to grow and, through that growth, our knowledge grew.

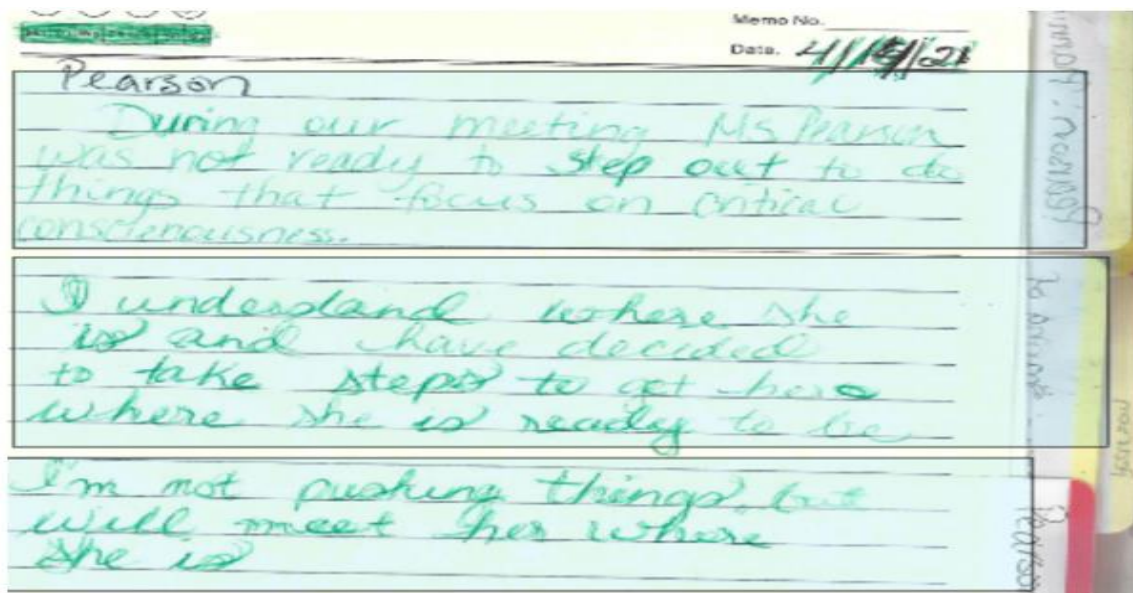


Figure 6.2 Field Journal: Pearson Not Ready to Step Out... I Understand

Finally, not everyone needs the same thing and just as we differentiate instruction for our children, as a literacy coach it was important for me to differentiate my work with the teachers. I described this in Chapter Five when discussing how Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson felt differently in terms of comfort regarding letting go of the OCR program and in terms of developing students' critical consciousness. My approach was different with each of them, working where they were not homogenizing my coaching to be the same for both teachers.

In our final small group session, we talked about best ways to reach teachers to encourage their learning in culturally relevant pedagogy and Ms. Pearson profoundly stated, "it depends on the person because everybody doesn't need that [one-on-one]" (Pearson, Small Group, May 27, 2021). With her words I strongly stand on the fact that as a coach I must know my teachers. I must know what they need so that I can fully support them.

Conclusion to Chapter Six

Like Ms. Pearson and her first-grade team felt compelled to continue to use Open Court Reading alongside her culturally relevant lessons, I found that while I thought I was ready to conduct research that centered my role as a literacy coach through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as I began to implement critical consciousness, I questioned my knowledge, abilities, and my desire to teach critically. I worried from the perspective of being a mother and an educator determining whether or not I felt that a critical consciousness should be taught to young children. I worried about my own job security as I considered not following mandated programs verbatim. In the process of figuring that out, I learned to give myself grace and access my own support as I learned

how to implement CRP in my role as a literacy coach. Thus, through my research, barriers were experienced on professional levels that became personal levels, but I was able to navigate through them with the support of my doctoral advisors, Dr. Clark and Dr. Phillips and teacher participants, Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson.

Being a literacy coach provides opportunities for an emphasis to be placed on daily instruction in the classroom. However, a partnership between a literacy coach and teacher extends beyond the daily instruction and reaches lives for years to come; and that is why I am thankful for this relationship with Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson. It is through this relationship that challenges as a literacy coach were experienced, but the rewards were much greater! Throughout my research, our time together allowed me to gather findings about my role as a literacy coach, address personal and professional barriers, and acknowledge that support is a must.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**IMPLICATIONS FOR MAKING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY
FOUNDATIONAL TO THE ROLE OF THE LITERACY COACH**

When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions.

-Carter G. Woodson, 1933/2010, p. 15

Introduction and Background to Implications

This study was designed to center culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) at the forefront of my role as literacy coach based on nationally and locally documented concerns about the limited opportunities for success for Black students using White-focused, Eurocractic curricula. The study identified barriers and supports encountered in that process as well as my growth as the literacy coach. In this chapter, implications from this study are offered to suggest changes that can be made to systems of education that include knowledge-building, using knowledge to examine programs, giving license to teachers to overhaul curricula, standing for change, building consistency within systems, and providing time, space, and support for the work.

For far too long, the public education system has been oppressive for Black students originating from the capturing and enslavement of Black people when they were depicted as inferior in the interest of colonial control through today as the educational landscape continues to oppress Black students. Messages received through educational and other oppressive systems (health care, housing, hiring practices) developed through a

legacy of colonization to benefit and be controlled by white people are encountered by Black people every day.

These subliminal as well as overt messages of anti-Blackness placed on Black people are also experienced by our children impacting their sense of self and belonging and, in turn, their academic futures. This is why culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), an approach grounded in Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) study of successful teachers of Black students, is needed within our schools. Making CRP foundational to role of the literacy coach, who has a strong influence on curriculum and teacher development, is one way that CRP can become foundational in schools. Implications from this study are provided to support educators in doing just that—working to make CRP fundamental to the literacy coach’s position so they can support teachers in fighting against a system that continues to fail our Black students.

Implications

To be an educator who transforms Eurocratic curriculum and assessment to that which develops students’ cultural competence, critical consciousness, and academic excellence, in my research I asked: *What can I learn about the process of making culturally relevant teaching foundational to my commitment as a literacy coach?* with the following subquestions: (a) What barriers are experienced and how are they negotiated (or not), (b) What support is experienced in the work to make CRP foundational to my position as a literacy coach? and (c) What can I learn about myself in the role of literacy coach as I attempt to make CRP foundational to my work with teachers and children? On my path to becoming a culturally relevant literacy coach, I engaged a kindergarten teacher and a first-grade teacher with me in a partnership that focused on transforming

the daily curriculum through culturally relevant teaching. My study of that process was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Critical Theory supporting my analysis of data around issues of race and my commitment to eradicate pedagogy that communicates that Blackness does matter (ross, 2019).

My analysis of data findings described in previous chapters but briefly encapsulated in Table 7.1 to show the relationship between findings and the implications that are explored in this chapter:

Table 7.1 Findings and Implications of My Study

Findings	Implications for District Administrators
<p>District leaders needed to understand what constitutes trustworthy evidence-based research; and have knowledge of CRP to be able to evaluate programs like OCR.</p> <p>Mixed messages about supporting CRP at the district level caused confusion about whether or not it was okay to deviate from the OCR script.</p> <p>There was no PD in CRP in literacy coach training or support sessions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the knowledge of what constitutes trustworthy research and evidence and culturally relevant pedagogy. 2. Engage in hard discussions about Blackness and Whiteness. 3. Take a stand against mandating colonized curriculum and for culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) 4. Invest in in-depth programs of CRP professional development for district leaders. 5. Provide support for literacy coaches to build CRP knowledge. 6. Support coaches in learning to dig deeper to examine materials and curriculum for cultural relevancy. 7. Provide autonomy for teachers and literacy coaches who are knowledgeable about CRP to counter or replace the script when there are mandated programs.
Findings	Implications for School Administrators
<p>CRP PD was optional; teachers who self-selected into it were more committed to the work.</p> <p>Teachers received mixed messages about using CRP</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Understand that it may not be possible for the whole school to embrace CRP; a critical mass can often get more done. 9. Ensure consistency across school leaders

leading to fears about implementing it.	
Findings	Implications for Literacy Coaches in Support of Teachers
<p>Mixed messages and past observations made teachers fearful of totally embracing CRP.</p> <p>Small group sessions made all the difference.</p> <p>Immediate feedback from literacy coach was key.</p> <p>Time was needed to learn and to construct curriculum.</p> <p>There were concerns about teaching a critical consciousness.</p> <p>Jumping in and giving CRP a try and student learning & enthusiasm gave teachers confidence.</p>	<p>10. Provide small group safe spaces for honesty and vulnerability</p> <p>11. Provide immediate feedback focused on the components of CRP</p> <p>12. Provide time for learning about and preparing to teach in culturally relevant ways.</p> <p>13. Use knowledge to help teachers help families feel comfortable with CRP.</p> <p>14. Help teachers jump in and give CRP a try.</p>
Findings	Implications for Literacy Coaches in Support of Self
Coach sought confidence and deeper knowledge about CRP.	15. Work alongside someone with more CRP experience to build your knowledge and confidence
Coach learned to give herself grace as a learner.	16. Recognize your successes: Finding grace

The implications explored in the following pages are offered with the hope that they will inform teachers, literacy coaches, administrators, and policy makers of the need for a curriculum that centers rather than “subvert[s] the interest of marginalized cultures” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 14) and that leads to centering Black students, histories, heritages, and languages in the curriculum. Specifically, implications illuminate actions that can be supportive of making CRP central to the role of the literacy coach so that they can support teachers in fighting against a system that continues to fail our Black students.

Implications for District Administrators

The leaders within the school district office have a very important responsibility of taking care of the logistics that keep schools functioning on a daily basis. A part of this is making sure that the best educational experience is provided for the students whom the district serves. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the leaders build their own knowledge about the covert messages of White supremacy that are taught through curriculum. It is not only important for district leaders to develop their own knowledge but to also help to shape the knowledge of its educators. This section provides implications for district leaders based on findings from my study.

Implication #1 District Leaders Need to Develop the Knowledge to be able to Examine Programs that Claim to be Research and Evidence-Based and Culturally Relevant

When implementing curriculum that is advertised as research and evidence-based, the assumption often is that it “provides rich content, teaching practices, and learning experiences that research has shown to be effective in supporting children’s development

and learning” (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d., para 1). This also comes with the typical assumption that if a program is advertised as being evidence and research-based, policymakers can be assured that it is researched in thorough and ethical ways meaning it is not focused on the benefit of one group of people. In my study, the district administrator I interviewed seemed comfortable with the Open Court Reading (OCR) program as being theoretically sound because the program used the words “research-based” and “evidence-based” in its materials. However, my research into the research-base of the program showed that the determining factor in being evidence and research-based is that it worked with 1, 113 children from six unidentified states, unknown demographics and did not use the lens of CRP.

Similarly, Mr. James felt that the curriculum was culturally relevant because he trusted the OCR representative that stated that the curriculum was culturally relevant. Thus, key to this finding was that Eurocentrism and anti-Blackness did not seem to be recognized or, if recognized, not taken into account when at least one district leader reviewed the adopted reading program, Open Court Reading (OCR). The reality was that the program did not develop students’ cultural competence—it dominantly portrayed White stories and White people or animals—and did not address development of students’ critical consciousness, two important components of CRP. As a result, if literacy coaches are to be supported in making CRP foundational to their position, a key implication focuses on the need for district leaders to have the knowledge to be able to examine curriculum and appreciate when it is not supportive of Black students or culturally relevant.

In both instances—understanding what makes research valid and inclusive, and

understanding culturally relevant pedagogy—lack of knowledge on the part of district administrators and policy makers impacts two basic issues related to whether or not CRP can be foundational to the role of the literacy coach: They cannot make decisions about programs to adopt nor will they be able to support funding for CRP PD, professional books, and children's materials.

Thus, a strong implication of this study is that if literacy coaches are to be supported in making culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to their role, administrators who play a role in choosing and promoting programs need the knowledge to be able to examine programs that claim to be research-based and culturally relevant. This entails the need to:

- Develop the knowledge and skills to be able to identify narrow research methodology that invisibilizes Black students and their knowledge, for example, by omitting studies by, about, and for the benefit of Black students;
- Develop in-depth knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy to be able to recognize when programs are or are not culturally relevant; and
- Take a stand against programs that are not culturally relevant and thereby perpetuate success for white students and fail Black students.

Implication #2: Engage in Hard Discussions

Although this recommendation falls within Implication #1, I give it particular attention here because of the ongoing attempts to close down discussions about race when those very discussions would help school leaders and community members understand the need for approaches such as CRP and be able to evaluate the research/evidence base of commercial programs for inclusivity. This is why I recommend

that administrators commit to engaging in difficult discussions around issues of race and anti-Blackness in the company of knowledgeable scholars who can facilitate such discussions. These kinds of discussions would support recognition of the need for change in classrooms guided by CRP as foundational to the role of literacy coach. Basic to those discussions could be:

- Understanding that there must be hard discussions about how racism has been internalized as well as institutionalized (Hoag, 2020) within systems that guide our society (Bell, 1992, Crenshaw et al., 1995). From that foundation, educators can examine anti-Black elements within curricular policies, practices and programs and work to transform them.
- Understanding the inter-related concept of the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992) meaning that Blacks will never be accepted as equals (Bell, 1995a, p. 306) and that we live in a society where racism has been internalized as well as institutionalized across systems like education, housing, health care, hiring practices (Hoag, 2020). Understanding this, educational policy makers and administrators would be better poised to identify anti-Black elements within curricular policies, practices, and programs as a prerequisite for changing them.
- Learning the impact of colonization on the construction of race as a tool for control, then understanding that decolonizing our systems does not mean being anti-White (Boutte et al., 2021), but means making our systems equitable for all people.

- Ask questions of programs and practices to identify anti-Blackness or colonization through omission, marginalization, tokenization, or misrepresentation of Black people, histories, communities, languages, accomplishments, resistance, and resilience; and make plans to dismantle and replace them. Helpful questions written to support institutional examination around literacy programs can be found in Wynter-Hoyte et al. (in press). A few of many are provided below as examples of the kind of institutional examination that is important:

- Do we have a list of criteria for adopting literacy programs?

Does it state that, on a daily basis, adopted programs and practices must utilize:

- Texts (books and other materials) that depict authentic (not stereotyped) narratives, illustrations, and experiences about Black families, histories, heritage, languages?
- Assessments that access Black students' linguistic, experiential, heritage, and community literacies and other knowledges?
- Engagements in which students from all backgrounds learn to critique texts of all kinds including library and classroom book collections for stereotyping, demeaning, or tokenizing Blackness and then take action for change?

- If such a list of criteria is not in existence, how can it be instituted?
- How will we ensure that such a list is utilized for the long term?
- How do our interview practices reveal and place value on the strengths of Black applicants for teaching and administrative positions, particularly in terms of their connections to and appreciation for the local Black community, heritage, language, and families and their experience teaching in Pro-Black ways?
- Does our mission statement make clear that Black students and families can expect to see their lives, heritages, languages, and literatures foregrounded, honored, and normalized in our literacy programs? If not, what do we need to do?
- Is time, focus, and funding for ongoing professional development dedicated to Pro-Black pedagogies for early literacy? Is time created so that a Pro-Black PD focus is not crowded or lost within an unmanageable number of other programs and practices? (Table 3)

Implication #3: Take a Stand Against Mandating Colonized Curriculum and for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

After studying culturally relevant pedagogy to understand what it actually is, learning to evaluate the methodology behind programs that claim to be “research-based” (Implication #1), and learning to recognize anti-Blackness in society and curriculum

through hard conversations (Implication #2), policymakers should use their knowledge to stand up against curriculum that continues to promote success for White students but not for all students. This is supportive of literacy coaches being able to ground their work in CRP because they will be able to notice when the curriculum is Eurocratic and work alongside teachers to produce content through a culturally relevant lens.

This kind of standing up would mean that educational leaders would first need to recognize that everything education was built on in this country needs to be reshaped from how “colonialism has shaped schooling and educational research in the United States” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.2). Coupling this with knowledge that colonized curriculum does not serve all students, policymakers will be able to make the argument for approaches like CRP as representative of a broader world view and more supportive of the education of all students. Some ways that district leaders could take a stand are:

- Refusing to mandate commercial programs particularly those that are culturally irrelevant and whose research-base is culturally and methodologically narrow;
- Creating district mission and vision statements that identify CRP as a grounding approach;
- Insisting on long-term PD for all leaders, literacy coaches, and teachers in culturally relevant pedagogies;
- Trusting teachers with proven CRP knowledge and ability to construct implement daily instruction that will humanize all races; and
- Using their knowledge to address school board and district personnel meetings.

Implication #4: Invest in Ongoing, In-depth Programs of Professional Development around CRP for Teachers and Leaders.

A key finding in my study was that a lot of district resources were spent on supporting our district's vision of AVID and not much funding was used for culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). However, thoughtful, ongoing, targeted professional development is necessary to strengthen and solidify teachers' and leaders' understandings of any new approach (EduPrime, 2021), and that is also the case with culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). As a result, if CRP is to be foundational to the role of literacy coach, investing in professional development around it for the wider educational community is critical. This will be supportive of the literacy coach's work to support teachers' efforts as culturally relevant teaching in several ways: understanding voices that are silenced, planning and implementation culturally relevant daily lessons, seeing and acknowledging the heritage, brilliance, resistance, and joy of Black people.

This means that there must be money in the budget to provide in and out of district training that will widen the understanding of what culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is and how it should be implemented within classrooms and schools. If a CRP foundation is to be realized, it cannot be one of many competing approaches that take a district's focus and funding and causes confusion and exhaustion for teachers as they try to be answerable to a range of foci. If there are other, more enforced aspects of a district's vision that relays the message that CRP is not as important and that the district is not as invested in teaching through the components of CRP. Therefore, if CRP is a part of the district's vision there must be multiple ways to provide professional development for its

leaders, faculty, and staff to gain knowledge of what CRP truly is and how to effectively implement it throughout the district.

Implication #5: Provide Support for Literacy Coaches to Build CRP Knowledge

Throughout my study, a major finding was that I needed support in my learning of culturally relevant pedagogy in order to be able to coach the teachers through a CRP lens. Having my advisors to communicate with as well as having a CRP consultant (Dr. Clark) available when I had the teacher debrief, support, and planning sessions provided me with additional support in my learning that I was not receiving at the district literacy coach meetings. If we, literacy coaches, are indeed leaders in schools we must do what is best to achieve educational changes for our students. Teachers and coaches are expected to work together to create an educational change. Therefore, I offer implications for district leaders to take up in supporting CRP as the foundation of the literacy coach's role:

- Provide in-depth, ongoing training for literacy coaches from an acknowledged expert with documented experience and knowledge;
- Provide a safe place for literacy coaches to come together and be honest and vulnerable as they discuss CRP, build understandings about the need for it, and plan together;
- Provide a school-based CRP consultant or coach to work alongside the literacy coach in the school;
- Provide opportunities for literacy coaches to attend conferences focused on CRP; and

- Provide opportunities for literacy coaches to visit other schools and classroom, in and out of state, to observe CRP in action.

Implication #6: Support Coaches in Learning to Dig Deeper to Examine Materials and Curriculum for Cultural Relevancy

Looking at the materials and the curricula that are presented by districts and publishing companies as the best learning tools for students, literacy coaches need to be able to use their knowledge (developed as a result of Implication #7) to determine if the resources are culturally relevant. A finding in my study was the importance of looking deeper at aspects of programs, for example, my looking at texts in the Open Court Reading (OCR) program, to determine how culturally relevant the program is. At first glance something may seem as though it is addressing all three components of culturally relevant pedagogy. When I first looked at the stories presented in Open Court Reading for kindergarten (Figure 5.1) and first grade (Figure 5.2), I thought “Oh, they have really added diverse races in the images in the stories.” It was not until I dug deeper into the main characters (Figure 5.3) that I realized the texts were not as diverse as I once thought.

Training literacy coaches to look deeper at the voices that are not represented will provide them with a tool to see what messages are being delivered to the students in words or in images. Once they have been trained and supported on finding the stories that are not presented, they will be able to look at the materials and curriculum and help teachers begin to think a different way and look for those who are marginalized. In doing so, the literacy coach is then able to help teachers provide authentic representations of required materials and curriculum.

Implication #7: Provide Autonomy for Knowledgeable Teachers and Literacy Coaches to Replace the Script; Demonstrate Trust in Their Knowledge

In this study, a major finding was that the Open Court Reading (OCR) program was not culturally relevant and, in fact, taught concepts inaccurately and incompletely with a White dominant focus. However, in spite of the principal's assurance that teachers could teach OCR skills using their own materials and deviating from the script, both teachers in my study were hesitant to do so. In fact, Ms. Pearson ended up teaching skills twice: once through culturally relevant innovations and once through the OCR script. One example comes from her teaching the Art for All unit. She wanted to transform it to engage students in examining the demographics of art and artists in major museums and then study Black and Brown artists. Similarly, with the unit on Red, White and Blue, Ms. Pearson and her intern Mrs. Bryant wanted to teach their students to look more critically at symbols of the U.S. and historical events. In both units, because Ms. Pearson did not feel that she had the autonomy to replace the OCR unit, she continued to teach the OCR lessons and the CRP lessons rather than replacing one with the other.

Even as teachers and I were building knowledge about CRP and were able to critique OCR accordingly and improvement was shown in students' achievement, we still did not feel that we had the autonomy to challenge the OCR program. This was in spite of the fact that we were knowledgeable enough to critique OCR in the interest of our students: While Mr. James felt that scripted programs provided a way to present the same concepts to all students, we saw contradictions to this: (a) students do not need the same skills at the same time, and (b) without cultural relevance, students from dominant

cultural groups continue to be benefited while Black students are often disenfranchised from the curriculum.

While I was able to voice my views and feel heard by Dr. Marzetti, our principal, I did not feel the same sense of license with district leaders. In fact, I feared for my job if I voiced dissent to district leaders as did the teachers. Teachers remembered OCR and district representatives coming into their classrooms to evaluate their “fidelity” to the program and this led them to be cautious even when autonomy was promised. This leads to an important aspect of providing autonomy: Teachers (and coaches) will not believe that autonomy is actually provided if there is a history of disapproval when teachers deviate from a mandated norm; thus, there needs to be some way for district leaders to recognize and demonstrate trust in teachers’ and coaches’ knowledge.

Implications for School Administrators

The district holds expectations of what is expected of the faculty, staff, and its students, but principals also decide what the expectations, under the directives of the district, will be for their schools. Having a principal who is supportive of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) makes it easier for the literacy coach to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to their role. The literacy coach supports all teachers and if the principal is supportive of CRP, it provides opportunities for the literacy coach to coach more teachers through a CRP lens. Although the principal may support the implementation of CRP there are other factors that sometimes can make the implementation process a little challenging. Below are my school-based recommendations for supporting CRP as foundational to the literacy coach’s position.

Implication #8: Understand that it May Not be Possible for a Whole School to Embrace CRP; a Critical Mass Can Sometimes Get More Done

Another finding from this study was that, while the principal of the school had a goal of developing faculty so that CRP could be foundational to instruction throughout the school, there were challenges to meeting that goal. While, on the surface an implication seems to be that if a school has culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) at its core, then the faculty and staff should have some knowledge of it, attained by being required to attend and participate in in-depth, long-term PD. However, as this study showed, that is not always realistic and, in fact, when educators are required to participate, some will jump in whole-heartedly and others will not. At our school, this meant that the CRP PD sessions moved from whole faculty to self-selected smaller groups. With that in mind, the implications for providing effective PD at the school level are:

- At the beginning of the school year, administration should share the vision for CRP and what it looks like with the faculty and staff because they are a part of the whole that makes the school thrive;
- At faculty meetings provide teachers with information about CRP so that they have some acquaintance with the components;
- See who is interested in participating in the CRP PD session after information has been provided at the faculty meetings;
- In the following years, offer encouragement and compensation for continued in-depth CRP PD to teachers and administrators who are willing to dig deeper recognizing that those who are not interested or motivated to continue may, in

fact, hold the group back. In other words, teachers who want to teach through CRP and become models for this approach, should be provided with ongoing professional development that will allow them to make changes to the curricula and their teaching styles so that the needs of the students are better met (MeraEvents, 2020). Compensation could come in the form of:

- Rethinking the school day to schedule half-days once a week for every teacher to be devoted to professional growth. In the 2020-2021 school year our district provided ½ day Fridays for professional development, but we no longer have those days;
 - Guaranteed funding for travel to one CRP-focused national conference a year;
 - Provision of professional books and children's books to support the culturally relevant classroom;
 - Funded graduate credit toward recertification or a degree program.
- Provide multiple opportunities for teachers who self-select into ongoing PD to share their work in faculty meetings, newsletters, teacher showcases, and by inviting other teachers into their classrooms; this will provide a way for those who are not yet drawn to CRP to have opportunities to see how CRP is working within the school and then make the decision if it is something that they would like to also do within their classrooms; and

- For those faculty and staff members who are studying CRP and want to dig deeper in their own learning and implementation of CRP, provide extended opportunities for them to interact with each other.

If the school is committed to the learning of CRP, the literacy coach should also have the same opportunities as the teachers to have ongoing professional development and to work alongside teachers who are doing the work.

Implication #9: Ensure Consistency Across School Leaders

No two people are exactly alike, and their individuality is what makes each person uniquely who they are. A key finding was that members of the administration team were at different levels of understanding of CRP. Although each person has different thoughts and beliefs as a leader of a school it is important for those with the same and different beliefs to come together and show unity to lead the school. Showing unity or having a united front, “being aligned in purpose, principles, and values” (Shassere, 2017, para 2), sends the message to those at the school that the expectations are the same no matter which leader you are speaking with. As leaders it is important to communicate feelings of belief or disbelief with each other, discuss what will be the best for those you are overseeing, and then communicate the final decision.

From my findings, this difference in operations caused confusion and fear within the teachers who participated in my research, as well as those not a part of the research because they were being observed from administrators in different ways. The principal, Dr. Marzetti, wanted to have culturally relevant pedagogy implemented within the daily instruction wherever a teacher could implement it, but other administrators who were new in their knowledge of CRP did not want to implement anything that did not follow

the curriculum expectations set forth through the district. Not relaying the same message eventually caused teachers to not want to go further in their learning about culturally relevant pedagogy and applying it to their daily instruction.

To ensure consistency across leaders in the school building, which includes literacy coaches because they are literacy leaders, I provide these implications:

- All academic leaders (administrators, literacy coaches, math coaches, instructional coaches, etc.) discuss how the vision will be carried out from the leaders;
- Since administrators conduct observations on a rating scale, they need to discuss how a lesson using CRP would look at each number rating;
- Have leadership meetings as safe places where professional development and discussions are conducted to gain more knowledge about CRP;
- Discuss what the expectations are for classroom observations. What is acceptable instruction and why? and
- Hire leaders who have deep knowledge of CRP or who will commit to ongoing PD and the in-depth study of CRP as a part of the hiring agreement.

Implications for Literacy Coaches in Support of Teachers

To make culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to the role of the literacy coach, literacy coaches need to understand and be able to respond to the needs, fears, and concerns of teachers. Developing confidence in teaching through a culturally relevant lens, teachers will not only know how to develop culturally relevant daily instruction, but they will also know how to communicate with administrators, district personnel, other faculty and staff members, and parents about the implementation of their

instruction when it is not solely what has been set forth as the required curriculum or standards. With confidence that comes from understanding what culturally relevant pedagogy is, the teachers will be able to support their instruction with facts as to what they are teaching and explain why they are teaching that concept(s). The implications in this section grow out of my work to hear their voices and respond to their needs which, in turn, helped to build their confidence and mine.

In my study, I found that confidence was an area that the teacher participants and I needed to grow more in. For example, teachers were concerned about teaching through a critical consciousness focus when students were taught in a dual modality setting (face-to-face and virtual) during the COVID 19 pandemic. They were concerned because they did not know how parents would perceive the lessons. It was also difficult to feel confident because we were accustomed to following scripted programs. Although building cultural competence and a critical consciousness while obtaining academic success is proven to be an effective pedagogical approach and we believed in it, we also lacked confidence at the prospect of constructing curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2011) also found that teachers lacked confidence in explaining what culture is or understanding their own culture (2017), or they were afraid of responses from parents and administrators when addressing critical consciousness issues (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 1995, 2011, 2021). However, the teachers and I were able to build confidence for a variety of reasons that were clear in the data. Those ways of building confidence are evidenced in the implications below.

Implication # 10: Provide Small Group Safe Spaces for Honesty and Vulnerability

A key finding in my study was the importance of having a safe place to be honest and vulnerable. In education it is important to have a supportive learning environment for our students to foster growth. Stearns (2016) considered a safe place to foster growth for students is an environment where students feel they are physically safe and a place where they can comfortably express themselves emotionally and socially. This provides students with feelings of support and inspiration (Western Governors University, 2021) as they take on new learning. This type of environment is what we want for our students, and it is also the type of environment that is needed for our teachers as they take on new learning.

Throughout the study the time within the adult learning environment was much needed and longed for. In our time together, teacher participants, professor, and researcher mentioned several times that the intimate small group setting we had was a haven for us because we could wonder and explore as well as ask questions that were not considered “a dumb question.” We had an adult learning environment that embodied the positivity of culturally relevant pedagogy and provided an opportunity for us to learn and grow. Therefore, my implication is that teachers need a safe learning environment where they will have opportunities for growing pains and victory.

Discussions and actions in a place of no judgement will allow teachers to give their all to dismantling curriculum and other unjust approaches experienced by students. The small, safe space we inhabited as a little research group created a space where we could all voice what we saw in terms of “bias, privilege, and oppression in the institutions

of schooling” (Baines et al., 2018, p. 24), preparing them not only to create curriculum but to fight the good fight to stand for equitable practices for all students.

Implication #11: Provide Immediate Feedback Focused on the Components of CRP

Another finding in the study was that the teacher participants appreciated the immediate feedback that I provided for them after doing an observation. Through my role as a literacy coach, I help with guided instruction as I plan with them, model teaching, observe, and give feedback (Deuseen et al., 2007; Mraz et al., 2009). Although providing feedback is an important part of my job, because of the focus of this study, the feedback that I provided was directly centered around implementation of CRP and I was able to support our thinking through a culturally relevant lens. I used the three components of CRP—academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness—as a basis for my feedback. This created helpful checkpoints that allowed for rich CRP conversations between the teachers and the literacy coach. If CRP is to be foundational to the role of literacy coach, I recommend this kind of regular one-to-one feedback as supportive of teachers’ growth.

Implication #12 Provide Time for Learning About and Preparing to Promote Academic Success, Cultural Competence, and a Critical Consciousness

Time is a four-letter word that just about everyone says they need more of. This is no different for the effective teacher. A major finding in my study was that teachers needed time and support to fully understand, plan for, and be able to implement culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Because the three components of CRP work together for the success of the child, in this section, I will describe this implication about time as it relates

to each component with the end result of putting them all together to have full implementation of CRP.

Academic Success

The academic success that Ladson-Billings (2021) spoke of is not academic success measured by an assessment that is not designed for all students, however, our education system requires teachers to follow certain curricula and assessments in order to get a “standard” of success. Thus, while we work to change these systems, as long as academic success is measured in these ways, time is required for teachers to:

- Look at, analyze, and implement what they are expected to teach and the “standard” for achievement required by their institutions;
- Dissect the standards and the intent of how they are to be taught and then look at how they can enhance the lesson by sharing counterstories that give another’s voice and perspective;
- Receive support from those who know the importance of CRP to work through the implementation of it in their daily instruction while addressing required standards;
- Effectively plan how to teach to the requirements for academic success in culturally relevant ways so that students can be equipped to pass the assessment requirements;
- Be supported in their own growth and learn how to take what might seem impossible and change it to a possible; and

- Have hard conversations about what academic success really means to them and for their students as well as provide the time to develop what is needed to make the best learning environment for students.

Cultural Competence

Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) stated that “culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p.19). Therefore, teachers must sustain the important cultural aspects of the students’ lives while continuing to teach about the dominant culture (Paris, 2021).

Academic success is one goal. However, to help students achieve academic success, students must know who they are. Here are implications related to the time necessary to plan for building students’ cultural competence. Teachers must have time (and support) to:

- Explore their own cultural identity(ies) and cultures different from their own;
- Plan for providing this type of environment and experience for students;
- Dig deeper into what identity is composed of “who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67) recognizing that “social identities and cultural lenses affect all of us no matter our race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or socioeconomic status” (Haas, 2020, p.11); and
- Allow for this hard and honest conversation with self

Critical Consciousness

Many teachers have not yet developed their own critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2011), which makes it harder to engage in critical conversations with students.

In not fully developing their own critical consciousness, teachers are not able to facilitate or listen to conversations about injustices within the school, community, and world. To help foster the kind of environment that is needed for these hard conversations, I have provided some implications around the implication of needing time to:

- Learn and grow about how to support the development of students' critical consciousness;
- Think and pose questions, which will strengthen teachers' own critical consciousness; and
- Dissect, digest, and get to work planning for developing students' critical consciousness.

Putting it All Together

A part of supporting the effective teacher is also giving them time to implement what they have learned. The planning process takes time to make sure that the information presented is accurate and not a version that will continue to center only the dominant culture. This requires time for teachers to research and to create age-appropriate lesson plans to provide deep learning of the content. The current design of the curriculum requires students to master what has been determined as successful. However, the curriculum's design is not aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy and, therefore, requires teachers to add to or replace the required instruction in order to replace the deleted histories of Black people (Au et al., 2016; Woodson, 1933/2010). Thus, a final aspect of this implication about time is that educators need time to deconstruct the curriculum and redesign it to make lessons culturally relevant.

Implication #13: Use Knowledge to Help Parents Feel Comfortable with CRP

It was found in my study that teachers were concerned about parent acceptance of teaching through the critical consciousness lens. Teachers should be ready and able to communicate with parents the “why” behind their reason for teaching concepts and working alongside a literacy coach who has CRP at the foundation of their role will help the teacher formulate the why to explain to parents. At the beginning of the year teachers should also inform parents of the type of classroom they have and what it means to be culturally relevant classroom. To foster a classroom that will be a safe place for children to develop academic growth, learn about their own culture and the culture of others, and a place to use their voices to stand up against negativity, teachers have to explain that to parents at the beginning of the year. This expression of what their classroom will represent should also be shared throughout the year in whatever form of communication that is had with parents (i.e., newsletters, emails). Teachers may also want to invite parents to be a part of the learning. Literacy coaches who have CRP at the foundation of their role will also be able to help support the teacher in these endeavors.

Implication #14: Help Teachers Jump in and Give it a Try

When we are faced with something new, the fear of the unknown can be a halting experience. Stepping out of our comfort zone can bring about a lot of questions about what we are being asked to do and even cause doubt as if we should be doing a particular thing. However, trying something new helps us to overcome those fears and expand our mind (Peikon, 2019). Both teacher participants made the decision to try something new although they had fears. My finding showed that although the teachers did not have confidence in teaching through a CRP lens, once they implemented the lessons their

confidence began to grow. Their confidence grew because they saw the way their students responded to the lessons and knew that they had to keep providing a learning experience for their students that taught them about the culture, heritage, beauty, and resistance of Black people. Based on this finding I recommend that literacy coaches encourage and support teachers in trying something new. I have provided some implications for literacy coaches to encourage and support teachers:

- When teachers are trying something new or out of their comfort zone, literacy coaches should work alongside them with planning lesson;
- Literacy coaches should offer to model or co-teach lessons with teachers as they are beginning to implement the lessons; and
- Literacy coaches should observe and offer feedback to teachers to help teachers dissect what they are doing, ask questions, and gain more knowledge.

Literacy Coaches Need Love Too: Implications for Literacy Coaches in Support of Self

Supporting the literacy coach's role as a leader and learner of culturally relevant pedagogy is critical to the process of making CRP foundational to the coach's role. This means that although literacy coaches are providing support to teachers through professional development, they also need to have time to perfect their craft. Thus, training in the theory and practices they are working on with teachers is needed so that they can execute meaningful professional development and support. Having literacy coaches provide professional development is a useful tool to build knowledge of principles and make them effective practices for teachers to use in their classrooms (Mraz

et al., 2009). I believe that professional development is good because things are constantly changing in our world and people in every career need to learn so that they continue to thrive in their career. However, the type of professional development that is provided for literacy coaches focuses on teaching instructional practices that lean toward a Eurocentric viewpoint (Au et al., 2016; Lyiscott, 2017; Woodson, 1933/2010); and this is where I see a need for change and offer the following implications for literacy coaches. In addition to committing to deepening your own learning which has been discussed throughout this chapter, I have the following two recommendations for literacy coaches in support of self.

Implication # 15: Work Alongside Someone with More CRP Experience to Build Your Knowledge and Confidence

It was found through my study that learning alongside a CRP expert was a contributing factor in building confidence. Having someone knowledgeable in an area that you are not confident in provides a support system that allows for growth. Having someone with more CRP experience will help literacy coaches develop their own understanding, thus making them more confident in helping teachers plan and implement daily instruction through a CRP lens. The more knowledge literacy coaches gain, the more they will be able to look at the curricula and advocate for those who are marginalized within the curricula, in our society, and our world. To provide this knowledge support for literacy coaches, schools should invest in having someone whose research and teaching reveals deep knowledge about and a history of experience with CRP to work alongside their literacy coaches.

Implication #16: Recognize Your Successes: Give Yourself Grace

A critical finding from my study was that I did not see my own success throughout my research. As literacy coaches begin to unpack what centering culturally relevant pedagogy into their daily role looks like, the literacy coach must give support to themselves. By this, I mean it is important for the literacy coach to give themselves grace. Grace is a five-letter word that has different meanings: something you may say before eating, bringing honor, moving with elegance, goodwill, favor (YOURDICTIONARY, 2022), or it can be a person's name. All are important meanings, but for this implication, I look at grace as giving yourself "kindness and forgiveness" (Calming Grace, 2020/2022, para 9). When learning about something new or something that you are continuing to learn about, overwhelming feelings may occur when not reaching a desired goal and particularly when one's own expectations are not met. It is in this moment that the literacy coach should extend grace to themselves and look at what has been gained thus far. In giving themselves grace they will stop, breathe, and accept where they are and leave room for continuous learning.

Implications for Further Research

At the beginning of my research, I focused on looking closely at what would happen if I committed to making culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my role as a literacy coach. To provide knowledge to the field for further research, I recommend studies that focus on:

- Proving support for literacy coaches from a CRP consultant;

- The process and foci in training literacy coaches across the country to understand if and where culturally relevant pedagogy is foregrounded;
- Effective methods for supporting literacy coaches as they support teachers through a culturally relevant pedagogy lens;
- The effectiveness of teacher and literacy coach relationships and how it affects the implementation of culturally relevant teaching; and
- Student outcomes when CRP is foundational to the literacy coach position.

Implications for My Own Research

With the learning curve being experienced between the teacher participants and myself, I think that the next place my research leads me is to center the focus on students within the classes of the two participants. Now that Mrs. Jones and Ms. Pearson have engaged in a yearlong small group session and made gains in their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, I see the next step as looking at how CRP impacts students' lives. I would recommend further research with students to include focus groups—carefully planned in non-threatening environments (Krueger & Casey, 2009) that allow a safe place for “effective and suitable for collecting data on the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of children” (Adler et al., 2019, p. 10). Conducting further research with a focus group of students would also allow for student voice and ownership of their learning and for the researcher to know how the students feel about the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. In a new study, I would also increase length of the study, include family focus groups, and spend more time in the classroom

Conclusion: The Reimagined Education System

Going into my research, I focused on my role as a coach and my work with two

Teachers and I thought that my role change would have the greatest impact on the students. Although the learning amongst the students and teachers happened, by the end of the study it became very clear to me that I had benefited the most personally and professionally! In addition, throughout my research, I kept the focus of having culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) foundational to my role, but the beauty came from the small intimate group that I had with the two teacher participants and professor. It was in this group that my confidence grew and my role as a critically conscious literacy coach was exemplified. Although I am speaking about how the small group setting affected me, it was apparent that having the ability to address challenges and learn together was very beneficial for all of us.

The importance of our experience together cannot be emphasized enough. The kind of dialogue we had does not often happen when state departments of education and school districts look into curricula that they hope will bring an end to students' academic failure. With a high demand placed on state standards and assessments from educational reforms (Improving America's School Act, 1994; NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015), school districts continue to look toward scripted programs that require "teachers to read from a script to deliver explicit, systematic reading instruction" (Commeyras, n.d., para 2) in hopes of change. However, not all students in our district or nationally experience academic success through these programs. Black students, in particular, are suffering as "scripted reading programs have had a negative impact on teachers and students around the country" (Dresser, 2012, p.71). To be able to recognize this, hard conversations need to be engaged with teachers, but, as we see in my study, they can have little holding

power when administrators have not engaged similarly or send mixed messages which lead to continued acquiesce to culturally irrelevant programs like OCR.

All implications presented in this chapter came together to support the growth of students through a culturally relevant lens. Growth academically, culturally, and critically. As I have said, for far too long there has been a failing epidemic among Black students and this is a way to make the changes that we say we want in the education system. Looking through a culturally relevant lens informs educators and policy makers of the harm being done academically, culturally, and critically to our students in P-12 settings. Not only within P-12 settings, but throughout college, which affects our next generation of learners and leaders. My findings and implications require educators and policy makers to look at the history of education and decide if they want to be change agents, pushing for change (Pratt & Flahiff, 2022), or not.

To get a new education system that is greatly needed and deserved, policy makers and educators must decide if they are going to be engaged in the prevention of the school to prison pipeline or in the expansion of it (Laura, 2018). School- and classroom-based educators need to stand up as well, the people in the classrooms with students every day. They must decide if they are going to be change agents and stand up to dismantle educational injustices or stay silent. However, since 1992 Black students have continued to score below white students on most measures of academic success (Nation's Report, 2019).

As a literacy coach who is a change agent, I believe it is imperative that we provide literacy coaches with sufficient support in culturally relevant teaching--“just good teaching!”(Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Then we can join our voices with other

stakeholders in the fight for the right to curricula that centers opportunities for students to look critically at the world; seek solutions to injustices; and experience a sense of belonging and appreciation for their own and other peoples' histories, languages, heritages, etc. while developing academic excellence. In standing up for curricula that centers culturally relevant pedagogy, educators can take responsibility for creating educational opportunities for students that will make connections to the learning and find joy and success in their education. The hope is that the teachers, too, will find joy and the love of teaching as I found my participants to have gained.

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APPENDIX A
INVITATION LETTERS

Dear (Teacher's Name)

I am Jennipher Frazier, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Language and Literacy Department at the [REDACTED]. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation as part of the requirements of my degree in Language and Literacy; and I would like to invite you to participate in my study which is sponsored by me.

I am studying how the role of a Literacy Coach can be redefined by collaborating with teachers while focusing on teaching required curriculum through the students' culture and interests. If you decide that you would like to participate, you will be asked to work alongside me in interviews, coaching cycles, and professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

In particular, you will be asked questions about your knowledge of CRP. We will discuss both this pedagogy in your classroom and deepen our knowledge in ways to reach Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) three components of culturally relevant pedagogy [academic success, cultural awareness, and critical consciousness]. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meetings will take place at [REDACTED] Elementary School and/or any mutually agreed place and should last no more than 90 minutes. The interviews, coaching cycles, and professional development will be audio and/or videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the [REDACTED] Elementary School and my home under lock and key. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials. This is the same for the children as well. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect our relationship in a negative way. If you begin the study and later you decide to withdraw, your contribution up to the point of withdrawal may be used within my dissertation.

Others in the professional development group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Susi Long at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form. When you are done, please give me the consent form by August 18, 2020.

With kind regards,

Jennipher Frazier

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@[REDACTED]

Dear (University Student Intern),

My name is Jennipher Frazier, and I am the Literacy Coach at [REDACTED] Elementary School. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am working on a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in May 2022, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored by me.

I am studying how to make culturally relevant pedagogy foundational to my role as a Literacy Coach. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to enter in a coaching cycle with me that consists of us planning lessons, me observing your lessons, us debriefing about the lessons, participating in a focus group about the work you are doing, and an interview.

In particular, you will be asked questions about your participation in your undergraduate courses that prepared you for student teaching through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy. You will be asked about the successes and challenges that you experience during the time of your internship. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place at [REDACTED] and will be an hour every other week. The interview will last 30 minutes and will be audio/videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at [REDACTED] and my home under lock and key. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Susi Long at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form. When you are done, please give me the consent form by January 29, 2021.

With kind regards,

Jennipher Frazier
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]@ [REDACTED]

Dear Parent,

My name is Jennipher Frazier, and I am the Literacy Coach at [REDACTED] Elementary School. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am working on a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in May 2022, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored by me.

I am studying how to help your child's teacher create lessons that will teach your child about different cultures and how each culture adds to our society. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about your thoughts on your child's participation in the study.

In particular, you will be asked questions about your initial and final thoughts of the work that your child completed. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The interview will take place virtually and should last about 30 minutes. The interview will be audio/videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at [REDACTED] or at my home under lock and key. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Susi Long at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form. When you are done, please give me the consent form by January 29, 2021.

With kind regards,

Jennipher Frazier

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@[REDACTED]

Parents please read to and discuss with your child what they are being asked to do with this research study.

Dear Student,

My name is Jennipher Frazier, and I am the Literacy Coach at [REDACTED] Elementary School. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am working on a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in May 2022, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored by me.

I am studying how to help your teacher teach you in your classroom by creating lessons that will teach you about different cultures and how each culture adds to our society. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about how your classwork made you feel.

In particular, you will be asked questions about your favorite part of your work and why you decided to write or draw your work. You will be asked about what you learned and why those things were important. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The interview will take place at [REDACTED] Elementary School and should last about 10 minutes. The interview will be audio/videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at Jackson Creek or at my home under lock and key. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Susi Long at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form. When you are done, please give me the consent form by January 29, 2021.

Print Name of Minor _____ Age of
Minor _____

With kind regards,
Jennipher Frazier

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH APPLICATION

DISSERTATION RESEARCH
APPLICATION

DIRECTIONS: Complete this form by filling in the information requested. Attach the file to an email message and it to [REDACTED]. Please type "Research Application" in the subject line of your email.

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

<i>(Applicant's first and last name)</i>	<i>(Instructor's first and last name)</i>
<i>(Applicant's email address)</i>	<i>(Instructor's email address)</i>

<i>(College or University)</i>	[REDACTED] <i>- list your school/location)</i>
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SECTION 2: TIMEFRAME

What is the proposed start date?	What is the proposed end date?
----------------------------------	--------------------------------

SECTION 3: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

State the purpose of the proposed research study. Limit your statement to one or two sentences that clearly identify the specific topic(s) and goal(s) of the study. (Example:

This study will examine the effect of the ABC Reading program on the oral reading fluency of first grade students from low income homes.)

SECTION 4: RESEARCH QUESTION(S) AND DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

List the specific research question(s) to be investigated in this study. (Example: What is the effect of participation by students from high poverty home in the ABC Reading program on blending isolated phonemes to make words?)

SECTION 5: METHDOLOGY

Provide definitions of terms that may be specific to your area of inquiry to ensure clarity and understanding.

Select the option that best describes your proposed research design.

Correlational - Correlational research designs attempt to identify a relationship between two or more things. In correlational research designs, no variables are manipulated and there is no attempt to prove causation. Correlational research attempts to determine what, if any, relationship exists between two or more variables. The relationship exists is described in terms of its direction and degree or strength. Includes causal-comparative or *ex post facto* designs.

Descriptive - Descriptive research designs attempt to describe things as they currently are. Descriptive research methods include survey, historical, content analysis, and ethnographic designs.

Experimental - Experimental research designs attempt to demonstrate a causal relationship between two or more things. Experimental designs use two or more groups (control and experiment), in which at least one independent variable is manipulated and the effect on one or more dependent variables is observed. Includes quasi-experimental designs.

Identify the data to be collected (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, grade level, etc.). If you will be using student performance data, you must specifically identify the data. (Not acceptable: test scores; Acceptable: XXXXXXXXXX Mathematics performance levels) Which group(s) are you requesting to gather data on or from? (Check all that apply)

Students

Teachers

Parents /
Families

Administrators

Others (Specify):

Which level(s) of school do you wish to work with? (Check all that apply)

Early **childhood (3 and 4 year olds)**

Elementary (Grades K-5)

Middle (Grades 6-8)

High (Grades 9-12)

Adult Education

Others
(specify):

How many participants are required?

Minimum

Maximum

Which school(s) will be included and what are the selection criteria?

What are the selection criteria for the individual participants?

Describe the data collection procedures. Include a timeline for each step as well as a description of any data collection instruments to be used. Researcher made instruments must be submitted with this application.

Describe the procedures and safeguards you will use to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants' data.

What are the potential risks to participants?

State the impact, if any, on instructional time.

SECTION 6: ANALYSIS

Describe your plan for analyzing or interpreting the data. If you will be using quantitative analysis, please identify the statistical test (e.g. t-test for dependent samples, analysis of variance, etc.).

SECTION 7: ATTACHMENTS

List all supporting documents, forms, surveys, etc. that you are submitting with this proposal. All data collection instruments designed by the researcher must be submitted with the application and listed below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Interview Questions

Initial Interview Questions

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. What inspired you to become a teacher?
2. How long have you been an educator? And what capacities/grade levels?
3. What is your educational background?
4. What excites you about teaching in a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse classroom?
5. What worries you about teaching in a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse classroom? Do you feel that anything is missing in the teaching of diverse groups of children? If so, what?
6. Do you feel that current state and district mandated curricula meet the needs of all children in your classroom? Why? Why not? Give examples.
7. Do you feel that your undergraduate and/or graduate course work prepared you to understand CRP? Why? Why not?
8. Do you feel that your district's professional development around literacy prepared you to understand CRP? If so, in what ways? If not, where do you see that it is missing?
9. Do you consider yourself a culturally relevant educator and what defines this for you?
10. What would you like to learn more about to deepen your knowledge of CRP?
11. What concerns you as you contemplate learning more about and making CRP foundational to your classroom?
12. What excites you as you contemplate learning more about and making CRP foundational to your classroom?
13. What do you think the literacy coach's role should be in supporting (or not supporting) CRP?
14. On a typical day what are things that you do within your classroom that follow Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)?
15. How did your students react when you taught them using CRP?
 - a. What stands out to you as you think about teaching through CRP?
 - i. positive experiences with CRP recent positive experiences?
 - ii. areas want to refine using CRP?
 - iii. challenges using CRP recent challenges?
16. What would you say is the benefit of using CRP? What are limitations you have found, if any?

17. Would you say that being a CRP teacher is effective for your children? If so, what are you basing it on?
18. Talk about responses other people have had to you as a CRP teachers?
 - a. students,
 - b. parents, or
 - c. administration
 - d. positive responses?
 - e. challenging responses?
19. Since you don't think that you are a culturally relevant teacher, what do you think you need to become a culturally relevant teacher?
20. What do you see as helpful ways to help you learn more about CRP?
21. What things did you try last year from our school's PD on CRP in your own classroom?
22. How did your students respond to those things?
23. Why do you want to learn more about CRP?
24. Why have you not considered or engaged in CRP prior to this?

Mid-point Interview Questions

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. How has this process been for you with whole group and small group professional development?
2. How have you felt about implementing the things in your classroom that we have learned about in whole and small group PD? Challenges or excitement about implementation?
3. Do you think you teach about all cultures or do you have a heavier focus on African American culture?
4. Where would you like to go next in your instruction pertaining to culturally relevant teaching?

Exit Interview Questions

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. What are your thoughts about the research that we just partnered in?
2. If you could change anything about our time together during the research process what would it have been and why?
3. What did you find to be the most beneficial for you and your students during this research process?
4. How do you perceive culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies after our time together?
5. What is your story from where you began to where you are now?

6. What, if anything, will you continue until the end of the school and do with your kids in years to come?
7. Anything else?

Student Intern Exit Interview Questions

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?
2. How did your Urban Cohort experiences help prepare you for teaching through a culturally relevant lens in your internship?
3. How were you able to add to your classroom experiences? What challenges/barriers did you face?
4. How do you see yourself teaching through a culturally relevant lens next year when you have your own classroom?
5. Anything else that you would like to add?

Interview Questions for Principal

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. How do you define culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies?
2. Is there a benefit in using CRP? Why or Why not? Explain.
3. What is your expectation for your teachers using culturally relevant and sustaining lenses to teach?
4. What are your thoughts about how teachers are required to follow a Eurocentric curriculum?
5. How do you help teachers in navigating through the Eurocentric curriculum with a culturally relevant and sustaining lens?

Interview Questions for Director of Elementary Instruction

(List that was prepared ahead of time and may have changed according to the interview)

1. How do you define culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies?
2. Is there a benefit in using CRP? Why or Why not? Explain.
3. What are deciding factors for choosing curriculum in elementary schools?
4. Should teachers alter the Eurocentric curriculum to fit the needs of their students? If so what does this look like to you?
5. How can teachers navigate through the Eurocentric curriculum and focus on culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies?

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Table 4.4 School-wide Professional Development Sessions

PD Sessions	Resources/Required Readings
September 8, 2020	<p>Windows and Mirrors (Rudine Sims Bishop): https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/rudine-sims-bishop-diverse-childrens-books/</p> <p>Baines, J.; Tisdale, C.; & Long, S. (2018). <i>“We’ve been doing it your way long enough”</i>: Choosing the culturally relevant classroom. Teachers College Press. (Ch. 4)</p> <p>What if We Radically Reimagined the New School Year? https://chicagounheard.org/blog/what-if-we-radically-reimagined-the-new-school-year/?fbclid=IwAR0IoBYPUJrhwnDtlyOTWPENa3VPegSogVT2RYcetCnfIBPnu8RbN66ZLAA</p> <p>*Dr. Clark met individually with a kindergarten teacher.</p>
October 28, 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of reading process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fallacies of decontextualized skill teaching (sounds, blending, etc) ○ Culturally relevant texts/lessons as foundational, not add-ons ○ The importance of meaningful texts ○ Readers and using cue systems to utilize all the information available to them: semantics, syntax, graphophonemics ○ Cue systems and how they are used by proficient readers ○ Teaching all readers to use a balance of cue systems ○ Onsets and rimes/chunks ○ Schema/Funds of Knowledge/Deep Structure ○ Mirrors and windows

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternatives to decontextualized Open Court texts to teach required Open Court skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examples using culturally relevant texts created by K-1 teachers ○ Using culturally relevant texts (name stories, Africa, Music We Love, etc) for read alouds, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, words study <p>*Dr. Clark met individually with three kindergarten teachers, two first-grade teachers, two second-grade teachers individually, and one specials teacher throughout the month.</p>
December 9, 2020	Canceled
February 10, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is meant by developing a critical consciousness ○ How can developing a cultural competence and a critical consciousness lead to academic achievement ○ How do students best learn the skills and strategies they need to know as readers and writers? ○ Do children need to know letters and sounds before they can write? ○ Why do students struggle as readers and writers when they are taught letters and sounds out of context.- in isolation? • Practicing identifying ways to teach “standards” and skills using a culturally relevant lesson about Africa (Wangari Muta Maathai) developed during summer PD. • Identifying how to use Open Court word cards after culturally relevant foundation has been laid • Suggestions for Open Court users: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Look at the Open Court skills required ○ Look at your culturally relevant unit ○ Look at how you can teach those skills through your CRP unit • Developing children’s and teachers’ critical consciousness: Examples

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing study of AAL and what it means for the classroom ● Musical literacies: Sweet Honey and friends <p>Baines, J.; Tisdale, C.; & Long, S. (2018). <i>“We’ve been doing it your way long enough”: Choosing the culturally relevant classroom</i>. Teachers College Press. (Ch. 7)</p> <p>*Dr. Clark met with the two second-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions.</p>
February 24, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <p>Announcement: Pick up book-Baker-Bell, A. (2020). <i>Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy</i>. NCTE-Routledge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Look at your work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are some ways you addressed pacing guide skills in the past two weeks in culturally relevant ways? ○ What examples of students’ use of AAL did you find in the past two weeks? ○ How does your knowledge of AAL impact how you see your students and their intelligence? ● What is AAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Terms to use (AAL & standardized English) ○ Bi/Multilingual speaker ○ Moving beyond code-switching ○ Why are we talking about this ○ Issues surrounded around AAL (negative attitudes of educators, limited knowledge of instructional methodologies, etc.) ○ Why use the term AAL and not other terms ○ What are the scholars saying <p>* Dr. Clark met with the two second-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD session as well with one of the second-grade teachers individually.</p>

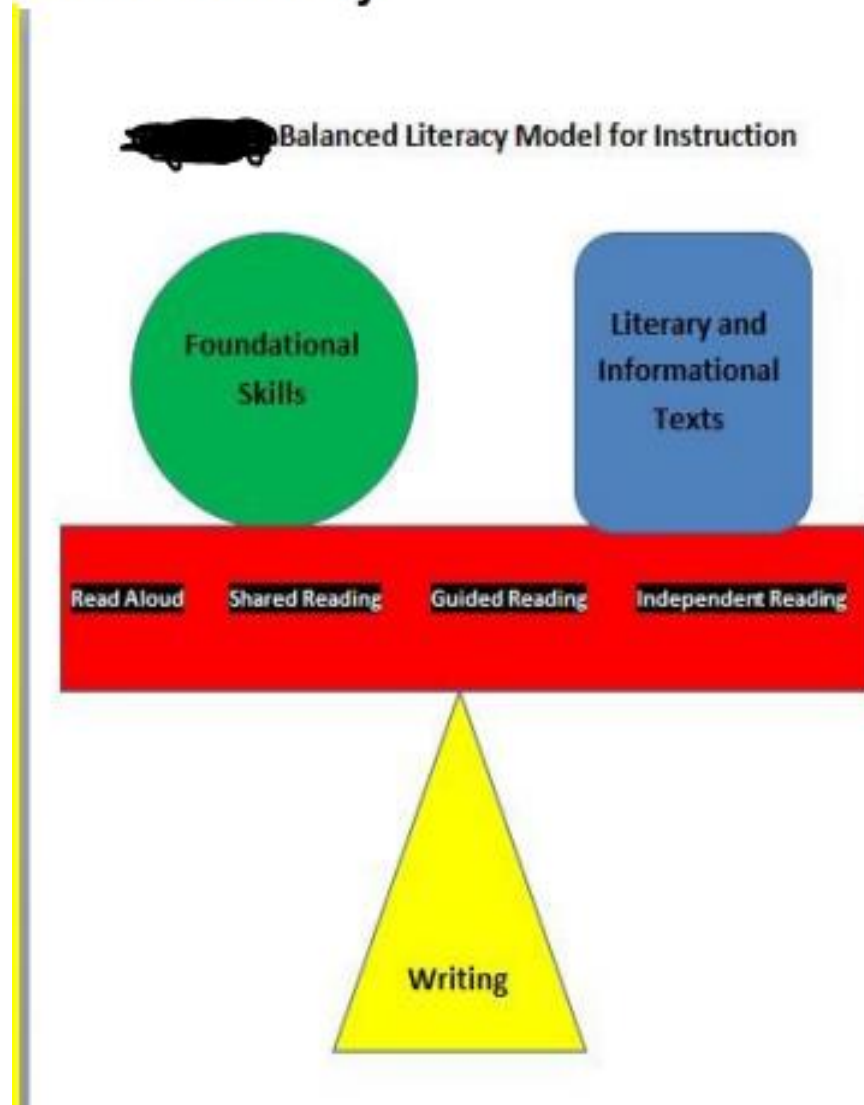
March 10, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Baker-Bell, A. (2020). <i>Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy</i>. NCTE-Routledge. (Chapter 1 & 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why is there a need for linguistic justice? ● What does anti-Black linguistic racism look like in classrooms? ● What does anti-Black linguistic racism look in assessment practices? ● What are some ways we ensure pro-Black linguistic justice in classrooms? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ During read alouds? ○ Through morning message? ○ During conversation? ○ During writers' workshop? ○ During written conversations? ○ When taking running records? ○ Through direct teaching?
March 24, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Baker-Bell, A. (2020). <i>Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy</i>. NCTE-Routledge. (Chapter 3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1) Discuss Janel's opening quote and the Toni Morrison quote: What does it communicate about Black language and schooling? Do the quotes speak to what you learned from your language memoir? Explain. What is a counterstory? Did your language memoir reveal any counterstories that you wish every teacher knew? ● 2) Describe Black Language Artifact #1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What was it and why did Dr. Baker-Bell feel it would help her gain insights into students' perceptions? (see p. 43) ● 3) pp. 45-48: How did the students push each other's thinking around Artifact #1? What did they say? ● 4) pp. 49-56: What is meant by "double consciousness" regarding language? Are there times when your life requires a double consciousness (two "yous") around

	<p>where, when, and how you use language? Google the term and find out who coined it and why.</p> <p>*Dr. Clark met with two kindergarten teachers individually, the two second-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions, one first-grade teacher who was not a part of the school-wide PD sessions, and the kindergarten team twice.</p>
April 21, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Culturally Relevant Teaching PowerPoint</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Baker-Bell, A. (2020). <i>Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy</i>. NCTE-Routledge. (Chapter 4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1) Read pp. 64-65 and bottom of p. 67: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What were some of the linguistic horrors faced by Africans as they were brought to other countries and enslaved? ○ What is meant by "linguistic isolation" in the context of enslaved Africans? ○ How does "linguistic Isolation" connect to the notion of "language planning"? (see quote at bottom of p. 67) ○ Why does Dr. Baker-Bell say it is important for our students to learn this history? ● 2) Read the conversation bubbles on p. 68, what are your thoughts regarding this info and your own classroom? <p>*Dr. Clark met with one kindergarten teacher individually, the kindergarten team twice, one of the specials teachers twice, the four first-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions, and the two second-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions.</p>
May 5, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">No Whole Group PD</p> <p>*Dr. Clark met with the kindergarten team twice, one of the specials teachers, the four first-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions, the two second-grade teachers who were a part of the school-wide PD sessions, and one second-grade teacher individually.</p>

May 19, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">First Grade Session Only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Semantics Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the illustration for a clue ○ Go back to the beginning of the sentence or paragraph and start again, thinking about what the sentence/story is about ○ Skip the word and read on to find clues in the following text ● Most helpful phonics strategies to teach children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the initial letter or letter cluster ○ Check the ending letter or letter cluster ○ Look for familiar chunks (onsets and rimes) and make analogies to other word you know. ● Schema/Funds of Knowledge/Deep Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whole Part Whole Approach ● Art for Art Unit
May 21, 2021	<p style="text-align: center;">Kindergarten Session Only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Semantics Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the illustration for a clue ○ Go back to the beginning of the sentence or paragraph and start again, thinking about what the sentence/story is about ○ Skip the word and read on to find clues in the following text ● Most helpful phonics strategies to teach children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the initial letter or letter cluster ○ Check the ending letter or letter cluster ○ Look for familiar chunks (onsets and rimes) and make analogies to other word you know. ● Schema/Funds of Knowledge/Deep Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whole Part Whole Approach ● Transferring to other text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using Trade Books ○ Open Court Reading ● Sweet Honey in the Rock Unit
June 2, 2021 (Final Meeting)	Sharing of work that was completed for the two units of focus by Kindergarten and First Grade

APPENDIX E
DISTRICT'S BALANCED LITERACY MODEL

Balanced Literacy



APPENDIX F
FEEDBACK FORM



Reading Coach Support/Feedback

Teacher:	Date:	Balanced Literacy Model Observed:
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T.A.G

T = Tell a Compliment
★

A: Ask a Question
❖

G: Give Support/Suggestions
→