The Impact of a Series of Professional Development Sessions on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) on the Awareness Level of Seven Teachers at a Suburban High School

Charity Jo Brady

University of South Carolina - Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation


This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.
THE IMPACT OF A SERIES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY (CRP) ON THE AWARENESS LEVEL OF SEVEN TEACHERS AT A SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

Charity Jo Brady

Bachelor of Science
Johnson & Wales University, 2004

Master of Arts
Azusa Pacific University, 2008

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education in
Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
University of South Carolina

2023

Accepted by:

James Kirylo, Major Professor
Yasha Becton, Committee Member
Leigh D’Amico, Committee Member
Rhonda Jeffries, Committee Member
Ann Vail, Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Richard Brady, for always believing in me and supporting me in every decision. I wholeheartedly acknowledge that I would not be the person I am today without your unconditional love and unwavering encouragement.

To my children, Jacob, Harper, and Carter, everything I strive for is inspired by you. You drive me to make a positive impact in this world. It is my hope that my work will contribute to creating a world that is as special as you are to me.

To my dear friend and fellow educator, Rachel Dangerfield, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support throughout this journey. You have been my constant cheerleader, filling my life with encouragement, motivation, and support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Yasha Becton, Dr. Leigh D’Amico, and Dr. Rhonda Jeffries, my dissertation committee members, for your patience and investing your time in me. To Dr. Kirylo, I cannot thank you enough for your continued patience, guidance, and encouragement throughout this process. You have been a pillar of support and mentorship.

I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to the participants who generously volunteered their time and shared their experiences, making this research possible. Your willingness to contribute to the advancement of CRP is truly commendable, and I am humbled by your participation.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation aimed to examine the impact that culturally responsive pedagogy had on a suburban high school. Specifically, it focused on the effectiveness of a six-session professional development series in increasing the awareness level of seven teacher-participants at Bayside High School during the Spring 2022 semester. The study utilized pre- and post-questionnaires, weekly journal reflections (written), field notes and observations, and participant interviews for data collection. The findings suggest that the professional development sessions were successful in increasing the awareness level of the teachers, leading to a more culturally responsive classroom environment. This study highlights the importance of ongoing professional development in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy and improving educational outcomes for all students.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), professional development, equity and access, critical race theory (CRT), implicit bias, cultural competence
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ iv
Abstract ............................................................................................................................... v
List of Tables ........................................................................................................................... ix
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... x
List of Abbreviations ................................................................................................................ xi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

Problem of Practice Statement .............................................................................................. 6
Research Question .................................................................................................................... 8
Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................. 8
Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................. 9
Methodology ........................................................................................................................... 10
Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... 11
Summary of the Findings .......................................................................................................... 12
Researcher Positionality .......................................................................................................... 12
Dissertation Overview ............................................................................................................ 15
Glossary of Terms .................................................................................................................... 16

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................. 18

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 18
Purpose of Literature Review .................................................................................................. 18
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Perspectives</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Based Approaches to Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset Based Approaches to Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness in the Curriculum</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit Bias and Cultural Competence</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Professional Development (CRPD)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER THREE: ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .................. 40

- Statement of the Problem of Practice .......................... 40
- Research Question ................................................. 40
- Action Research Design ........................................... 41
- Setting and Time Frame of Study ................................ 43
- Participants ....................................................... 44
- Research Methods .................................................. 47
- Data Collection and Instruments ................................ 47
- Research Procedure ................................................. 49
- Intervention .......................................................... 51
- Data Analysis ........................................................ 53
- Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data ............... 55
- Plan for Devising an Action Plan ................................ 55
- Conclusion ............................................................ 56

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS .............. 57
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Research Procedure .................................................................50
Table B.1 Participant Interview Form Record ...........................................98
Table C.1 Weekly Journal Response Record .............................................99
Table D.1 Sample Field Note Observation Template ................................100
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Pre/Post Comparison–Self-perceived Level of Bias ........................................60
Figure 4.2 Pre/Post Comparison–Willingness to Reflect Critically .................................62
Figure 4.3 Pre/Post Comparison–Planning and Executing CRP Lessons .......................65
Figure 4.4 Desired Need for Leadership Driven CRP PD Chart .................................67
Figure 4.5 Pre/Post Comparison–Usefulness of CRP PD at BHS .................................69
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>Black, Indigenous, People of Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM</td>
<td>Black Lives Matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Dual Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>Standard American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>Students of Color</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is an educational approach that recognizes and values the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of students while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that promote academic success for all students, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2018; Love 2019). CRP involves integrating culturally relevant content, instructional strategies, and assessments into the curriculum to foster student engagement and achievement which has a positive impact on student motivation, academic performance, and social-emotional development (Howard, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To effectively implement culturally responsive teaching, professional development (PD) plays a significant role: providing educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to create culturally inclusive classrooms (Gorski & Covert, 2020). PD programs provide opportunities for teachers to deepen their understanding of cultural diversity, reflect on their own biases, and develop instructional strategies that honor students' cultural identities (Milner & Laughter, 2020). By engaging in ongoing professional development, educators can enhance their cultural competence and cultivate a more inclusive and equitable learning environment (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). As equity and access have long been a centerpiece of educational reform efforts, investing in comprehensive and sustained professional development initiatives is
vital for public schools to effectively implement culturally responsive teaching practices and address the diverse needs of students from various cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2007; Du Bois, 1973; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994).

While challenges in educational equity and access persist, significant progress has been made in the last decade. The expansion of college and career readiness programs which prioritize the importance of preparing students for post-secondary education and the workforce have created initiatives to provide high school students with comprehensive college and career guidance resulting in a more nuanced approach that aims to level the playing field and ensure all students have equal opportunities and access to opportunities beyond high school. (Nagaoka et al., 2015).

The United States Department of Education recently issued the equity action plan that emphasizes the need to work with schools, communities, students, families, and educators to recover from the pandemic and promote academic achievement to meet the needs of the global economy. Education Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, highlighted the need for transformative educational opportunities that implore all stakeholders to “take bold action to ensure our nation’s schools [not be defined] by disparities, but by equity and excellence” (Department of Education, 2021). This action plan outlines the need for supporting schools in addressing opportunity and achievement gaps, supporting educators with resources and funding, and focusing on equity as a priority of the administration; however, it fails to provide solutions or strategies on how exactly to do this which continues to puzzle many public school educators.

There has been a growing emphasis on creating programs which reduce the achievement gap and increase graduation rates among historically underserved
populations: targeted tutoring, mentor programs, increased access to advanced placement (AP) courses, and culturally relevant teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy have been implemented to address disparities in academic outcomes and to support students from marginalized backgrounds (Dynarski et al., 2017). These initiatives aim to provide challenging and rigorous coursework options that were historically less accessible to marginalized students.

High-achieving students of color (SOC) are overlooked when schools follow an assimilationist pedagogy that denies the cultural histories, language, and literacies of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Since 2014, students of color fill the majority of public school classrooms, even still, children of color—especially males and regardless of ability—do not achieve at the same levels as their white peers (Nadworny, 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017).

These challenges primarily stem from sociological factors rather than inherent abilities (Ferguson, 2016; Love, 2019). It is crucial to address the educational debt that has provided white students with opportunities for success while denying students of color the same privileges (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Shifting the focus from an achievement gap to an opportunity gap exposes the systemic inequities and biases prevalent in American public schools. Multicultural curriculum and culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies are key in challenging deficit perspectives and ethnocentric assumptions about historically marginalized students, as well as countering Eurocentric curriculum (Paris & Alim, 2017; Sleeter & Carmona, 2018).
The United States is witnessing an increasingly diverse student population, with students coming from racially, economically, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The idea of American individualism often wrongly suggests that race, class, and gender are irrelevant to opportunities (DiAngelo, 2018; Muhammad, 2020). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2000 and 2017, there was a decrease in the percentage of white and Black students, while the percentage of Hispanic students increased significantly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). It is essential for educators to possess the knowledge and skills to understand their students and employ pedagogical approaches that create optimal learning conditions and maximize individual potential (Robinson, 2010). The effectiveness of teaching and learning is influenced by teachers' skill sets and expectations, leading to either growth or loss of potential depending on the conditions (Love, 2019; Robinson, 2010).

America's complex society comprises individuals from diverse ethnic groups, geographical regions, and an imbalanced distribution of social power. Given these social dimensions, it is necessary to differentiate education based on gender, race, age, ability, class, and culture. The historical inequities present in America's public schools have perpetuated an educational system primarily designed for middle and upper-class white students (Love, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). Continuing to evaluate success based on one standardized measure, without considering the unique strengths and abilities of all students, creates a system that disadvantages those who do not fit the traditional mold. Educators have an ethical responsibility to critically assess current systemic inequities in curriculum and pedagogy, paying particular attention to how these affect Black,
Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and students with disabilities (Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Race in America is a socialized, institutionalized construct that legitimizes inequality and works to uphold white supremacist ideals and systems (DiAngelo, 2018; Love, 2019). America’s students of color inherit attitudes about who they are and their ability to achieve from older peers, teachers, and other adults; this is a sociological effect of systemic racism (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The racial composition of teachers is also concerning as 80% of all teachers are white, suggesting that students of color may never or will rarely be taught by a teacher of color (Jordan-Irvine, 2003; Walker, 2018). Educators are tasked with facilitating the academic achievement of all students regardless of race, religion, sex, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and primary language. However, without careful examination of their own explicit and implicit biases, this responsibility cannot be met.

Since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in public schools, academic achievement, nevertheless, for students of color and low-income students continues to concern educators and education policy makers in America (Gay, 2010; Tatum, 2003). Teachers’ implicit biases and unexamined whiteness works to maintain dominant racial ideologies that ignore the funds of knowledge historically disenfranchised students bring with them to the educational setting (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Picower, 2009). When educators’ implicit biases result in lower standards for students of color, the students receive a message that they are less capable and are less likely to be academically successful. It is essential, therefore, to
create a match between what students are willing and able to do and the environment and expectations for achievement (Muhammad, 2020; Nadworny, 2016).

The educator’s responsibility to disrupt the systemic racism in school curriculum must build from culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2005) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) in order to create optimal opportunities for students of color, who have often been ignored, deleted, and removed from America’s curriculum, to develop a critical consciousness and cognitive abilities to challenge the educational status quo (Freire, 2000).

**Problem of Practice Statement**

This study took place at Bayside High School, a public charter school in a suburban community in South Carolina which houses 1,570 students. The high school is made up of 50 percent male students and 50 percent female students; students of color make up 31 percent of the population: 22 percent African American, 6 percent Hispanic, 3 percent undisclosed. Of the 1,570 students, 38 percent are classified as economically disadvantaged (SC School Report Card, 2021). This high school is currently the only high school in the district offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

As the teacher-researcher, I recognized a need for professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy after observing disparities in the number of students of color enrolled in higher level coursework: honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment (DE). Currently the number of students of color enrolled in advanced courses does not represent the population at the school. For example, of the 66 students enrolled in any AP English course, only five are
students of color; only one of those students is a male. Because it is a public charter conversion, this school is the assigned, neighborhood school serving the families who live in this suburb and the neighboring beach town. Students from other school zones within the district must apply to attend; these students make up a quarter of the student population. The application and enrollment process is not critical of grades, academic ability, or achievement; students simply apply, and if there is availability, they receive admission; many of the applicants apply in order to enroll in the IB program.

This has resulted in a diverse population—racially and economically; however, many of the students within our public school zone are not being challenged to meet their full, academic potential according to disparities in standardized test scores and class grades. These disparities are being masked by the success of the advanced programs which serve predominantly white students. Advanced programs create the illusion of a meritocracy, however; these programs disproportionately exclude students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged. This is an issue of access and equity, and although the state report card shows an excellent rating, annual assessment data that clearly shows students of color are scoring substantially lower than their white counterparts.

The Covid-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests of 2020 illuminated the pre-existing inequities within our systems—not just in education, but political, economic, and community freedom. Students of color and economically disadvantaged students, who were thrust into virtual learning with little preparation or training, were now facing heightened crises as the contemporary manifestations of systemic inequities attacked both their physical and mental health. Traditionally
marginalized students and families at Bayside High faced reduced resources and lack of care and effort beyond instruction, primarily with access to nutrition and technology. When school reopened for students physically in the fall of 2020, many of the historically marginalized students chose to remain virtual in an effort to protect their health and well-being at the potential hindrance of their academic success.

As the teacher-researcher for this action research study, I examined seven teachers participating in a series of professional development sessions designed to foster awareness of teachers’ implicit biases and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). The purpose of the study was to analyze the effectiveness of ongoing culturally responsive professional development sessions on teacher awareness.

**Research Question**

What impact will a series of professional development workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) have on the awareness level of seven teachers at a suburban high school in South Carolina?

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact a series of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) professional development workshops has on the awareness level of seven teachers in a suburban high school in South Carolina. For the purpose of this study, a series is a six-week interactive program that includes hour-long, weekly professional development activities, personal journals, pre- and post-Likert scale surveys, and one interview. I, the teacher-researcher, co-created the professional development sessions as the co-chair of the Equity and Access Committee at Bayside High. The study was intended to examine the attitudes of the teacher participants, and particularly how
those attitudes may or may not shift while participating in the six on-campus class sessions. The term attitude, for the purpose of this study, means thoughts, feelings, and overall understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Finally, for the purpose of this study, awareness is defined as knowledge or perception of self, students, Bayside High, and the systemic racism and inequities inherent in America’s public education system.

**Theoretical Framework**

As with many studies on curriculum and instruction and its impact on historically marginalized students, this study used critical race theory (CRT) as a framework, which outlines three main assertions

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 (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48).

Based on this theory, societal racism must be addressed in order to dismantle the opportunity gap for students of color (Gorski, 2017; Love 2019; Milner, 2012). CRT relies on race relations and literature that consists of basic insights, perspectives, and pedagogies that seek to transform and promote educational change in and out of the classroom as outlined by Solorzano and Ornelas (2004):

[U]sing critical race theory in education is different from other critical frameworks because it simultaneously: (1) foregrounds race and racism in research, (2) challenges the traditional paradigms, methods, and texts, and
separates discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact students of color, (3) helps us focus on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color, (4) offers a liberatory and transformative method while examining racial, gender, and class discrimination, and (5) utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of discrimination.

This action research study relied on CRT as a foundation in order to address the lack of access and equity in the curriculum, as well as implicit biases that go unrecognized that influence instruction through a series of professional development sessions. Within the CRT framework, this action research study employed culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as an additional, more focused framework, with careful attention to the development of CRP in a suburban high school. Fisher and Frey (2016) note that students achieve at higher levels when lessons are designed to challenge students at an appropriate level and teachers expect more from their students. With this, culturally responsive pedagogy is designed to pull knowledge out of students versus pushing information into students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2017). Acts of cognition, not mere transferal of information, empower minority students to liberation (Friere, 1974; Love, 2019).

**Methodology**

This study was conducted during the Spring 2022 semester at a public high school in South Carolina. I identify as a white, cis-gender female and currently teach high school English at Bayside High, which has a predominantly white teaching faculty. The
seven teacher participants teach different subjects, and have varying degrees of experience. In order to gain multiple perspectives, the participants were purposely chosen from different departments at the high school: science, history, English, world language, and special education. All participants were full-time teaching faculty at the school where the study took place. Specific details for each participant are included in chapter three of this dissertation.

Initial data was a Likert scale survey each participant completed prior to any of the CRP professional development sessions. The data was collected during the six-week professional development series. Each week had a primary focus related to CRP, and teacher participants responded to weekly journal prompts. Participants completed a second survey at the conclusion of the CRP professional development series. In addition to the surveys and participant journals, I conducted a formal interview with each participant throughout the CRP PD series. Field-notes were taken during each PD session and were carefully reviewed at the conclusion of the study.

**Significance of the Study**

As student diversity in the classroom increases, and teacher diversity remains stagnant and predominantly white and female, it is important for teachers to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy as a potential solution and catalyst for delivering rigorous and relevant learning opportunities for all students. As an effort to improve academic outcomes for historically marginalized students, culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is essential in promoting educational equity in American public schools (Gay, 2010; Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Assessing teacher awareness levels and attitudes about CRP allows schools to identify the most appropriate way to implement
CRP within a given school community. Using a six-week intensive series created with Bayside High School in mind provided much needed insight into the needs and challenges unique to this school.

Summary of the Findings

The results of this study demonstrate a noticeable rise in the level of consciousness among the seven teachers who participated in the culturally responsive pedagogy professional development program. Through the examination of pre- and post-program Likert surveys, interviews, field notes, and journal entries, various significant patterns emerged, highlighting the participants' heightened awareness.

The major findings from this study are organized based on the synthesized experiences of the teacher participants, through analysis of weekly journals and interviews, as well as my weekly field notes and observations. There was and still remains a perceived need for CRPD; however participants did recognize areas of strengths and weaknesses with regard to CRP at BHS. There were three persistent themes within the study: 1) an increased recognition of implicit biases and how this impacts teaching and learning; 2) a working knowledge of CRP strategies; and 3) a need for leadership to continue to advance teacher development in CRP. Chapter 4 presents further discussion on these themes.

Researcher Positionality

Our public school system is plagued by educational inequities that have far-reaching consequences. As both a teacher-researcher and a public school teacher in South Carolina, I have witnessed these educational inequities firsthand. Recent data from the Charleston County School District reinforces the disparity. In the spring of 2021,
ACT scores for 11th-grade students revealed that only 12% of African Americans and 29% of the Hispanic population met the benchmark in English, compared to 74% of white students (Postlewait, 2021). These statistics highlight the glaring disparities that persist within our education system. Scholars have argued that many students possess the potential to succeed academically, but their lack of resources and limited access to enriching experiences beyond their social circumstances prevent them from realizing their full potential (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020; Nadworny, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2017). These academic disparities must be addressed urgently to ensure that every student, regardless of their background, has an equal opportunity to thrive in our public education system.

For this study, I gathered initial data through an anonymous teacher questionnaire focusing on baseline perceptions of CRP. The focus of the initial data was used to identify the need for CRP professional development and attitudes and awareness levels of teachers.

This was an insiders working with other insiders collaboration, and will take a qualitative approach. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), “Collaborative inquiry groups often are the result of formal institutional efforts that create site-based management teams to engage in data-driven organizational change efforts” (p. 46). Upon completion of the study, results and data were analyzed and recommendations will be made to duplicate the process.

Students are ultimately held to a standard of their own beliefs in conjunction with the expectations others have of them. However, this delicate balance can be disrupted by the tendency of some teachers to perceive students of color as lacking the essential skills,
knowledge, and attitudes necessary for academic success. This misguided perception often leads to the development of curriculum and instructional approaches that fall short of optimal teaching and learning, as highlighted by Milner (2006).

During my first semester of teaching at Bayside High, I observed a noticeable discrepancy in teacher expectations between white students and their African-American and Hispanic counterparts. What was most alarming was the prevailing attitude among many teachers regarding college preparatory courses, which were viewed as "career and technology" courses. Consequently, these courses were subject to lowered standards based on the teachers' attitudes and perceptions. Carol Jago (2011) emphasizes the importance of engaging students in academic work that matters to them, encouraging projects that involve their own inquiry into the issues that surround them, and utilizing challenging texts that stimulate critical thinking (p. 110).

With this perspective in mind, I have made it a priority to maintain high expectations for all my students while simultaneously meeting them where they are in terms of ability and relevance. Having experienced both sides of this issue as a former student and now a teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects of low standards on academic achievement. This curiosity and awareness drove my research in culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and motivated me to explore how a shift in attitudes and perceptions can positively impact student achievement.

As the teacher researcher, I had to be sure to remain culturally sensitive in the organization of the study with respect to the students and parents, as well as the colleagues who volunteered to participate in the professional development series. I needed to address the enrollees’ attitudes and perceptions about CRP during the selection
process in order to effectively create and execute the series, and because the overall outcome was to analyze the awareness levels of educators, I had to remain objective and reflective in the role of teacher and researcher. While ultimately I hoped teachers would value and implement CRP, I needed to refrain from placing my expectations on my colleagues.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter One of the dissertation provided contextual information that establishes the background and research question for the study. In Chapter Two, a comprehensive review of scholarly literature focuses on critical race theory, culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching, and the historical context of the problem at hand is presented. This chapter also highlights specific areas of examination, revealing persistent gaps between teacher expectations and student potential, namely color-blindness and the inclusion of whiteness in the curriculum. Chapter Three, a thorough report is presented, outlining the setting and methods used in this action research study which includes the use of pseudonyms to provide biographical sketches of each participant in the study. Chapter Four delves into the findings and interpretations derived from the data collection of the research. Chapter Five provides the study's implications and offers recommendations for further research. This chapter features an action plan for sharing the findings with the participants and communicating the results to the school administration.
Glossary of Terms

1. **Achievement Gap**: disparities in academic achievement between different groups of students, particularly along the lines of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, when compared to their peers (Lee, 2002).

2. **Attitude**: a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998).

3. **Awareness**: "the state of being conscious or cognizant of something, including one's own thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the environment." (Bargh & Morsella, 2008, p. 1097).

4. **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**: a theoretical framework that examines the intersection of race, power, and education to analyze and challenge institutionalized racism and inequality in society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

5. **Cultural Competence**: the ability to appreciate one’s own culture while also respecting and understanding at least one other culture (Aguilar, 2020; Muhammad, 2020)

6. **Culturally Relevant Teaching**: a pedagogical approach that connects students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to the content being taught, fostering engagement, relevance, and academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

7. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)**: "an instructional approach that acknowledges and values students' cultural identities and experiences, using them as a foundation to guide teaching methods and content" (Gay, 2010, p. 31).
8. **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**: an approach to teaching and learning that supports the cultural identities, languages, and practices of students and communities, while challenging oppressive structures and promoting social justice" (Paris, 2012, p. 81).

9. **Implicit Bias**: automatic, unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence individuals' judgments and behaviors towards others, often without their conscious awareness (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013).

10. **Marginalization**: the social process by which certain individuals or groups are pushed to the fringes or periphery of society, resulting in their exclusion, limited access to resources, and diminished power and voice (Link & Phelan, 2001).

11. **Opportunity Gap**: the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and support that disproportionately disadvantages certain groups, such as marginalized students, limiting their educational and life outcomes, specifically the systems within education that create disproportionate opportunities for students from various backgrounds (Reardon, 2011).

12. **Professional Development**: "activities and programs designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and competencies of professionals, such as teachers, in their field of practice." (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 863).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Teacher expectations and pedagogical approaches influence students’ academic achievement and self-perception; students of color are more perceptive to teacher attitudes and these attitudes directly contribute to a child’s self-concept (Irvine, 2009). This action research dissertation will investigate the impact of culturally responsive professional development on the awareness levels of seven teachers employed at Bayside High School. Curriculum in America’s public schools often follows the Eurocentric traditions of American public schools further contributing to this disenfranchisement for Students of Color (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017).

This literature review will qualify the necessity of this study through examination of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Educators often confuse the idea of being culturally relevant and responsive with substituting a canonical text with a text written by an author of color or hip-hop pedagogy. However, culturally responsive pedagogy aims to use students’ customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as an imperative tool in curriculum and instruction (Gay, 2000).

Purpose of the Literature Review

The literature review in an action research study serves to ground the study in theory, thus making the study credible and trustworthy. The literature review must demonstrate an understanding of the current body of relevant research and the critical
integration and evaluation of the theoretical framework into the action research study (Steane, 2004). In selecting appropriate literature for review, the researcher must assess the current state of research in the specific area of study. This process will explore the theory that underpins the action research study, review relevant arguments surrounding these theories, allow the researcher to draw valid conclusions grounded in theory, and communicate and evaluate the conclusions that will drive the study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Reviewing and critiquing the current literature helps to guide the researcher to find and assess the current body of literature which helps to justify the need for the action research study. To gather relevant research for this study, the teacher-researcher used multiple texts, academic journals, articles, published dissertations, and multiple electronic databases: JSTOR, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). The literature review for this action research study will discuss critical race theory (CRT), culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), deficit and asset approached pedagogies, the opportunity gap for students of color, and the challenges of teacher positionality and whiteness in the curriculum.

**Historical Perspectives**

Teachers play a significant role in shaping student achievement. Academic disparities, influenced by race and class, contribute to the persistent opportunity gaps in education; however, Milner (2013) states that “using race as an analytic site is not to suggest that people are in poverty because of their race but to demonstrate how race can be a salient factor in how people experience and inhabit the world and consequently education” (p.1).
To dismantle oppressive educational systems, it is essential for educators to develop a comprehensive understanding of diversity. Recognizing that diversity extends beyond surface-level observations, educators must embrace different experiences, perspectives, cultures, and identities. This acknowledgement should be integrated into the curriculum to foster inclusivity and understanding (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017). By embracing diversity, educators can work towards a more equitable and inclusive educational environment. In order to dismantle oppressive systems, educators must first understand the implications of diversity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts that racism, especially in the educational curricula, is perpetuated due to the centrality of whiteness, teacher bias, and institutional bias (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Scholars, even those who focus on multiculturalism and diversity, often meet the focused discussion on “race as a primary tenet of inequality [as a violation of] the sacred rule of maintaining the race, class, and gender triumvirate” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p.34). CRT challenges the belief that inequality should primarily be examined through the lens of the race, class, and gender triumvirate, highlighting the significance of race in understanding and addressing systemic inequities.

In addition, the language and literacy practices which dominate the homes of diverse students are often traded in for literacy activities measured according to Standard American English (SAE). This results in the eradication of the linguistic, literacy, and cultural practices that diverse students bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Banks, 2007; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). This disregard for diverse students' language and cultural backgrounds contributes to a loss of valuable resources and perspectives within the educational setting. By failing to acknowledge and incorporate
these students' unique linguistic and cultural practices, we risk perpetuating inequities and reinforcing a narrow perspective of what constitutes valuable knowledge and communication. A more inclusive approach that values and celebrates the diverse language and literacy practices of students can foster a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all.

Critical race theory has several tenets: racism is normalized and embedded in all systems and institutions; racism can be understood through agency; justice is not always provided through the legal system; those who are privileged will only work to dismantle racism if they are to benefit (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This requires educators to promote agency and student voice in order to direct curricular decisions and implementation.

Until the system of education interrogates the status quo in education which continues to perpetuate inequities rooted in a Eurocentric history, traditionally marginalized populations will continue to suffer (Wise, 2011). Before we can begin to acknowledge and understand another race or culture, we must first seek to fully understand our own position in a complicit system designed for white people (Wise, 2002). Wise (2011) lists four main issues that need addressing: challenging the norm, moving beyond “food, fabric, and festival,” hyper-focus on the numbers versus the needs and contributions of the marginalized, and reflection on how a lack of diversity currently exists in the institution.

“Color-blindness” within the curriculum perpetuates the white status quo and inherent biases present in the classroom. Educational institutions contribute to the reproduction of systemic racism and white privilege as the curriculum is often “white-washed” and misinterpreted, and allows for the ‘othering’ of minorities, shaping
the subjectivities and identities of white and non-white students (Peters, 2015). Wise (2002) warms of the detrimental effects of whiteness as status quo in education:

There was and is a ‘psychological wage’ to whiteness that allows whites to overlook the very real harms that stem from our continued fealty to white supremacy, so long as we can content ourselves with the notion that we are better than someone else: that there is someone or some group below us (p. 236).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) introduced the concept of culturally relevant teaching as a theoretical framework aimed at addressing the academic achievement of marginalized students by challenging the existing inequities in schools, particularly in relation to culture and language. Ladson-Billings (1995) found that when reviewing the attitudes of academically successful students of color, this success came at the expense of their cultural, linguistic, and psychosocial well-being. Historically marginalized students face challenges and sacrifices related to their cultural identity, language practices, and overall social-emotional well-being in order to meet the academic expectations and standards set by the educational system. This suggests that the educational system may inadvertently perpetuate a trade-off where students feel compelled to prioritize academic success while compromising important aspects of their cultural and personal identity. This is attributed to the problematic whiteness found within the curriculum - to be educated and articulate is viewed as “acting white” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994, Ladson-Billings, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017). This contributes to the systemic oppression of potentially high-achieving students of color. Students who choose to achieve are often pulled between two worlds, never fully belonging to either group.
Culturally responsive pedagogy capitalizes on the rich cultural histories and literacies of students of color in contrast to a deficit pedagogy. School should feel like home, and this is more than comfort; this is to mean a literacy that employs the student’s natural language and skills to build from in order for students to achieve their complete potential. Over the last decade, culturally relevant pedagogy has become ubiquitous as it has been popularized by publishing companies and consultants who aim to sell products to educators in an effort to achieve academic equity; this practice is not representative of Ladson-Billings intention (Ladson-Billings, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogy includes three main components: 1) a focus on student learning, 2) developing students’ cultural competence, and (3) supporting their critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Without a comprehensive understanding of the necessary components of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers rely on shallow activities that involve a glimpse of culture in an effort to appear diverse or culturally competent or sensitive. These activities may be implemented with the intention of appearing diverse, culturally competent, or sensitive. However, they lack depth and fail to effectively engage with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. This suggests that a deeper understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy is needed to ensure that teaching practices authentically incorporate and honor diverse cultures in meaningful and impactful ways.

In addition to minimizing opportunities to develop cultural competence, teachers are not prepared to support students’ critical consciousness, as it is often viewed through the white prism (Ladson-Billings, 2017, Paris & Alim, 2017). Without adequate preparation, teachers may struggle to create inclusive and culturally responsive learning
environments that honor the experiences and perspectives of all students. This also implies that the understanding of social issues and injustices is limited to a white, Eurocentric perspective, which neglects the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities. As a result, teachers may unintentionally perpetuate existing power imbalances and fail to adequately support students' critical consciousness development (Ladson-Billings, 2017, Paris & Alim, 2017).

It is essential for teachers to receive comprehensive training on cultural competence and be exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences. This includes embracing and incorporating diverse voices and narratives into the curriculum, challenging dominant narratives, and fostering an environment where students can develop a critical understanding of social issues from multiple perspectives (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2017, Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). By doing so, teachers can better support students' cultural competence and critical consciousness, leading to a more inclusive and equitable educational experience.

References to student learning must be much broader than standardized testing measures against a Eurocentric curriculum. The skills that are pertinent in CRP cannot be measured using standardized tests: reasoning, problem-solving, and moral development (Ladson-Billings, 2017).

**Deficit Based Approaches to Teaching and Learning**

Deficit approaches to teaching and learning are traditionally measured against a Eurocentric norm that views students of color, who have different cultural and linguistic practices or values, as deficient in the dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways prevalent in America’s public schools (Valdes, 1996; Lee, 2007; Paris & Ball, 2009). The
dominant language, literacy, and culture embedded into the traditional curriculum was created for the white, middle-class norms and perpetuates the systemic oppressive beliefs that any practice that does not align to this norm is less than or unworthy (Paris, 2012). The assimilationist practices of the 20th-century attempted to eradicate the culture, language, and values many students of color brought from their communities, further contributing to the opportunity gap that continues to pervade America’s public schools. Simply put, students outside of this White norm are considered to be linguistically and culturally bankrupt (Paris, 2012).

Resource Pedagogies (Valdes, 1996, Lee, 2007, and Paris & Ball, 2009) repositioned the language, literacies, and cultures of students of color to honor those practices and values as a means of accessing the White-dominant norms of the public school systems in the 1980s and 1990s. Moll and Gonzalez (1994) refer to the idea of “funds of knowledge” for which educators should build from in order to successfully transfer these skills into the curriculum. What Moll and Gonzalez (1994) realized is that teachers must first view these “funds” as a positive, potential utility. This knowledge can contribute to the creation of academic content and curriculum design. While resource pedagogy is a step in the right direction, it still positions students’ cultural identities and linguistic practices outside of the White-norm, resulting in an additive approach to curriculum design.

Deficit perspectives, although often working to be inclusive, were reinforced by different approaches, resource pedagogies, and third space concepts of the late 20th-century. Despite the intention of inclusivity, various factors, such as specific methodologies, educational practices related to resources, and the adoption of hybrid
social species that bridge cultural or social contexts, contributed to the perpetuation or strengthening of deficit perspectives which resulted in the explicit and implicit loss of cultural and community heritage and linguistic practices if students are to be successful in American school systems (Gay, 2000; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Students of color continue to be the target of deficit approaches, contemporary researchers argue against the assumed “unidirectional correspondence between race, ethnicity, language, and cultural ways of being” (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Deficit perspectives cannot be viewed simplistically if educators are to create an inclusive curriculum that honors a pluralistic, multilingual, multiethnic society.

Similar to the deficit-based pedagogical models, assimilationists assume that cultures that function separate from the common culture are deficient, at-risk, and lack foundational necessities for academic agency (Banks, 2001). America is often referred to as the ‘melting pot’ and celebrates the idea of a diverse population; assimilationists believe in cultural integration. Assimilationists honor the dominant culture and dismiss the cultural traditions and values of the nondominant culture. According to Banks (2001):

The assimilationist learning theorist assumes that learning characteristics are rather universal across cultures (such as the stages of cognitive development identified by Piaget) and that certain socialization practices, such as those exemplified among middle-class Anglo-Americans, enhance learning, whereas other early socialization practices, such as those found within most lower-class groups, retard students’ abilities to conceptualize and to develop the verbal and cognitive abilities needed for school success (p. 122).
**Asset Based Approaches to Teaching and Learning**

Unlike deficit based approaches to teaching and learning, asset based pedagogies ensure the maintenance of language, culture, and community into the classroom. To address low achievement of students of color, schools must design curriculum with the acceptance that there are various ways to interpret the world, modes of communication, and approaches to teaching and learning that are unique to specific populations (Emdin, 2010). In attending to a student's cultural context, students are empowered as they relay their experiences. Student’s cultural assets should be engaged with the practice of critical race methodology (CRM). In other words:

- CRM (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process…;
- (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color;
- (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and
- (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color.… It views these experiences as sources of strength and
- (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 131).

Students of color whose cultural context is misunderstood by educators are viewed as at risk of underachieving. As Fisher points out, “A historical nature of education in the context of the United States makes it far too easy to forget how schools sought to assimilate Black and Latino youth, thus marginalizing if not outright devaluing these students’ familial and community contributions” (as cited in Morrison, 2017, p. 184).
Classrooms that value cultural context create experiences that grant students the opportunity to interpret learning and knowledge with not only engagement, but also relevance.

Asset-based models of curriculum require a responsiveness to students’ lived experiences. In culturally responsive teaching, Perry and Delpit (1998) suggests that students must see the connection between learning and their lived experiences. By embracing the concept of "funds of knowledge," which refers to the cultural and historical skills and knowledge that students possess, educators can shift their perspective from seeing these assets as deficits. This change in mindset not only validates students but also fosters an inclusive academic environment (Moll et al., 1992). An essential component of this approach is culturally responsive teaching, which recognizes that culture finds expression through language and literacy. Students who do not speak Standard American English (SAE) in the home, are often misunderstood as being under-performing or below-level in the classroom. Lazar, as cited in Harmon (2012), points out that:

Literacy practices serve legitimate communicative purposes for all families, but their value is determined by the power that specific communities hold in society…. power relations exist in society and determine how different literacies are valued. It is often assumed that the literacy of nondominant or underrepresented groups are nonexistent or inferior to those of middle-class white Western societies…. (p. 14).

Literacy and language are at the heart of teaching and learning. Language and literacy educators who embrace the social constructivist view strive to validate the lived
experiences of students of color. This validation extends to acknowledging and valuing their home language, methods of communication, stories, narratives, family histories, biographies, chronicles, and parables. By recognizing and incorporating these aspects, educators create an inclusive and affirming learning environment that respects the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students of color (Bell, 1987; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Morrison, 2017).

Using students’ languages in meaningful and purposeful ways is culturally responsive teaching with an asset-based approach. Perry and Delpit deepen this methodology by (1998) identifying four discourses: (1) call and response: students call and respond appropriately; (2) proverbializing: brief statements for teaching ideals and values; (3) narrativizing: storytelling on personal and historical lived experiences; and (4) signifying: using irony, humor, hyperbole to communicate in multiple levels of tone and meaning. Using these language strategies in connection with multicultural content, educators begin to create an inclusive environment that honors diverse students and their experiences. Asset based pedagogy is based on constructing curriculum in conjunction with students versus a traditional model that constructs curriculum for and outside of students (Yosso 2005; Paris & Alim, 2014; Morrison, 2017).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culture encompasses language, literacies, and practices that students bring from their unique backgrounds and experiences. This inclusive perspective acknowledges that culture is not limited to ethnicity alone but is a multifaceted aspect of students' identities, enriching the educational environment with a range of diverse perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2017; Gay, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). It is
suggested that students of color achieve lower academically due to a lack of continuity between school and home (Banks, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires educators to go beyond simply celebrating and recognizing culture to promoting and critiquing the multiple and shifting ways that students engage with culture both at school and at home.

In addition to CRP, Django Paris (2012) proposed culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as a bridge for twenty-first century learning and asset-based pedagogies that support aspects of culture by model-meshing, seeking out nontraditional texts, and exploring alternative cultural affiliations. By positioning students’ cultural knowledge as an asset, students begin to see themselves in academia. This theoretical stance seeks to “perpetuate and foster--to sustain--linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Current traditional models foster a monolingual and monocultural curriculum further widening the opportunity gap for students of color. Gay (2013) and Paris (2012) credit Ladson-Billings (1995) for the introduction of culturally relevant teaching and the inspiration for the golden age of resource pedagogies focusing on the intersection of language, literacy, and culture, but argues that relevance and responsiveness are not enough to build the asset-driven pedagogy necessary to support America’s multiethnic and multilingual society. Culturally sustaining pedagogies build upon the foundations of culturally responsive pedagogy but go further by aiming to sustain and strengthen students' cultural identities and practices.

Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies three main ideas for culturally relevant pedagogy: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; (c) students must develop a critical consciousness
through which they challenge the current status quo of social order (Morrison, 2017). In order to pursue an authentic learning experience for a diverse student population, educators must form an alliance in learning partnership with the students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Hammond, 2015). This alliance will foster the connection to stretch and empower students, specifically students of color, as academic scholars. The ultimate goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to cultivate self-efficacy, create independent learners, and promote critical thinkers (Ladson-Billings 1995; Banks, 2002; Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015). By validating students' experiences and honoring cultural and linguistic practices of the home in the school, students become empowered.

Overtime, the concept of culturally relevant teaching evolved into CRP to include a broader range of pedagogical strategies and practices that promote equitable learning outcomes for all students, regardless and inclusive of their cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

In the culturally responsive classroom, curriculum "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 16). Teachers incorporate materials and topics that are relevant to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, and that resonate with their lived realities. However, in order to fully work toward a culturally responsive classroom, educators must adopt culturally responsive pedagogical practices. These practices include strategies for engaging students, promoting critical thinking, and building relationships, including the use of cooperative learning, the integration of technology, the incorporation of experiential learning, and the use of dialogic inquiry (Gay, 2000). These practices allow students to work collaboratively,
explore their own interests and experiences, and develop their own voices and perspectives and work to create an inclusive classroom culture that promotes academic achievement for all students.

The language gap, which centers whiteness in the curriculum and views any linguistic practice outside of Standard American English as deficient, is what Alim (2004), Alim and Smitherman (2012), Gay (2013) and Paris and Alim (2017) present as linguistic supremacy. Culturally responsive pedagogy works to decenter whiteness in language practice and curriculum while disrupting “any future attempts to ban race and ethnic studies or to pass English-Only laws must be seen as part and parcel of the political project of whiteness-that is, as oppressive, restrictive policies that are passed with the express content of limiting the progress of communities of color” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.7).

Whiteness in the Curriculum

Race is a primary factor in influencing outcomes for students in the classroom and the curriculum. With white females dominating the field of education, it is essential that teachers do not “remain silent about race when race is clearly a factor in the classroom or curriculum, [when they do], they are in fact teaching ideological and institutional aspects of whiteness” (Peters, 2015; Chandler-Ward, 2017). Peters (2015) concluded, based on a University of London student-created research study, that a “lack of awareness that the curriculum is white comprised of ‘white ideas’ by ‘white authors’ and is the result of colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible” (p. 641).

Critical race theory and culturally relevant teaching require a disruption to the status quo. Whiteness in the curriculum is legitimimized when teachers, often white teachers, fail to
address a white curriculum, further perpetuating systemic oppression that protects and preserves the status quo (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). There is a pattern of silence and silencing embedded into the curriculum. Fine (1991) notes:

What became apparent was a structural fear of naming. Naming involves those practices that facilitate critical conversation about social and economic arrangements, particularly about inequitable distributions of power and resources by which these students and their kin suffer disproportionately. The practices of administration, the relationships between school and community, and the forms of pedagogy and curriculum applied were all scarred by the fear of naming, provoking the move to silence (p. 34).

Teachers who are silent about whiteness in the curriculum contribute to the silencing of students of color in the classroom (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Educators may present what is considered a colorblind curriculum, one where they are convinced that color, or more specifically race, is not seen in the classroom or curriculum. To state that color or race is not an influence in the curriculum, is to further perpetuate the systemic racism pervasive in traditional educational structures. To recognize the philosophy of whiteness as it is represented in the curriculum and not also recognize the lived experiences of students of color is to deny access and equity to all students. “Curriculum is an official selection that structures knowledge in ways that privilege a particular construction of knowledge and the history of knowledge” (Peters, 2015). Traditional curriculum framed in whiteness is created to teach the white, middle-class student.
Implicit Bias and Cultural Competence

Implicit biases are the inherent attitudes and beliefs that a person unconsciously holds about a person or group of people (Milner, 2015). Although unintentional, these biases are formed through personal experiences, socialization, and histories and are activated by the way a person perceives identity: gender, race, ethnicity (Milner, 2015). In a culturally responsive classroom, teachers need to be aware of their implicit biases and strive to develop cultural competence. It is critical for educators to identify implicit bias, thereby improving student outcomes and guiding them to reach their full potential. Teachers’ beliefs can shape their practices whether consciously or unconsciously (Gay, 2010; Milner 2015). Implicit biases can lead to discriminatory behavior, even among people who genuinely believe in equality and fairness (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004).

Using a culturally responsive frame, educators must learn to combat implicit biases surrounding social differences in order to create a culture of inclusivity. CRP demands a detour from mainstream thinking and behavior from all stakeholders with an emphasis on critical literacy, authentic listening, and explicit interrogation and analysis of inequities within the classroom and society (Gay, 2010; Muhammad, 2020). bell hooks (1994) states:

When we, educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education. (p. 44).

Cultural competency is the ability to appreciate one’s own culture while also
respecting and understanding at least one other culture (Aguilar, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). Cultural competency is achieved by first examining implicit biases and how these biases create inequities in curriculum and instruction, and then beginning to build a culturally responsive classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014). This requires understanding and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students, and incorporating those perspectives into curriculum and instruction while maintaining an awareness of the power dynamics in the classroom and ensuring that all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

Using a culturally responsive frame requires educators to combat implicit biases, promote critical literacy and authentic listening, and analyze and address inequities within the classroom and society. It also requires developing cultural competency, valuing the experiences and perspectives of all students, and committing to ongoing self-reflection and growth. By doing so, educators can create a culture of inclusivity and provide students with a truly liberatory education.

**Culturally Responsive Professional Development**

CRPD requires ongoing self-reflection, learning, and growth. Teacher attitudes about professional development can range from apathy and disengagement to program exhaustion to excitement. To address negative perceptions, professional development initiatives must focus primarily on specific teacher needs and increasing student achievement (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2017). Teachers must be considered valuable stakeholders in the decision making process—and the goal of this development must not be to scare teachers into compliance with punitive systems, but to empower them to interrogate their own histories and practices for philosophical and pedagogical growth.
There are multiple factors contributing to issues of equity and access in schools, so leaders are tasked with providing opportunities that meet teachers where they are, creating judgment free spaces, and designing development initiatives that sustain over time (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Neri et. al., 2019).

Until American educational systems interrogate the status quo, traditionally marginalized populations will continue to suffer (Wise, 2002). Before we can begin to acknowledge and understand another race or culture, we must first seek to fully understand our own complicitness within a system designed for White people. Being user-centered and problem specific is essential when developing and executing authentic and meaningful development opportunities (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). For the purpose of this development, the user will be both the teacher and the student.

In addressing student needs, educators should approach the disparate data with an unbiased eye. Teachers cannot rely on deficit perspectives and resource pedagogies designing student learning (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Paris, 2012). The dominant language, literacy, and culture embedded into the traditional curriculum was created for White, middle-class norms and perpetuates the systemic oppressive beliefs that any practice that does not align to this norm is less than or unworthy (Paris, 2012). Deficit perspectives are rooted in this thinking: if a student differs from or is unable to meet the status quo, there is something wrong with the student, not the system. Resource pedagogies work to diminish this problem while recognizing the vast cultural, linguistic, and literacies that students of color bring to the classroom; Moll and Gonzalez (1994) refer to this idea as funds of knowledge for which educators should build from in order to successfully transfer these skills into the
curriculum. Teacher attitudes about these funds must be positive in order to become a potential utility in the classroom. While resource pedagogy is a step in the right direction, it still positions students’ cultural identities and linguistic practices outside of the white-norm, resulting in an additive approach to curriculum design.

Teachers need to feel valued and heard without fear of judgment or punishment when surrendering to change. It is important for educators to have a working knowledge of cultural concepts and their own positionality within inequitable systems before they can be challenged to disrupt those same systems.

The educator’s responsibility to disrupt the systemic racism in school curriculum must build from culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2005) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). Responsive pedagogy leverages the funds of knowledge diverse students bring to the classroom and capitalizes on these unique literacies, histories, and experiences to design relevant and authentic learning experiences (Redding & Corbett, 2018).

In order for CRPD to be effective, it must be ongoing and embedded into the culture of the school or district. This means that CRPD should not be seen as a one-time training, but rather as a continuous process of learning and growth. It should also be integrated into all aspects of the school or district, from curriculum development to hiring practices (Lynch & Hanson, 2015).

**Challenges**

The research on closing the achievement gap is exhaustive. Bettina Love (2019) refers to the survival tactics that educators use to combat achievement for students of color as the “educational survival complex” (p. 13). While Love (2019) criticizes the
teaching and reform models prior to 2020, the sentiment remains the same: “education for collective dignity and human power for justice” requires more than “survival tactics for dark children” (p. 13). Simply stated, the achievement gap is defined as the disparity in academic achievement in groups of minorities and students of low socioeconomic status (Abramson, 2006). In shifting the focus from the students, the achievement gap, to the systemic inequities inherited by students based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, allows educators to resume attention to the obstacles and conditions that deny students opportunities because of these classifications.

Because the United States education reform efforts use standardized tests, graduation rates, and grade point averages to assess student achievement, students of color are held accountable at a historically Eurocentric standard originally designed for middle to upper class white families, that does not represent them culturally, ethnically, or linguistically; this contributes largely to the opportunity gap. In addition to systemic racism in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, Barton and Coley (2009) suggest a strong correlation between life and school conditions with cognitive development and academic achievement: educators need to be prepared to teach all students by fully knowing their students’ humanity and the richness of their identities (Love, 2019).

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed selected research and scholarship on critical race theory, culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching, and CRP professional development. In addition to reviewing the major movements toward liberatory education, I explored the scholarship and research on deficit and asset based pedagogies, Whiteness in the curriculum, and challenges in attitudes and beliefs with regard to CRP
PD. The scholarly arguments presented advocate for education practices that value the lived histories, cultures, experiences, and languages of all students and use these strengths to guide curriculum design and execution.

Eurocentric and ethnocentric curricula have been identified as contributors to the persistent achievement gap in American public schools, often neglecting the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. However, one approach that seeks to address this issue is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which strives to empower students by fostering social agency and a sense of responsibility. Scholars strongly emphasize the need for CRP professional development for teachers, where they actively model CRP practices and pedagogy in the classroom. Teacher educators and professional development facilitators need to explicitly integrate CRP principles and strategies into their programs. Culturally responsive teaching is a fundamental aspect of multicultural education, aiming to leverage the rich funds of knowledge, diverse experiences, and cultural styles within a student body to make learning more relevant and meaningful to them (Gay, 2010). By adopting a culturally responsive frame in the classroom, educators actively work to challenge and counter the implicit biases ingrained in conditioned racialized thinking (Chen, Nimmo, & Fraser, 2009).
CHAPTER THREE: ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem of Practice

The current achievement data at Bayside High School shows that students of color are underperforming compared to their white counterparts in all academic areas. This is a multifaceted problem, and for the purpose of this study, I focused on the awareness levels of seven teachers after participating in a series of culturally responsive professional development (CRPD) sessions. Culturally responsive pedagogy is designed to help students develop a sociopolitical or critical conscience while challenging teachers to develop a belief that all students are capable of success (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The initial problem was identified as students of color were underrepresented in advanced courses during the junior and senior year. I observed that out of 66 students, only five were students of color. However, this problem is not isolated to advanced courses as students of color in all courses are not being taught to their full potential, and the need for culturally responsive professional development for the predominantly white teaching faculty became evident to me as I explored the initial problem more in-depth.

Research Question

What impact will a series of professional development sessions on culturally responsive teaching (CRT) have on the awareness level of seven teachers at a suburban high school in South Carolina?
Using critical race theory as a primary lens, I used a qualitative methods approach to examine the attitudes and awareness levels of seven teachers at a suburban high school in South Carolina. Action research is “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 3). In support of the qualitative methods used, a pre- and post-Likert scale survey was used to quantify the findings. Through the dual role of teacher and researcher, I collected data through four sources: pre- and post-study Likert scales, teacher-participant interviews, teacher-participant journals, and observational field notes.

**Action Research Design**

This action research study is a qualitative case study that examined teachers’ attitudes and awareness levels in response to the problem of disparities in academic performance between students of color and their white counterparts. In an action research case study, the researcher does an in-depth exploration of a single entity in order to understand a particular phenomenon (Efron & Ravid, 2013). I sought to explore the awareness levels of seven teacher participants who engaged in a series of culturally responsive teaching focused professional development sessions.

This study was situated within critical race theory and worked to illuminate the socio-political conditions required to provide an education as a liberatory practice. I intended to explore how power dynamics, social structures, policies, and practices in education can either reinforce or challenge racial inequalities and contribute to a more equitable educational experience. By situating the study within critical race theory, I sought to shed light on the transformative potential of education in addressing racial injustices and advancing social change. Race as a factor of inequity contributes to the
phenomenon of students of color having less academic success than their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002).

Structural and institutional racism embedded in American schools works to uphold a Eurocentric, normative standard that fails to acknowledge and value the lived experiences of the global majority (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). The oppressive and ignorant ideas of color-blindness and neutrality fail to recognize the unique cultural assets students of color bring to the classroom. Multicultural education has its limits, and if educators fail to theorize race, they will continue to fail to serve the needs of all students. Multicultural education is not the same as critical race theory, and when used interchangeably with diversity, it is written off as a trend or shallow coexistence (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017).

The opportunity gap for historically marginalized students in the United States is easily documented and rejects a paradigm that allows the status quo to prevail (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive pedagogy rests on three criteria: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010). With these propositions in mind, I created and observed a six-part series of professional development sessions focusing on teacher implicit biases, responsiveness and teacher messaging, compliance versus engagement, and unpacking core content and curriculum.

One of the prominent characteristics of action research is that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16).
Criteria for good action research includes trustworthiness and validity, but also focuses on quality, goodness, credibility, workability, and outcomes (Herr & Anderson, 2015). If quality and validity are synonymous, this must be applied to outcomes, knowledge acquisition, positionality, methodology, setting, and participants. In an action research case study, the researcher does an in-depth exploration of a single entity in order to understand a particular phenomenon (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Case study research design allows the researcher to study unique research participants who are experiencing the same process; this allows me to research individual teacher mindsets, values, and historical beliefs and their influence on becoming culturally responsive educators. Case studies create flexibility of data collection and invite a personalized study of each participant. In this study, I sought to understand the attitudes and awareness levels of each teacher participant before, during, and after the professional development series.

My positionality as a white, female teacher is significant as the teacher-researcher conducting the study. In order to establish validity, reflective practices were needed to be authentic and recorded through weekly journals.

**Setting and Time Frame of Study**

The study took place at Bayside High School during the spring semester of the 2021-2022 school year. The teacher-researcher and participants work at a high school in a suburban area of Charleston, SC where 31% of students are students of color and 28% are economically disadvantaged (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020). In order to protect the identity of the teacher participants and the high school community, pseudonyms are used throughout the study.
The time frame for the study was a six-week period beginning in March of 2022 and concluding in April of 2022. The initial meeting was in-person on a district identified professional development day. Prior to the first meeting, participants completed a Likert scale survey to assess base knowledge and awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants met for 90 minutes to review the timeline for the study and participated in the first professional development session. Participants met weekly on Wednesdays for the next six weeks to participate in the professional development series. Each session lasted 60 minutes. Between professional development sessions, participants will journal about the previous week’s session and reflect on how this has influenced or impacted their practice or educational philosophy.

**Participants in the Study**

The teacher-participants in this study are certified teachers at Bayside High School. All teachers at Bayside High are required to attend mandatory, weekly professional development sessions on culturally responsive pedagogy. The need for this series grew from years of administrative data analysis on the disparate learning outcomes for students based on racial or economic characteristics. Seven teachers volunteered to participate in the study beyond the school-wide requirement of attendance at all CRP professional development sessions.

- **Ms. Chachee**, a 49-year-old white female, has dedicated herself to working with the Hispanic community throughout her career. She has 27 years experience teaching Spanish and has completed her doctorate in education with a focus on gifted and talented populations. Ms. Chachee actively acknowledges and confronts her implicit biases; she is dedicated to developing awareness and
dismantling these harmful thought patterns. Ms. Chachee rates herself as a 3 out of 10 in terms of her ability to identify and analyze systemic racism and inequities in education.

- **Mr. James**, a 33-year-old male who has been teaching science for three years. Prior to his teaching career, he served in the army. James recognizes his personal struggle in distinguishing between legitimate biases and reasonable or rational reactions or thoughts. James acknowledges his current limitations in identifying and analyzing systemic inequities in education. On a self-assessment scale, he rates himself a 2 out of 10 in this regard. However, his desire for personal growth and commitment to his students motivate him to actively engage in self-reflection and continuous learning, with the aim of becoming more adept at recognizing and addressing systemic issues.

- **Ms. Sheli**, a 46-year-old white female, is an experienced high school English teacher of 24 years. Sheli works to confront the notion that she wants her students to assimilate to her way of thinking and learning. While Sheli is aware of the existence of systemic inequities in education, she rates herself a 4 out of 10 in recognizing and analyzing them. Sheli acknowledges that addressing systemic inequities requires ongoing education, collaboration with colleagues, and a commitment to actively challenging and dismantling unjust structures.

- **Ms. Reece**, a 46-year-old white female, is a high school English teacher with 25 years experience. Reece recognizes her own implicit biases, particularly in relation to profiling students. Although rating herself at a 4 out of 10 in recognizing and analyzing systemic inequities in education, Reece admits to being
underdeveloped in CRP and expresses a willingness to continue to learn how to be a more inclusive and equitable teacher.

- **Ms. S**, a 37-year-old white female, is a special education teacher for six years, focusing on fostering parental involvement in her students' education. She is committed to providing an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all her students. While she acknowledges that she has profiled students based on behavior associated with race in the past, Ms. S demonstrates a genuine desire to address these biases and grow as an educator. She rates herself a 3 out of 10 in recognizing and analyzing systemic inequities.

- **Ms. Lisa**, a 48-year-old white female, has been a special education teacher for 17 years. Ms. Lisa acknowledges the presence of implicit biases and recognizes how they have influenced her perception of different students over the years. While she rates herself a 3 out of 10 in recognizing and analyzing systemic inequities in education, she demonstrates a genuine commitment to expanding her understanding and addressing these issues.

- **Ms. Jane**, a 55-year-old white female, has been a history teacher for 27 years. She has developed a deep understanding of the presence of implicit biases and their potential impact on educational decisions. Recognizing the importance of fair and unbiased treatment, Jane has actively worked on checking herself to ensure that her classroom practices are free from bias and promote equal opportunities for all students. While she rates herself a 4 out of 10 in recognizing systemic inequities in schools, she demonstrates a commitment to continuous growth and is open to expanding her knowledge in this area.
Research Methods

The culturally responsive professional development sessions were created by the Equity and Access Committee at Bayside High School. I am the co-chair of the Equity and Access team and worked directly with this team to assess the needs of the faculty based on student data and longitudinal observations and feedback from previous professional development opportunities. The focused content of the culturally responsive professional development (CRPD) sessions grew from this assessment. Teaching faculty attendance for the CRPD series was mandatory and took place monthly during the scheduled meeting time: Wednesday, from 3:30pm - 4:30 pm. Seven volunteer teacher-participants participated in this study.

Data Collection and Instruments

Pre- and Post- Likert Scale (Appendix A). The teacher-participants were given Likert Scale surveys at the beginning and end of the six-week series in order to evaluate the evolution of the teachers’ awareness levels with regards to culturally responsive teaching overtime. Likert Scale surveys are a common source of quantitative data used to identify participant attitudes to show trend and the effectiveness of the taken action (Ivankova, 2018). The same survey was given at the beginning and end of the action research study.

Interviews (Appendix B). In addition to the surveys, I conducted interviews with the teacher-participants throughout the CRPD series. The surveys and interviews were used to address teacher perceptions and needs regarding CRPD. The interviews were 30 minutes long and audio and video recorded via Zoom or in-person according to the participant’s preference. The principal, instructional coach, and the equity and access
coach were also interviewed to illuminate the need for the series and their understanding of culturally responsive professional development as an intervention at Bayside High School. All participants were de-identified and given consent forms for participation. Using emerging theory, all interviews were coded to develop categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The participant interviews were conducted virtually due to Covid-19 safety restrictions. Online interviews using a text set of questions which participants completed were used for each interview with the teacher-participants; I responded with follow-up questions as necessary. There are advantages and disadvantages to online interviews. “Although online interviews allow for respondents’ reflexivity...your ability to “read” between the lines, to gain deeper insight into the respondents’ feelings and inner thoughts, and to respond spontaneously are diminished” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 107). However, in order to maintain safety, the online interview protocol was the most effective method for conducting interviews for this study. The interviews with the principal, instructional coach, and Equity and Access coach were conducted in-person immediately following the planning meetings for the CRPD series. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a deeper knowledge of the teacher-participants, their backgrounds as individuals, their backgrounds as teachers, and to deeply assess their perception and attitudes about culturally responsive pedagogy.

The interviews were limited to five questions with potential follow-up questions, as needed. The interview questions were open-ended and required the participants to explain in one or more sentences which demanded a more thoughtful response from each participant as fewer, open-ended questions will yield more substantive information from
the respondents (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Each interview followed the funnel process of beginning with a broad question about culturally responsive teaching and ending with a respondent specific question about culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms.

**Participant Journals** (Appendix C). The teacher-participants maintained reflective journals throughout the six weeks to record critical incidents, anecdotal information, reflections, and experiences related to the professional development series. In the days in between sessions, teacher-participants were asked to make at least one journal entry relating the previous week’s professional development content to their teaching philosophy or practice. These journals were structured around reflective questions and were intended to record the thoughts and ideas participants found valuable.

**Field Note Observations** (Appendix D). I recorded observational field notes during each professional development session and interview that include detailed descriptions of what I see, hear, and observe during each session. The use of field note observations creates a descriptive and reflective record of what is happening, the setting, and the participants (Efon & Ravid, 2013).

**Research Procedure**

This action research study took place over six weeks during the spring 2022 semester. The study researched seven teacher participants in a focused professional development series designed to increase teacher awareness. This study was a small part of a larger, school-wide initiative to increase cultural competency at Bayside High School. The procedure for the six week action research study is outlined in Table 3.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Professional Development Content and Expectations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Implicit Bias                                    | 1. Teacher participants completed the pre-development Likert Scale  
|      |                                                  | 2. Researcher created professional development  
|      |                                                  | 3. Teacher participants attended and participated in session one training on implicit bias  
|      |                                                  | 4. I took observational field notes during the session |
| 2    | Building Cultural Competence                     | 1. Teacher participants completed the structured reflective journal prompt #1  
|      |                                                  | 2. I reviewed participant feedback and reflections and recorded information into chart  
|      |                                                  | 3. Building cultural competence professional development co-created with the E&A team at BHS |
| 3    | Responsiveness and Teacher Messaging             | 1. Teacher participants were invited to share reflections from the previous week  
|      |                                                  | 2. I created and led the responsiveness and teacher messaging session  
|      |                                                  | 3. Teacher participants attended and participated in session three training on responsiveness and teacher messaging  
|      |                                                  | 4. I took observational field notes during the session |
| 4    | Leveraging Cultural Capital                      | 1. Teacher participants completed the structured reflective journal prompt #3  
|      |                                                  | 2. I reviewed participant feedback and reflections and record |
3. Leveraging cultural capital professional development co-created with the E&A team at BHS

5 Unpacking Core Content and Curriculum Part I

1. Teacher participants were invited to share reflections from the previous week
2. I created and led the unpacking core content and curriculum with culturally responsiveness in mind
3. Teacher participants attended and participated in session five training on unpacking core content and curriculum with culturally responsiveness in mind
4. I took observational field notes during the session

6 Unpacking Core Content and Curriculum Part II

1. Teacher participants completed the structured reflective journal prompt #5
2. I reviewed participant feedback and reflections and recorded information into chart
3. Teacher participants shared unit design
4. Final reflective journal prompt #6

**Intervention**

**Week 1.** The professional development session on identity and bias proved to be a transformative experience for the seven teacher participants. During the session, they were encouraged to delve into their personal racial histories, a process that ultimately aimed to enhance their effectiveness as educators. By examining their most prominent identities and contrasting them with those identities most validated in public schools, the
Week 2. Building cultural competence was an important focus of the professional development session for the seven teacher participants. The teacher-participants were presented with statistical data specific to Bayside High School, including school zoning maps, which allowed them to gain insights into the racial dynamics and systemic inequities present within their school community. By analyzing concepts such as racism, culture, whiteness, and systemic inequities, the teachers developed a heightened awareness of the social and cultural factors that impact their students' experiences.

Week 3. The session focused on the effects of teacher messaging on these systems, highlighting how the words and actions of educators can reinforce or challenge existing power structures. Teachers were encouraged to critically reflect on their own messaging and teaching practices. This session explored how liberal frameworks, though well-intentioned, often fall short in dismantling racism and can inadvertently perpetuate it. By challenging these misguided frameworks, the teachers were able to gain a deeper understanding of the complex and interconnected nature of inequitable systems. They explored how racism is experienced differently based on an individual's or group's intersecting identities, emphasizing the significance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing systemic oppression.

Week 4. During the session on leveraging cultural capital at the district-wide equity, inclusion, and race symposium, the seven teacher-participants were required to attend three sessions specifically chosen by the teacher-researcher, which included exploring the documentary *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. This
prompted the teachers to critically analyze how they can view the funds of knowledge possessed by their students as valuable assets and entry points to academic achievement. The session highlighted the importance of embracing and incorporating diverse perspectives and backgrounds into the educational process, fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

**Week 5 and Week 6.** During the two-part session on unpacking core content and designing curriculum with a culturally responsive lens, the seven teacher-participants actively engaged in a process of critical examination and transformation of their instructional practices. In the first part, they conducted an in-depth analysis of their core content. They identified potential biases, gaps, and areas that could be improved by incorporating diverse perspectives and voices. In the second part, the teachers collaborated to design curriculum that was inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their students. They integrated authentic resources, diverse texts, and culturally responsive teaching strategies.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection and analysis should happen simultaneously, as it is a recursive process (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The initial data analysis for this study began with analyzing the initial Likert Scale results showing teachers’ perceptions and attitudes about culturally responsive pedagogy. Each teacher-participant had an electronic folder that had the agenda for the entire study, the pre- and post- Likert Scale, structured journal prompts, and resources for each development session. It is critical that organization systems for organizing data be established early (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and this
e-portfolio will be used throughout the study to organize and evaluate data on individual participants.

The Equity and Access Committee met at the conclusion of the study to discuss data and share evaluations and observations, review anecdotal notes, narrative analysis, and comparative analysis to recognize trends and report findings. This data collection was kept in an e-portfolio, as well. This constant comparative method is widely used in qualitative research to generate findings, and this will be used to guide findings to build theoretical interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to understand the awareness levels of teacher participants about culturally responsive pedagogy after participating in a series of professional development sessions. The collected data will come from observations, journals, surveys and interviews to show individual, personal, and narrative data. As each data reference is collected, I analyzed trends to draw conclusions and make generalizations that connect directly to the purpose statement. As previously stated, participants had individual e-portfolios in an effort to individualize teacher attitudes and awareness, but based on overall conclusions and generalizations made inductively from this data, categories will be constructed to use in future comparative analyses.

Because qualitative data analysis relies on assumptions based on reality and the lens with which the studied phenomenon is observed and reported, this study used triangulation to increase credibility and validity of the results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method of cross-checking from multiple sources was apparent in the monthly team meetings and a separate analysis period before the team met to outline differences and similarities in perception in an effort to avoid bias and maintain integrity and
trustworthiness. This study included method triangulation, investigator triangulation, and data source triangulation. Method triangulation was present based on the quantitative and qualitative data measures throughout the course of the study (Patton, 1999). The principal, committee members, instructional coach, and equity and access coach analyzed findings to diminish the effects of inherent bias and illuminate multiple perspectives and create validity and rigor within the study.

**Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data**

At the conclusion of the action research study, the seven teacher-participants and I met to discuss and reflect on the data collected throughout the six week professional development series. Each participant was asked to share how their attitudes and awareness levels have or have not changed throughout the six week study. As a group, the participants and I worked to draw conclusions about the research and discuss implications for the classroom.

It is imperative that confidentiality is maintained and each participant was given a pseudonym not only for the purpose of the study, but also for building level data and analysis discussed and shared by the principal, Equity and Access Committee, and coaches. Participation in this study was voluntary.

**Plan for Devising an Action Plan**

The findings from the study will be used to identify and guide a continued effort to develop teachers at BHS in culturally responsive pedagogy. The findings have been shared with the administration, the equity and access team, and the instructional coaches at BHS. This series is now being offered in both the fall and spring semesters for teachers at BHS, although it is still voluntary. In addition, I have presented the first
session of this series at the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English annual conference. I will continue to rework parts of this series to provide professional development for teachers at BHS, within the school district, and across the state.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the awareness levels of seven high school teachers after participating in a six-week professional development series on culturally responsive teaching. The intervention was created and executed by me, the teacher-researcher, and I was able to identify specific themes within the study that will be used to create future professional development opportunities at BHS. The data was analyzed through a CRP lens and had significant outcomes in awareness of implicit biases, cultural competency, CRP strategies, and the need for leadership to drive equity and access expectations and development.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study presents the findings and interpretation of the results examining the awareness levels of seven teachers who participated in a CRP PD workshop series. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the PD program on the participants' awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices. The study consisted of six workshops focusing on different levels of cultural awareness: implicit bias, building cultural competence, responsiveness and teacher messaging, leveraging cultural capital, and unpacking core content and curriculum. Participation in the study was voluntary. Data for this study was collected over a six week period during the Spring 2022 semester at a public charter high school in Charleston, South Carolina.

Research Question

What impact will a series of professional development workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) have on the awareness level of seven teachers at a suburban high school in South Carolina?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze the changes in the awareness levels of seven high school teachers after participating in a PD series focused on CRP. By examining the teachers' awareness, this study aimed to contribute to the
existing body of knowledge on the effectiveness of professional development in promoting culturally responsive teaching practices which ultimately impact student achievement for all students.

**Findings of Study**

In examining the findings of the data collection, I first analyzed each source separately. Once the original data sources were analyzed, I organized the data from all workshops using Google Sheets and Microsoft OneNote. By utilizing Google Sheets and Microsoft OneNote, I was able to create a cohesive framework that facilitated the identification of commonalities, variations, and significant trends across the workshops. This holistic approach enabled me to draw conclusions and make informed recommendations based on the data analysis, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

The assessment encompassed four key components: (a) pre- and post-Likert scale surveys and participant journals, where teacher-participants self-reported their perceived improvements in awareness, as well as any effects this may have had on student engagement and achievement; (b) my observations and the observations of the teacher-participants to document changes in planning content and curriculum, as personal reflections in relation to CRP; (c) field notes taken before, during, and after the sessions illustrating commonalities, contrasting moments, and epiphanies; and (d) interviews conducted with teacher-participants to gather their reflections on the impact of the culturally responsive pedagogy professional development on their increased awareness and points of frustration or confusion.
I carefully reviewed each source of data individually. This analysis aimed to extrapolate teacher-participants' perceptions of CRP PD at Bayside High School and identify common themes and trends among their responses. By employing this comprehensive methodology, the study sought to provide valuable insights into the relationship between teacher awareness and the use of CRP. The examination of multiple data aimed to provide a thorough understanding of the impact of the CRP PD series and its implications for instructional practices at BHS.

The findings of this study indicate an increase in the awareness levels of the seven teacher-participants in the professional development program on culturally responsive pedagogy and revealed several key themes related to the participants' enhanced awareness: 1) an increased recognition of implicit biases and how this impacts teaching and learning; 2) a working knowledge of CRP strategies; and 3) a need for leadership to continue to advance teacher development in CRP.

**Analysis of the Data**

The results of this study suggest that the professional development program on culturally responsive pedagogy had a positive impact on the awareness levels of the participating teachers, as well as a desired need for on-going CRP PD. The findings align with existing research on the effectiveness of professional development in promoting culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The increased recognition of implicit biases and commitment to reflection and self-assessment, knowledge of culturally responsive strategies, and emphasis on a desired need for extended leadership in CRP show the participants willingness to evolve as educators.
The interpretation of these results suggests that professional development programs focused on culturally responsive pedagogy can play a vital role in preparing teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to create inclusive and culturally relevant and responsive learning environments. The findings also underscore the importance of ongoing support and follow-up to sustain the positive changes in teachers' awareness and instructional practices.

**Theme 1: Recognition of implicit bias as an initial step in gaining cultural competence.** All seven teachers demonstrated an increased recognition of their own implicit biases and a new understanding of how identity and bias manifest in the classroom. The first session in the series focused on identity and bias. Part of the session required participants to analyze their own identities and reflect on how those identities manifest in both their learning lives and teaching lives.

![Pre/Post Comparison - Self-perceived Level of Bias](image)

*Figure 4.1 Post study responses indicating participants’ self-perceived implicit bias and willingness to reflect critically on implicit and explicit biases.*
All participants identified increased awareness levels of implicit bias after participating in the CRP PD series.

To validate what the Likert survey results indicate, Ms. Chachee stated, "Sadly, I make assumptions each and every day due to my implicit bias. I am working daily to identify these biases and address them through changes in thoughts/actions/reactions." This sentiment was shared amongst the participants. Through my observations, I noticed that by highlighting the identities that were most validated in public education: whiteness, cisgendered, able-bodied, affluence, English speaking, participants were able to see how their own experiences and biases molded their teaching.

In contrast, by having participants identify the identities that were most important to them and then comparing those with the identities most validated in traditional education systems, all participants began to realize how they were invalidating some of their students some of the time. Ms. Sheli shared in her weekly journal for week one that she “actively works to overcome the idea that I sometimes want students to assimilate to my needs or way of thinking as a teacher.”

All seven participants recognized how their identity shaped their implicit biases and how this ultimately shaped who they are as teachers. Ms. Reece admitted:

I have implicit bias where race and gender identification are concerned. I realize that it surprises me if black students perform well. It's not because I don't want them to do well, it's just that we talk a lot about an achievement gap and I tend to expect it. I want to be more careful to always have high expectations and only respond when students have individual difficulties. As far as gender bias is concerned, I want to be less frustrated if students give confusing signals about
this. I find myself worrying if I don't get it right. I want to worry less and listen more where this is concerned.

This statement candidly illustrates how teachers contribute to a student’s self-perception and can ultimately lead to a student self-fulfilling prophecy of not being a scholar or academic based on culture, heritage, language, and sociopolitical markers that go against the White, affluent, English speaking status quo prevalent at BHS. In this session, the participants reflected on their own beliefs about race and culture, and how this leads to academic profiling. Ms. Lisa admitted, “I definitely have changed the way I look at students when they struggle to learn something or participate in a behavior that’s more desired. I was certainly brought up on the idea of bootstraps and grit.”

Figure 4.2 Pre/Post Comparison of all participants willingness to reflect critically
In addition to all seven participants’ increased recognition of bias, the Likert survey shows that all participants’ willingness to reflect critically remained the same or increased (Figure 4.2).

Using the post-Likert survey data in conjunction with the interviews, it became evident that all teacher-participants exhibited a genuine openness to reflect on their own implicit biases. Many expressed a willingness to engage in self-examination and critically assess their assumptions and stereotypes about students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This observation suggests that teachers recognized the potential impact of their biases on student achievement and were motivated to actively address and mitigate their influence. Ms. Sheli shared in her interview how this information allowed her to reflect on her own biases:

I have lived my whole life in the South. I grew up in a very rural and homogenous community and remember the culture shock of attending college in New Orleans. Leaving my hometown saved me–experiences beyond a conservative, white perspective have been that much more meaningful and have opened my eyes drastically. Each year and with each PD opportunity, my eyes open wider.

(personal interview, April 13, 2022).

Teacher-participants shared instances where they actively sought opportunities to challenge their biases in their classroom practices. They acknowledged the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment, where all students can succeed. These teachers expressed a strong commitment to adopting culturally responsive pedagogical strategies that counteract biases and stereotypes, allowing them to better support their students' academic growth and achievement. Specifically, Ms. S reflected
on her growth as a teacher and how her awareness of her own biases has helped her to
grow as a teacher. In the interview, she stated:

I am not sure if I have identified specifically biases I have at this exact moment. I
know in the past I might have been quick to judge a student of color’s behavior
over a white students’ behavior but I feel that I do not do that now. I definitely see
this being the case at BHS and at my former school. As I have an increased
acknowledgement of my background and experiences, I am able to check them
and not act in haste, but respond thoughtfully in a way that shows my students
genuine care instead of a stereotypical response. (personal interview, April 19,
2022).

These observations revealed a collective recognition among the teachers of the
importance of addressing implicit biases as a crucial step toward promoting positive
student outcomes. Teachers demonstrated a growing awareness of the potential harm that
biases can inflict on students' educational experiences and were motivated to create a
more inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

**Theme 2: Knowledge of culturally responsive strategies.** Participation in the
six-week CRP PD series has shown to significantly increase teacher awareness and
understanding of the importance of incorporating cultural responsiveness in their
instructional practices. The PD series provided educators with a comprehensive
framework and practical tools to recognize and address the diverse cultural backgrounds
of their students. As a result, teachers demonstrated an enhanced ability to create an
inclusive and equitable learning environment that hopes to positively impact student
engagement and achievement.
Throughout the professional development series, teachers engaged in deep discussions and interactive activities that explored topics such as implicit biases, cultural competence, and the impact of cultural responsiveness on student learning. By examining their own beliefs and biases, teachers became more self-aware and developed a heightened sensitivity to the diverse experiences and needs of their students. This increased awareness enabled them to critically reflect on their instructional practices and make intentional changes to better meet the cultural, linguistic, and social-emotional needs of their students. All participants are more comfortable redesigning curriculum in adherence with CRP after having participated in the CRP PD series as illustrated in figure 4.3. In a paired reflective journal response during week five, Ms. Jane and Mr. James responded:

Figure 4.3 Pre/Post Comparison on confidence in planning and executing lessons using a CRP framework
In the past, we believed we would need to integrate multiple curriculums into a single class to meet the diverse needs of all students, but student centered curriculum is driven by the students within the parameters set by the teachers: discovery instruction. We also realize that when we identify our “most vulnerable” students we often look directly at the bottom, but there are also our GT students who are not meeting their potential and can grow tremendously when they are taught using CRP.

In the fifth and sixth sessions, teachers worked on practical strategies and techniques to implement culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms. They learned how to incorporate culturally relevant materials, include diverse perspectives in their curriculum, and foster a positive classroom climate that validates the cultural identities of all students. The teachers' awareness of the importance of culturally responsive teaching grew, and they expressed a renewed commitment to applying these practices in their instructional planning and delivery. Ms. Chachee, in her post-series interview responded:

As a Spanish teacher [at BHS], I have recognized the importance of incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies to create an inclusive learning experience for my students. I find that when I incorporate authentic cultural materials into my lessons and expose them to a variety of resources, like literature, music, photographs, art, and cuisine, it is more an immersive experience. One lesson in particular where we shared different cultural resources from our own backgrounds and compared with the Spanish speaking countries, allowed all students to be seen and heard while finding likeness with other countries served as a classroom
culture building experience as well as an opportunity to learn about language and culture in the Spanish classroom.

One observation I made throughout the six-week series on CRP was that although the participants were eager and open to learning and understanding, when it came to the practical application, they expected a handbook or scripted lessons/curriculum, but once they realized that CRP is not prescribed or additive, they realized they would need to redesign their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their students. The week six journal asked participants to brainstorm new ways of participation within their content areas. Five of the seven teacher-participants identified broader, on-going projects as a practical CRP strategy. Ms. Lisa shared:

As a special education teacher, I have been individualizing learning needs for my entire career, but now I’m beginning to understand that it goes beyond that, and we need to be good listeners first, and then work in collaboration with the community to create a multicultural experience that is both relevant and responsive to each students’ needs. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

This shows how the awareness of the participants grew while they expressed a new confidence; however, it was my observation that while the participants became more confident, they still struggled to articulate what they would do in the classroom.

**Theme 3: Need for leadership advancing teacher development in CRP.**

According to the post-series Likert survey, and observations recorded in my field notes, all seven participants see a need for leadership, specifically administration, to advance teacher development in CRP.
Figure 4.4: Chart showing the need for leadership to drive CRP initiatives

Figure 4.4 highlights that 28.6% of participants rated the need for leadership-driven CRP initiatives as a four out of five, while a majority 71.4% ranked it as the highest priority with a five out of five rating. These findings clearly illustrate that there is a strong recognition and desire among participants for leaders to spearhead the integration of CRP practices within the school.

The qualitative data gathered through participants' comments in their reflective journals and personal interviews further highlights the importance of leadership in driving CRP initiatives. Ms. Lisa remarked, "We need strong leadership that values and prioritizes cultural responsiveness. It starts from the top, and without clear guidance and support, it's challenging for teachers to implement." Ms. Sheli shared this sentiment, stating, "Leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone and expectations for cultural responsiveness. We need leaders who promote and prioritize CRP, providing us with the necessary resources and professional development to improve our instructional practices."
All participants agreed that there is a sustained need for CRP PD and this series was useful for BHS (see Figure 4.5). Ms. Chachee did not see usefulness according to the pre-workshop survey; however, at the conclusion of the series, she now believes there is a strong need and perceived usefulness for ongoing CRP PD at BHS. In her final journal, she wrote:

I think participation in this series made me more aware of the urgent need for more professional developments like this. Students of color are treated differently, I am not sure if this is something that is done knowingly by others or if it is just from the lack of training and knowledge that PD like this provides.

Ms. Lisa also recognized the need for collaboration in CRP PD in her week six journal response: “This served as a reminder of the need for CRP – constant reminders are good; they bring change and deter complacency. I do have a better sense of how other educators in my building feel about CRP and have learned from their experiences.”
The need for these PDs to be supported and driven by leadership was also expressed during workshops and recorded in my field notes. As the group began discussing the implications and need for ongoing CRP PD, the theme of modeling cultural responsiveness emerged. To further explore this theme, I included a question about the need for CRP initiatives to come from leadership in the final interviews. Mr. James reflected on our beginning of the year faculty meetings:

At the beginning of each school year, we review the previous year’s data. [Our principal] always highlights the disparities between Students of Color and White students, and he leads a conversation about the problem, but we have yet to have a campus wide discussion about solutions or even a shared goal on CRP. If we are to analyze the disparities as a campus, we need to also be working together to eradicate these problems.

Ms. S shared a similar need for CRP PD initiatives to be leadership driven in order to be more inclusive of the entire faculty. She stated, “now that we have identified the problem, we need admin to lead the initiatives that allow us to have the difficult conversations and accountability to show that we are focusing on disrupting inequitable systems campus-wide.”

Where all seven teacher-participants recognized a need for leadership to drive on-going CRP PD, there were additional sub-themes that presented during my observations. The most prominent being that all stakeholders be involved in CRP initiatives and that we share a common goal and methods for achieving this goal as a school-based community. The need for collaboration and system-wide initiatives was ever-present as participants repeatedly commented on the importance of involving all
stakeholders in CRP initiatives. Ms. Jane emphasized, "It's not just about individual teachers implementing CRP in their classrooms. We need collaboration and a collective effort to make an impact on our students' experiences." Similarly, Ms. S. expressed, "We need a whole-school approach, where everyone is on board and working together towards a common goal. It requires systemic change and consistent support from all levels of leadership."

Conclusion

This study explored the awareness levels of seven teachers who participated in a professional development program on culturally responsive pedagogy. The findings revealed a significant increase in their awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices. The participants exhibited improved recognition of implicit bias, knowledge of culturally responsive strategies, commitment to reflection and self-assessment, and a desire for ongoing CRP PD modeled by leadership at BHS.

These findings align with the framework on culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018). According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive pedagogy involves recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of students. It also includes incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum and instructional strategies. The increased awareness of the teachers in this study indicates progress in aligning their practices with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy through interrogation of implicit biases, reflection on how these biases influence teaching and learning, a new understanding of CRP strategies, and a desired need for on-going CRP PD initiatives driven by leadership (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2017).
The outcomes of this study will inform the development of an action plan aimed at increasing awareness and implementing CRP school-wide. The goal is to develop teachers with varying backgrounds and experiences in order to enhance their perceptions and attitudes toward CRP. As teacher awareness increases, perceptions, and attitudes improve, it is anticipated that the implementation of CRP will have a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Banks, 2007; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2017).
CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an instructional approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural backgrounds in all aspects of learning: curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Gay, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a CRP PD six-week series on teachers' awareness levels at Bayside High School. The study results indicate increased awareness levels with emphasis on recognizing implicit biases and how these influence teaching and learning, a stronger understanding of CRP strategies, and a desired need for leadership driven, ongoing CRP PD. These themes were identified through analysis of pre- and post-Likert scale surveys, workshop journals, observations, discussions, participant interviews, and field notes.

The need for CRP PD was initially identified as an issue with the disproportionate enrollment in AP courses at BHS primarily based on race; however, after a more careful investigation, it was realized that students of color were underperforming at all academic levels. The CRP PD series was created as an intervention to promote academic equity and access at BHS.

The results of the study illustrate an urgent need for CRP PD at BHS. One of the key findings of the study was that implicit bias was a major factor in perpetuating racial
inequities in the school. Teachers and staff were more likely to discipline students of color, and BIPOC students were less likely to be recommended for advanced courses. The study showed that CRP strategies were effective in promoting racial equity. Teachers who participated in the PD reported feeling more comfortable discussing race and equity in the classroom, and students reported feeling more supported and included in the classrooms of the seven teacher-participants. However, the study also revealed that many educators are still uncomfortable with discussions of race and equity, which highlights the ongoing need for PD in this area.

Another finding was the desire for leadership to play a role in spearheading the PD initiatives. Without strong leadership support, it was difficult to get teachers to engage with the material. This was made evident in having only seven volunteers out of 118 educators at BHS. The teacher-participants expressed the need for ongoing CRP PD but emphasized that all teachers should participate and this needs to be driven by leadership for unity and cohesion in achieving the goal of equity and access.

**Research Question**

What impact will a series of professional development workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) have on the awareness level of seven teachers at a suburban high school in South Carolina?

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact a series of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) professional development workshops has on the awareness level of seven teachers in a suburban high school in South Carolina.
Implications

The study is intended to examine the attitudes of the seven teacher-participants, and particularly how those attitudes may or may not shift while participating in the six on-campus CRP PD class sessions. The seven participants were led through six immersive sessions focusing on implicit bias, cultural competency, responsiveness and teacher messaging, leveraging cultural capital, and curriculum design. I led each PD session by modeling CRP strategies which allowed the teacher-participants to not only explore their own biases and racial identity and the effects this has on their pedagogy, but also granted them tangible practice with selected strategies and simplicity in offering voice and choice in learning activities, which is a small but necessary part of CRP.

The participants also interrogated the systems at BHS, including careful data analysis of the state report card which clearly shows the disproportionate academic achievement of students of color when compared to their white counterparts. The final two workshops required the teacher-participants to evaluate their current curriculum, specifically a unit of study, and then to revise and recreate the same unit using CRP instructional practices. These educators reflected on the process during the final session and collectively brainstormed ideas for implementation moving forward. Three major themes emerged from the data collection during the study:

1. Recognition of implicit bias
2. Knowledge of culturally responsive strategies
3. Need for leadership advancing teacher development in CRP

As a result of the three major themes that emerged from the study, the following implications can be drawn:
1. Educators at BHS experience discomfort when discussing race and systemic inequities. However, in a small group setting, the participants were willing to share candidly about their own biases and implications in the classroom. This further illustrates the need to create spaces for courageous conversations. By analyzing the factors that influence teachers’ comfort levels, this study can provide insights into how to create a culture of humility and understanding that effectively promotes inclusive and equitable education practices in high schools.

2. When presented with statistical information about race and systemic inequities in the BHS community, educators gain a better understanding of the how and why these systemic inequities exist. This grants educators the opportunity to interrogate their own beliefs about why academic disparities exist for students of color.

3. Educators feel defensive when CRP PD is delivered without first exploring personal identity, racial histories, and systemic inequities.

4. Academic outcomes improve for students when culturally responsive educators prioritize teacher-student relationships and are eager to learn about students’ cultures, communities, and families.

The teacher-participants acknowledged their own vulnerabilities and blind spots. When they could not relate to and connect with their students, it was challenging for them to have empathy for them. They continued to interrogate their own beliefs and values as educators despite their discomfort. Overall, they showed a desire and drive to advance culturally responsive instruction. Teachers must develop cultural competence if they want their lessons to be responsive to a diverse student body (Howard, 2020). Teachers should
build a positive classroom culture, teach topics from a variety of perspectives, and have a working knowledge of their students' prior experiences and cultural knowledge.

The study revealed that when provided with a safe and supportive environment, teachers were willing to engage in candid discussions about their own biases and the implications these biases have in the classroom. By understanding the factors that influence teachers' comfort levels, educational institutions can work towards building a culture that encourages embracing discomfort as an opportunity for growth (Singleton, 2014).

The study also revealed that educators feel defensive when culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) professional development is delivered without first exploring personal identity, racial histories, and systemic inequities. This suggests that it is essential for CRP training to include opportunities for educators to reflect on their own identities and experiences, and to understand how systemic inequities impact their teaching practices in a non-judgemental environment that breeds acceptance and understanding for all stakeholders. By incorporating personal reflection and self-awareness, and by reflecting on their own racial histories, educators can better recognize their vulnerabilities and blind spots, and develop a deeper empathy for their students.

**Action Plan**

The results of this action research study showed an increase in the awareness levels of seven high school teachers after participating in a six-week PD series on culturally responsive pedagogy. In response to the key themes present in the study, these action steps will directly correlate with these themes: recognizing and disrupting implicit biases in curriculum planning, knowledge of CRP strategies, and leadership driven CRP
PD initiatives. These action steps will require careful collaborative planning with administration and access to resources to implement CRP PD opportunities at BHS.

The action plan for additional impact on teacher attitudes and student outcomes includes multiple steps. First, I will share the results of the study with school-based administration, instructional coaches, and the equity and access team. From there, I will seek permission to offer the six-week series on a voluntary basis during the fall 2023 semester. In addition to leading this workshop for a new group of teachers, I will also seek to continue working with the original teacher-participants in extended training in CRP and in the curriculum redesign to be shared within each department.

The first step in my action plan is to disseminate these findings with building-level administration, instructional coaches and the equity and access team. One major theme that was illuminated during my data collection was the need for leadership to drive CRP PD initiatives. In a direct response to this theme, this step would invite stakeholders to compare the quantitative data at BHS that illustrates the disparities in academic achievement between Students of Colors and their White peers with the qualitative data within this study that further suggests when teachers are culturally responsive in their pedagogy, students achieve at higher rates.

In order to review the data in a simplistic, organized manner, I will create a presentation to be shared first with the administrators, instructional coaches, and equity and access team. With my principal’s consent, I will then share the presentation with our charter board and the entire faculty at BHS. It is my goal to encourage all stakeholders to harness their discomfort and become more culturally responsive. The presentation will begin with the quantitative data in order to clearly define the problem. I will then share
an overview of each PD session within the series as an opportunity to show the
stakeholders the gentle implementation of CRP over the course of six-weeks so as to not
overwhelm them with urgent race-based discussions and activities which can be met with
judgment and apathy. The results of this study will then be shared using the pseudonyms
provided in the study and participant feedback will also be shared. At the conclusion of
the faculty presentation, I will issue the interest survey to explore potential participants
for the fall 2023 cohort.

The second action step will be to gain permission to run the series again during
the fall 2023 semester. By first presenting the data and findings, I hope to gauge interest
and recruit participants for a second, improved series. Using original participant
feedback, I will revise parts of the original series. Although participants were eager to
gain practical strategies in the beginning, they did provide positive feedback for laying
the groundwork during the first four weeks before revising their unit of study. I will
make sure that the second cohort of participants understand this using reflections from
the original participants. For example, Ms. Chachee wrote in her week six journal
response,

I wish all teachers at BHS had to take this PD. I came in wanting to fill my
tool-box to create simple solutions for an obvious problem, but I quickly realized
it isn’t that simple. The first part of this workshop really helped me understand
how deep this problem is within our community. A simple strategy or lesson plan
is not sufficient enough to address this. We need ongoing development and we
need to understand that this is a multi-faceted problem.

This next session will be limited to ten participants, as I would like to continue to revise
the series based on participant feedback. One change in participants I would like to make is to have more male participants and educators of color as participants. It is also important to have a participant from each content area. Ideally, having two participants from each department, one in each series session, these participants can then work with their departments to develop CRP.

The next action step will be to meet with the original cohort for ongoing CRP PD. These participants reported back that students felt more seen and engaged as they employed CRP in their classrooms. Using this as a catalyst for designing future PD sessions, I would plan to study student achievement, attitudes, and outcomes where CRP is being employed in unit design.

There was an expressed need for a second, more practical, workshop on CRP. As the student population remains diverse, it is imperative that educators are equipped with the tools to effectively engage and support all students. The first workshop provided valuable information on the importance of cultural responsiveness, but lacked practical strategies for implementation in the classroom. A second workshop would address this gap by providing teachers with concrete examples of culturally responsive teaching practices and opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve with peers.

The first session in the second series would be a refresher where we share and discuss our observations since having completed the first series with regard to bias, culture competency, and systemic inequities and how these manifest in our classrooms. From there, I would assist the participants with identifying the most immediate needs within their classrooms. It would make sense to begin with creating a classroom culture of inclusivity and acceptance. This could be co-created with the participants and the
eight teachers, myself included, could use these strategies and lessons in the classroom and report back monthly on effectiveness and outcomes. The follow up sessions would also be more collaborative by nature, as teachers share what is working in their classrooms as what is needed in their classrooms.

The final sessions will focus on practical strategies and instructional design within the content areas. Through monthly meetings, we can work as a team to design units for each course. The ultimate goal is for these teacher-participants to become CRP leaders within their departments and after the appropriate training, they can share these units with other teachers and roll out a CRP initiative campus-wide.

Professional learning about race and equity requires a systems-thinking approach (Penuel et al., 2020). In the past, leaders at BHS have relied too heavily on the power of a single day PD. Brief workshops do not allow teachers the necessary time to interrogate and shift their own perspectives, and this is vital in equity work. CRP has been shown to improve academic outcomes for students from historically marginalized groups, making it not only an ethical imperative but also an effective teaching practice. It is essential that educators at BHS receive ongoing professional development in this area to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all students in their classrooms.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This action-research study focused on teachers’ knowledge and awareness of CRP influence teaching and learning. Future research can study how district and local leaders can create CRP professional development opportunities to have a larger impact on a single school or entire district. Gay (2010) argued that school administrators must have a similar obligation for the overall school culture and environment if instructors are
required to modify their instruction to adapt to children's cultural learning and social requirements in the classroom. This study can be viewed as a crucial first step in building the awareness around equity and access at the high school level; however, this could also create an opportunity to employ this workshop series at the school’s feeder schools and thereby work to dismantle systemic inequities earlier in a student’s education.

This study illustrates the positive outcomes teacher awareness of CRP PD has on student-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, and student academic achievement. Although this was a six-week series, future research could study the sustained engagement of a small group of teachers within a single school through the course of a semester or school year to truly track progress in growth of not only teacher attitudes and beliefs, but also student achievement. A longitudinal study could include potential book studies, sharing of CRP resources, and increased comfort for grappling with polarizing issues like race and systemic inequities. In addition to a longitudinal study, it would benefit the school community to make this training or study mandatory, which would need to again be driven by administration, but the growth in both teacher awareness and student achievement would provide valuable insight into disrupting the inequitable systems currently present in many public high schools.

**Conclusion**

This study was driven by my own passions as an educator. My experiences in teaching high school in predominantly Black schools and now in a moderately diverse school have made it impossible to ignore the system inequities and disparities in public schools for historically marginalized students. At the beginning of my career, while teaching at a predominantly Black high school, I had resources limited to traditional,
Eurocentric curriculum. This was my first realization as a new educator: I did not have the tools or resources to create meaningful units for my students. I dedicated my career to building cultural competence and focusing on creating equity and access for all students to achieve. Equity work is never complete, and I am committed to being a life-long learner in this regard.

This action research focused on the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and its impact on the awareness levels of seven teacher-participants. In an effort to disrupt inequitable systems at BHS, discomfort is to be expected and embraced during discussions around race and equity. In addition to embracing discomfort, ongoing meetings and professional development sessions provided opportunities for teachers to share their stories and learn from one another. The importance of sharing stories was highlighted in the study as it allowed teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their students' experiences and perspectives. This, in turn, led to a more inclusive classroom environment where all students felt valued and heard.

Despite the challenges that come with implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, the study found that it had a positive impact on teacher awareness and shows promise to impact student outcomes. It is important to recognize that race and equity professional development rarely ends in closure. Rather, it is an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection and growth. We owe it to our students to constantly interrogate our practices to ensure our instruction is what is best for all students.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035001037


https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200101


Milner, H. R. (2012). *Start where you are, but don’t stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today’s classrooms*. Harvard Education Press.


https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721720923520


https://www.screportcards.com/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9SDEwNDQ4MSZj


https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/state-report-card/


APPENDIX A

PRE- AND POST- LIKERT SURVEY

I appreciate your time and participation in this questionnaire, which aims to assess perceptions and attitudes towards race and culture, cultural awareness, and knowledge and attitudes regarding the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Please provide your responses to the following questions by selecting a rating on a 5-point scale that best reflects your beliefs about culture and race.

All answers will be kept confidential. Thank you for your valuable input.

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your self-perceived level of bias (explicit or unconscious) concerning race and culture, with 1 indicating a high degree of bias and 5 representing no bias at all.

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your willingness to engage in challenging conversations, engage in critical self-reflection, and make conscious changes to address any unconscious or explicit bias, with 1 indicating a low willingness and 5 indicating a high willingness.

3. To what extent do you agree with the statement that American public education lacks equity, and students of color face discrimination as a result of racist systems, policies, and practices? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement.
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your willingness to take specific steps to enhance your cultural awareness and better understand the lived realities of your students.

5. How strongly do you agree with the notion that implementing strict disciplinary rules would lead to improved outcomes for students of color? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete agreement and 5 indicating complete disagreement.

6. To what extent do you agree that adjusting your approach, planning, and execution to better align with the needs of your students of color would improve their outcomes? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement.

7. How confident are you in your ability to plan and execute lessons that meet the needs of your students of color and ensure their educational outcomes are on par with those of your white students? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement.

8. Professional development opportunities at JICHS that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy are useful. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement.

9. There is a current need for professional development at JICHS that focuses on culturally responsive teaching. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating complete disagreement and 5 indicating complete agreement.

10. (pre- only) If you are interested in participating in a six-week professional development workshop on culturally responsive pedagogy, please include your email
here, and I will contact you with details. **All names and responses will remain confidential.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW

Table B.1 Participant Interview Form Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Participant Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. What is your background with culturally responsive pedagogy, if any?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. What information about yourself or your career in education should I know that has not been discussed or shared prior to this interview?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Generally, what are your impressions or attitudes about PD opportunities at BHS? What about the PD offerings addressing CRP?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. How has your participation in this series impacted your awareness of culturally responsive teaching and its potential effects on your students, if at all?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Are you interested in additional professional development on this topic? If so, please explain your needs or interests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT WEEKLY JOURNAL PROMPTS

Table C.1 Weekly Journal Response Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRP PD SESSION</th>
<th>PROMPT</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Reflect on Implicit Bias and Identity (workshop #1). Have you identified any implicit biases present in the way you teach or interact with students? What changes—in your thinking or teaching—have you made as a result of this session?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Reflect on CRT 1 (workshop #2). What inequitable systems do you see in your classroom? BHS? CCSD? South Carolina (education only)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Reflect on CRT 2 (workshop #3). After the two part series on CRT, what new knowledge is most meaningful to you as a teacher? How will this knowledge influence what you do in the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Reflect on district wide systemic inequities (workshop #4). What new information stood out most to you? How will this influence teaching and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Reflect on your unit plan (workshop #5). What revisions or modifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>will you make to your selected unit? How has your participation in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRP PD series influenced these revisions or modifications?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Reflect on the six-week series. How, if at all, has your participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in CRP PD impacted your awareness of CRP? How, if at all, has this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>influenced your teaching methods? How has this impacted student outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

FIELD NOTE OBSERVATION FORM

Table D.1 Sample Field Note Observation Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF OBSERVATIONS</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

LETTER TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Participant,

My name is Charity [Brady]. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the effects a professional development series on culturally responsive pedagogy will have on the awareness levels of high school teachers. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a six-week professional development series, complete two surveys, participate in one interview, and maintain weekly reflective journals. The weekly professional development sessions will take place in the media center conference room from 3:30-4:30 every Wednesday.

In particular, you will be asked questions about culturally responsive pedagogy and your own classroom practices. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The interview meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 30 minutes. The session interview will be 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 the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

During the weekly professional development sessions, 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.

You will receive six recertification hours and six comp-time hours for participating in the study. You must participate in the entire study to receive any recertification hours or comp-time hours. You will not receive partial credit for participating in some of the study; hours will not be prorated.
You may contact me at escruggs@email.sc.edu. If you would like to participate, please complete the final question on the school-wide survey that was sent out. When you are done, please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,
Charity [Brady]