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Making a Difference in the Lives of Students: Successful Teachers of Students of Color with Disabilities or who are At-Risk of Identification of Disabilities at a High-Performing High-Poverty School

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Making a Difference in the Lives of Students: Successful Teachers of Students of Color

with Disabilities or who are At-Risk of Identification of Disabilities at a High-Performing

High-Poverty School

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Special Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
April 2, 2013

Keywords: Students of Color, Students with Disabilities, Poverty, Ethic of Care,
Culturally Responsive Teaching

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and kids. Because it is only through God's grace and the love you give me that I am able to do the things that I do. Thanks for all of the sacrifices you have made over the years to see me through to the end. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mom. You left us far too soon, but the time I was blessed to have you here set the foundation for me to be the man I have become. I know you are smiling down on us and I hope I have made you proud.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to give honor to God. Thank you Lord for the many ways you have blessed me. Over the years you have placed some very special people in my life and placed it on their hearts to believe in me. Although I now it impossible to name them all, I will spend a few sentences trying to recognize them. To Dr. Patricia Alvarez-McHatton, your work ethic and dedication to excellence has helped me to be the scholar I am today. To Dr. Daphne Thomas, thanks for all of the support and encouragement you have provided me along the way. To Dr. Kevin Gordon, your mentorship and guidance has had a significant impact on me and I thank you for it. To Dr. Harold Keller, thank you for stepping in and making what could have been a difficult situation into an opportunity to further our relationship. To Dr. James Paul, your wisdom, mentorship, and friendship has been extremely valuable to me as I emerged into a scholar. The talks we have enjoyed over the years have both enlightened and encouraged me. I look forward to many more in the near future. To Dr. Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, I thank you for your expertise and guidance. Your multicultural education course contributed heavily to my knowledge of effectively responding to diversity in the classroom. Finally, thank you to all my family and friends who have supported me along this journey. Your continuous prayers and kinds words have carried me through the tough times.

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ABSTRACT

Urban settings are described in scholarly literature as areas beset with high concentrations of poverty, high incidences of crime and violence, and are typically occupied by high percentages of people of color (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006; Mitcham, Portman, & Dean, 2009; Vera, 2011). For many children who live in low-income urban school districts, our educational system is failing them (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006). Swanson-Gehrke (2005) reported that at least two-thirds of these children fail to reach basic levels of achievement in reading. Such dismal achievement results may be attributed to a myriad of issues faced by students living in high poverty that may impede the learning process.

Improving the school achievement of these students requires comprehensive knowledge, unshakable convictions, and high-level pedagogical skills (Gay, 2010). The identification of effective instructional practices used to address the academic and social needs of these students has appeared to be an elusive task. The current study focused on this reality by investigating a school that has been able to create systems that result in improved academic and social outcomes of their students. Specifically, the study examined the instructional practices and beliefs of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification of disability at a high-performing high-poverty school.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the years, it has been well documented that students of color have been identified for special education programs at rates higher than their peers (Dunn, 1968; Mercer, 1973; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2007; Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010) and have experienced poor educational outcomes (Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow, 2005; Reschly & Christenson, 2006). In an analysis of ethnic representation in special education, Klinger, et al. (2005) revealed that Black students are more likely than White students to be identified as having mental retardation, learning disability, or an emotional disturbance. Mykerezi, Jordon, and Kostandini (2010) reported that students of color are failing to finish high school and are more likely to be unemployed, to end up in prison, or need public assistance. These issues have been cause for concern for parents, educators, and legislators, resulting in an urgent need to identify methods that will ameliorate disparate outcomes.

Reform initiatives and federal policy have considerably impacted public schooling (Aspen Institute on NCLB, 2007). Concerns for improving the educational conditions of students of color with disabilities have produced a resounding call for educational reform. These changes were evidenced in the requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. The mandates introduced by these acts that directly impacted the education of students with disabilities were the highly qualified designation for teachers, participation in

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statewide assessments, and that their participation and results be publicly reported by subgroup in measures determining Adequate Yearly Progress (McLaughlin, Malmgren, & Nolet, 2005).

Under NCLB, the focus began to shift from solely being on student performance to now including discussions on teacher impact on student outcomes. As a result, schools have witnessed changes that include an increased emphasis on the use of evidenced-based practices and increased requirements for teachers certification to assure each teacher is highly qualified in the areas in which they teach (Aspen Institute on NCLB, 2007). The increased requirements for teacher certification included full state teacher certification, a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education, and subject matter competence in each subject area taught (U.S. Congress, 2002). NCLB strives to ensure that these students receive access to high quality instruction provided by highly qualified teachers. Phillips (2010) asserted that the focus of NCLB legislation to increase teacher effectiveness was based on the recognition that these students have traditionally been under-served by public education. However, some believe that what has resulted from this movement toward teacher credentialing was a diminishing of the importance of pedagogy. Moreover, the distinction of teachers being considered highly qualified does not equate to them being effective in their practice.

Braun, Chapman, and Vezzu (2010) noted that NCLB has had a very modest impact on the rates of improvement for Black students and on the reduction in the achievement gaps between Black and White students. The modest improvement in the outcomes of students of color under NCLB has caused some to question the legitimacy of the mandates chosen approach to responding to the needs of these students through

teacher quality initiatives. Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) asserted that debate still rages regarding whether measureable teacher credentials can reliably predict either teacher quality or student achievement. Croninger, King-Rice, Rathbun, and Nishio (2005) furthered this claim by noting that while education policies promote high-quality teaching to enhance student achievement, questions persist about what constitutes quality teaching. Cruickshank (1990) reported that effective teachers are recognized by character traits, knowledge of subject matter, pedagogical decisions, expectations of students, responses to students, and approaches to managing the classroom. Although such indicators appear to be critical when determining teacher effectiveness, they are absent from the teacher credentialing requirements of NCLB. The failure of NCLB to focus specific attention to the impact of pedagogy on student outcomes warrants an increased emphasis for research that aims to examine the correlation between the two. Therefore, it is imperative that research is conducted that increases the knowledge base informing the field regarding effective methods aimed at addressing the problem students of color with disabilities not making adequate yearly progress.

Statement of the Problem

For many children who live in low-income urban school districts, our educational system is failing them (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006). Swanson-Gehrke (2005) reported that at least two-thirds of these children fail to reach basic levels of achievement in reading. Such dismal achievement results may be attributed to a myriad of issues faced by students living in high poverty that may impede the learning process. These issues include poor learning conditions, inadequate facilities, limited academic resources, low community involvement, and inexperienced or minimally qualified

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teachers (Blanchette, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Desimone & Long, 2010). Students in urban schools tend to perform lower than their peers from more affluent schools on academic measures (Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Blanchette, Klingner, and Harry (2009) noted that students of color with disabilities are at an even greater disadvantage because they are confronted with not only the challenges faced in urban schools, but those experienced by students in special education programs as well. The challenges include limited access to general education curriculum and poor post-school outcomes. In schools that are attended overwhelmingly by Black and Latino students, 40 percent or more of their freshman fail to make it to the 12th grade (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Moreover, African-American students exiting special education programs typically have difficulty accessing postsecondary education settings, are unprepared for the workforce, and experience high unemployment rates (Chamberlain, 2005). These realities of the educational experiences of students of color with disabilities require additional research on effective methods for meeting their needs. The current study aimed to identify these methods in an attempt to improve the outcomes of these students.

Improving the school achievement of students of color who currently are not performing well requires comprehensive knowledge, unshakable convictions, and high-level pedagogical skills (Gay, 2010). The identification of effective instructional practices for students of color with disabilities or who are at-risk of identification of disabilities has appeared to be an elusive task. The inability to identify effective instructional practices has exacerbated the challenges confounding students of color with disabilities. This may be a result of the belief that teaching practices significantly impact

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student outcomes. Palardy and Rumberger (2008) asserted that the practices teachers' employ in the classroom are more important than their education, credentials, or background variables. Therefore, a need exists to critically examine the practices of teachers who have achieved success in their efforts to meet the needs of students. Doing so will provide the field with a better understanding of instructional practices that may improve the educational outcomes of students of color with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

Typically, research intending to gain a better understanding of the educational outcomes of students in high-poverty schools has focused on settings in which students were not making progress (e.g., Bower & Griffin, 2011; Vera, 2011; Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). Such an approach to confronting the issue appears to focus on school failure rather than school success. Research originating from a deficit perspective fails to acknowledge the existence of schools in high-poverty communities that are experiencing success in meeting the needs of their students (e.g., Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007; Peck, 2010). The current study focuses on this reality by investigating a school that has been able to create systems that result in improved academic and social outcomes of their students. Specifically, the study examined the instructional practices and beliefs of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification of disability at a high-performing high-poverty school.

Significance of Study

Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale (2007) asserted that in spite of the challenges confronting high-poverty schools, these schools are still held accountable for improving

the academic and social outcomes of their children. While several studies have

highlighted some of the approaches high-poverty schools have implemented in

addressing student needs (e.g., Bryan, 2005; Poplin & Rivera, 2009; Jacobson, Johnson,

Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005), there continues to be a demand to further this strand of research.

Specifically, further research should focus on the role teaching assumes in the effort to

improve the success of students in high-poverty schools. Darling-Hammond and Youngs

(2002) argued that teachers matter for student achievement. Such an assertion warrants

more examination of the phenomena of teaching in order to gain a deeper understanding

of the impact of teachers and their practices on student achievement. The focus of this

examination is to identify what works so these practices can be replicated in other high-

poverty settings. There exists a need for a clear understanding of what instructional

methods have potential to effectively improve the social and academic outcomes of

students of color with disabilities. The significance of the current study contributes to the

fields understanding of practices that work for this student population.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

Stake (1995) declared that research questions force attention to the complexity

and contextuality of a phenomenon. Specifically, the following research questions will

be addressed:

1. What are the instructional practices of teachers of students of color with

   disabilities or at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools?

2. What are the approaches taken by teachers of students of color with disabilities or

   at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools to build

   community and caring in the classroom?

3. How do teachers describe their instructional practices and beliefs?

Overview of Research Design

Qualitative case study enables researchers to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations (Stake, 1995). Case study refers to the gathering of detailed information about a phenomenon in an attempt to draw conclusions about that phenomenon in a specific context (Zainal, 2007). It satisfies the three tenets of qualitative research of describing, understanding, and explaining cases (Tellis, 1997). Qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its specific situation (Stake, 2006). To study a case, we carefully examine its functioning and activities, but the primary objective of a case study is to understand the case.

Runyan (1982) noted that the case study method is effective when the purpose of the study is to describe the experience of a single case or to develop explanations of that experience. The primary objective of this case study is to get a deeper understanding of the practices of teachers of students of color in a high-performing high-poverty context. To get an understanding of the type of instruction and the ways in which classroom culture is created, it is imperative that time is spent observing actions in that classroom and interviewing the teacher on their interpretations of these actions. Spending time in the classroom observing the teachers' instructional approaches and engaging them in detailed discussions about what has been observed will enable me to describe practices used in teaching students of color with disabilities in a high-performing high-poverty setting. Zainal (2007) asserted that case studies help to explain the complexities of real-life situations, which may not be captured through experimental or survey research

methods. Due to the complexity associated with teaching, case study methodology was chosen for this study.

<center>**Philosophical/Conceptual Framework**</center>

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) asserted, "qualitative research is inquiry that is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational" (p. 650). This form of research is referred to as constructivist research. The philosophical perspective that guides this study is this constructivist perspective of knowledge. Constructivism is defined as an interpretive stance, which attends to the meaning-making activities of active agents and cognizing human beings (Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher constructs knowledge and understanding for the reader through their interpretation of the happenings of the phenomenon in its multiple contexts (Stake, 2010). The end goal of the constructivist is a deep understanding of social processes that may lead to or support positive social change (Lincoln, 2005). The major intent is to discover these meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

By making detailed observations in classrooms and all other relevant settings, the experiences of teachers delivering instruction and interacting with students can be captured. Through observing the interaction between the teacher and students in instructional contexts, and engaging the teachers in meaningful discussions regarding their practices, I was be able to make meaning of the impact that the identified instructional practices have on student outcomes. Moreover, through this framework, I

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began the process of making explicit the instructional behaviors of teachers in high-poverty settings in order to enable others gain a better understanding of teaching in this context.

The conceptual framework that supports this study is the theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching consists of five essential elements. These elements include developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students and families, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. These educational processes demand a shift in instructional methods, curricular materials, teacher dispositions, and school-community relations (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). To display each element identified by Gay, an individual must poses a high level of cultural proficiency. Culturally proficient educators acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse communication and social interaction patterns, and they use them appropriately to enhance the effectiveness of their communications with students and their families (Burns, Keyes, & Kusimo, 2005). Student achievement improves when teachers recognize, value, and incorporate students' personal abilities into their instructional strategies (Gay, 2010). This sense of connection with children and families enables teachers to enhance student learning and improve learning outcomes.

Gay's framework was selected because of the potential it provides for furthering our understanding of teaching in a highly diverse high-poverty context. In today's educational climate, one out of four American children attends an urban school where children are failing to reach basic levels of achievement (Swanson-Gehrke, 2005). Much

of the literature informing the field on CRT (e.g., Howard, 2001; Klingner et. al, 2005; Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009) leads practitioners to believe that CRT is needed in these educational contexts. It is not my assumption that the teachers in high-poverty settings inherently implement CRT and therefore the purpose of the study was not to examine CRT. However, an in-depth examination of the instructional approaches and beliefs of teachers of students of color with disabilities through a culturally responsive teaching lens provided an in-depth understanding of teaching at high-performing high-poverty settings.

Background of the Study

This study was an extension of an interdisciplinary multiple case study that examined the organizational processes and daily functions of a high-performing high-poverty school. Stake (2006) describes a multi-case project as a research design for closely examining several cases linked together. It entails a special effort to examine something having many cases, parts, or members. The multi-case study was interested in gaining deep understanding of the specific processes, approaches, and procedures of an HPHP school. That study sought to identify key factors that enable high-performing high-poverty schools to successfully meet student needs. Attempting to identify these key factors, the multi-case study engaged in a year long process that examined the interaction between the interrelated variables that contribute to a schools successful functioning. The variables that were examined are: teachers, students, leadership, families and community, student support personnel, and curriculum. The multi-case study collected multiple sources of data to examine the school. The data collection methods consisted of interviews, observations in multiple settings, document review, and

autophotography. The current study extended the work conducted in the multi-case study by continuing to work with a small sample of the teachers that participated in the study. While the multi-case study observed teachers and engaged them in discussions of their instructional practices related to all students, the current study was interested in engaging the teachers in a process that specifically focuses on their work with students of color with disabilities or at risk of identification.

Limitations

Due to the subjective nature of the data collected in qualitative case studies (i.e., observations and interviews) several common criticisms have traditionally been presented (Runyan, 1982). Mayan (2009) noted that in studying naturally occurring phenomena, qualitative researchers attempt to interpret the meaning people attach to their experiences. Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (2004) asserted that the qualitative researcher is a critical component of the research process and is thus viewed as a research tool. Based on this conceptualization of qualitative research, I acknowledged the relevant limitations in this study and now discuss how these limitations were addressed. The perceived limitations of the study are construct validity, generalizability, and researcher bias.

Construct Validity

Because of potential researcher subjectivity, construct validity is problematic in case study (Tellis, 1997). Case studies are not dependent upon a single data collection technique (Runyan, 1982) and therefore the use of multiple data sources in critical to this study. Through the use of multiple sources of evidence, I accounted for the threat to construct validity. By conducting interview and observations I was able to determine

consistency among the data. This process also enabled me to build confidence in the themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

Generalizability

It is essential that generalizations of case study findings be made on a case-by-case basis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Stake (1995) asserted that generalizations are commonly drawn about a case. He also noted that through studying that case at length, these generalizations are refined. This is due to the reality that as valuable information is provided about a particular situation, it informs our understanding of the situation. This new understanding enables us to make assertions on that situation that we then seek to apply in similar contexts. The purpose of the current study is not to generalize the findings but rather to provide a detailed description of a single case. The description of the case that this study provides enables others to make assertions about the phenomenon of teaching students of color with disabilities in high-performing high-poverty settings.

Researcher Bias

As a Black male and former elementary special education teacher, I approach the education of students of color with disabilities from a perspective that is reflective of my personal experiences as a learner and educator. My personal orientation and the historical narrative of education also causes me to approach the task of educating students of color from a critical perspective as I often question whether or not, we as a field are taking the necessary measures to assure that improved educational conditions for this group of students will be realized. I recognize how my personal narrative impacts my work and have employed reflexivity, subjectivity audit, and member checks.

Qualitative researchers are a critical component of the research study as they are "an integral constructor of the social reality being studied" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p.24). To address this reality, I kept a researcher journal to record my impression of those moments in the research process that "arouse strong positive or negative feelings" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p.463). By doing this, I was able to separate my personal perception of the phenomenon from what may be actually occurring. This will allow me to avoid misinterpretations of collected data. Finally, member checks enabled me to engage in a discourse with the participants that highlighted any instances in which my interpretations are not adequately representing their reality.

Role of the Researcher

The field of education can play a critical role in reducing many of the economic and social inequities that are prevalent in society today. In high-poverty communities, schools have the potential to change the social and educational trajectories of the children and families that inhabit them. These statements are reflective of my personal orientation and my recognition of the impact that acquiring a quality education has had on my life. I believe that each individual should be afforded with the opportunity to gain experiences that enable him or her to improve their personal situations. I also believe that teachers and schools should make committed efforts to facilitate these students' attempts to achieve success. Unfortunately, for many children schools have not always fulfilled this charge. This issue has affected no group of students as much as it has affected Black males from high-poverty communities. This leads me to agree entirely with Ladson-Billings' (1994) assertion that schools have yet to demonstrate a sustained effort to provide quality education for African Americans. Such a declaration has fueled me to

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focus my attention on the identification of approaches that lead to improvement of the academic and social outcomes of these students. It is with this lens that I view my work and my role in the change process.

As an educator, I take great pride in the teaching and learning process and fully embrace the opportunity it affords me to critically affect the outcomes of my students. I have over seven years experience as a special education teacher and behavior specialist in several high-poverty schools. During my time in these schools, I developed the understanding that we as a field could do more to make connections with these students and their communities in an attempt to make their learning experiences more meaningful. To my dismay, my colleagues and I were not always equipped with necessary knowledge and skills that would permit us to do so. Due to my desire to learn how to best meet student needs, I knew I need to embark on a quest to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of teaching students of color in high-poverty settings. This journey has led me to where I am today. I view myself as a committed, caring, and passionate Black male educator who is equipped to engage in a process of examination of teaching in a high-poverty school. This examination could ultimately result in a new level of understanding of practice that may inform the teacher practice. Simultaneously, I am prepared to engage in a critical reflection of the self that could lead to a new level of enlightenment of the self.

What I have shared here is a portion of my truth as an individual, an educator, and a researcher. I embrace this truth, as I know it has fueled my work over the years and has enabled me to reach new levels of discovery. Equally, I embrace the charge of conducting this research study as I know I will discover what was previously unknown

about teaching of students of color in high-poverty schools.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

A review of relevant literature is included in Chapter 2 of this document. This review includes a discussion of the current educational climate that has been established due to recent legislative mandates. Specifically, this discussion entails a description of the responses current legislation has promoted as means to addressing the issues confronting the education of students of color and students with disabilities. This review then presents literature on the academic achievement of students of color, students with disabilities, and students of color with disabilities and the factors that impede the academic achievement of these students. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of effective teaching of students of color. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology that will be used in this study. This includes a comprehensive discussion of case study methodology, participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the findings of the study. This discussion provides individual case reports for each of the participants and concludes with a cross-case analysis of the findings. Chapter 5 is an overall discussion of the study, which addresses my interpretations of the findings and the implications of them. Additionally, this chapter provides recommendations for teacher educators and offers a conceptual model of effective instruction of students of color with disabilities in high-poverty schools.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Current Context of Schooling

The issues currently confronting urban special education have been historically problematic. These issues have had a significant impact on schools and often serve as contributing factors in their struggle to improve the outcomes of students. Critical challenges confronting urban special education include poor student academic performance (Swanson-Gehrke, 2005); the achievement gap between students of color and their White peers (Fryer & Levitt, 2006); dismal school completion rates (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005); and disproportionate representation of students of color in special education programs (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010). Such challenges and the inability of many schools to overcome them have placed schools in urban or high-poverty settings at the forefront of many legislative initiatives. Urban settings are described in scholarly literature as areas beset with high concentrations of poverty, high incidences of crime and violence, and are typically occupied by high percentages of people of color (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006; Mitcham, Portman, & Dean, 2009; Vera, 2011). As the issues in urban communities persist, schools continue to seek effective methods to meet the needs of a student population that continues to grow increasingly diverse. Unfortunately, the identification of these methods has been minimal at best, leading Ladson-Billings' (1994) to argue that public schools have yet to demonstrate a sustained effort to provide quality education for children of color.

Providing a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities has been a challenging and often controversial endeavor (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Since its inception, the field of special education has been forced to respond to challenges regarding the efficacy of its practices for certain groups of students. One of the most persistent issues facing the field of special education is the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education programs. Salend and Garrick Duhaney (2005) noted that disproportionate representation refers to the extent to which students with specific characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic status, gender, age, etc.) are placed in a specific type of educational program or afforded access to services, resources, curriculum, and instructional and classroom management strategies corresponds to the percentage of those students in the overall population. The problem of disproportionality has been present in the field for over 30 years. Ritter and Skiba (2006) declared disproportionality of students of color in special education programs could not be completely comprehended as long as it is considered a singular incident, detached from the broader context of history. Criticism of this issue began when Dunn (1968) argued that Black students and students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds were being identified as having mental retardation and being placed in separate educational settings at higher rates than White students. While this report prompted a reduction in number of Black students labeled as mentally retarded, scholars have noted that disproportionality has become an issue in other disability categories (Artiles & Trent, 1994); specifically, students identified as having learning disabilities and emotional behavior disorders.

On the surface, placement of students in special education programs appears to be a

viable response to the needs of students with disabilities. This belief is informed by the perceived benefits that the field purports to provide to students in need of remediation. MacMillan and Reschley (1998) reported that these benefits include a student-teacher ratio that is considerably lower than that in general education, per-pupil expenditures that are two to four times what is spent on general education students, an education program that is individually tailored to the needs of child, and services delivered by a teacher with specialized training. However, for all the intended benefits of special education placement, a large percentage of students of color fail to achieve academic success. Gardner and Talbert-Johnson (2000) affirmed this belief when noting that despite the significant improvements in the educational opportunities for African American children and children with disabilities, these students are continuing to underperform.

While recent research indicates that academic achievement in both reading and math among students of color is improving, their scores range between 16 and 32 points lower than those of their white peers regardless of age tested (NCES, 2008). With such disparate academic achievement between different groups of children, it is important to note that teacher quality has been identified by research as the most important influence on student achievement, even when compared with other potential factors (e.g. socioeconomic status, class size, family background) (Sanders & Horn, 1998). In fact, research indicates that students with comparable achievement abilities have alarmingly different academic outcomes as a result of the teachers they have in school (Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

In the current educational climate, a pressing issue continues to be the inability of school districts to meet the individualized needs of all students including children of

color, students with special needs, and economically disadvantaged students who are typically disproportionately immersed in urban settings (Gardner & Talbert-Johnson, 2000). These issues continue to become more pressing, as schools grow increasingly diverse. According to data reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2010) in *The Condition of Education*, from 1988 to 2008 the percentage of enrollment of White students in public schools decreased from 68 to 55 percent. In contrast, during this same period, the enrollment of students traditionally identified as being persons of color increased dramatically from 32 to 45 percent. Banks (2006) asserted that as cultural, ethnic, language, and religious diversity increases, the challenge of educating citizens to function successfully in a pluralistic democratic society deepens.

The noticeable demographic shift in the student population could lead some to believe that if schools fail to prepare themselves to respond to the increase in diversity among their student population the potential exists for an increase in the number of students of color who experience school failure (Ware, 2006). The task of improving the outcomes of students of color becomes more problematic when considering the dwindling number of African American educators, who have traditionally played an important role in creating a positive learning environment for African American students (Gardner, Ford, & Miranda, 2001). The notion that the declining number of teachers of color will become problematic to efforts geared at improving the outcomes to students color is based on the belief of some scholars (Graham, 1987; Irvine, 1988; Lewis, 2006) that these teachers possess posses the potential to curtail the current educational trajectory of students of color.

While the concern for the declining number of teachers of color may be warranted, the focus on ways to improve the educational experiences of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification of disability must be placed on the identification of effective practices that improve the outcomes of these students. Efforts aimed at identifying these practices could serve as an appropriate starting point in the change process. To continue to focus on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color to address the needs of students of color further delays the process of improving the academic and social outcomes of these students.

Brown (2007) discussed the need of schools to identify effective ways of responding to the needs of diverse students when asserting that the change in racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student population is not the problem, but rather the problem lies in the manner in which educators respond to this change. As our society increases in diversity, teachers and other school personnel have an equivalent need to increase their understanding of the critical relationship between culture and social behavior and the need to view students' behaviors within a cultural context (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Therefore, with such a shift in student population, the need to identify ways to effectively ameliorate the issues germane to urban education and special education becomes more urgent as potentially increasing numbers of students may be negatively impacted. Blanchette, Klingner, and Harry (2009) discussed the intersection among race, culture and disability and its impact on special education. They affirmed that many students who attend urban schools fail to achieve equitable academic outcomes due to limited educational and economic resources. The relationship between urban education and special education is significant because the interaction of the issues

confronting both areas of education often creates a dismal outlook for student

achievement. This intersection is critical because student characteristics such as poverty,

non-English language status, and race and ethnicity status are negatively correlated with

student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

This chapter reviews the relevant literature informing the conceptualization of this

study. The chapter begins with a discussion of schooling in high poverty settings. It

discusses the issues prevalent in high-poverty schools and their impact on student

achievement along with responses targeted at addressing these issues. This section then

present a call for the need to shift the focus of response efforts to more proactive

approaches as opposed to the more deficit driven perspectives that have traditionally been

employed. The chapter then includes reviews of the role of teaching in student

achievement as well as a discussion of ways in which teacher effectiveness has been

defined. The chapter concludes with a conversation of culturally relevant teaching and its

potential for improving the outcomes of students of color with disabilities or at risk of

identification in high poverty schools.

Schooling in High-Poverty Settings

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported that one in five children have lived in

families in which household income failed to exceed official poverty thresholds. The

"widespread poverty found in America's inner cities has a pervasiveness that touches

every aspect of life, including increased health risks, family stress, limited social support,

and issues regarding personal safety" (Gardner & Talbert-Johnson, 2000, p. 78). Foote

(2005) asserted that in some high-poverty settings, schools are in poor condition and the

quality and availability of classroom resources is deplorable. Such assertions are

evidence that, poverty is not a situation that occurs in isolation, and its impact undeniably reaches schools and classrooms located in these urban communities.

Challenges of High-Poverty Schools

A current focus in the field of education is the disparity in achievement experienced by students in high-poverty schools as compared to students from suburban and rural schools with higher economic resources (Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1995). Students attending high-poverty schools who are often disproportionately students of color are often faced with significant challenges that impede their learning. These include an increased likelihood of living in poverty (Bennett, 2008), social marginalization, racism, classism, violence, crime, socially toxic environments, increasing levels of violence in an around school campuses, funding inequalities, and inadequate preparation of many educator to provide culturally responsive curricula for students in urban settings (Gardner & Talbert-Johnson, 2000). Salend, Garrick Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) noted "many of these factors interact to produce policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors that result in disparate treatment for, and disparate impact on, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (p. 290). Harris (2007) affirmed this notion when suggesting that social and economic disadvantages are critical causes behind the educational inequalities.

Although, the issue of poverty has been shown to have a significant impact on the academic and social outcomes of students, several scholars (Haberman, 1995; Swanson-Gehrke, 2005; McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006; Bennett, 2008) have posited that teachers can be effective in ameliorating the effects of poverty in schools. Teachers in high-poverty schools are effective because they possess a specific approach

to the setting that enables them to be successful (Weiner, 2000). After conducting more than 1,000 interviews, Haberman (1995) was able to describe the behaviors and undergirding ideologies that effective teachers in high-poverty school embody. Haberman's description resulted in the identification of the 15 functions of effective teachers. The functions are:

- Persistence – reveals the deep and abiding beliefs that effective teachers hold about the nature of children in poverty and their potential as well as their roles as teachers.

- Protecting learners and learning - involves being sensitive to current events that might capture the imagination of students. Students are involved in reading, writing, and thinking about these issues.

- Generalizations: Putting ideas into practice – creating classroom environments in which children active in constructive ways. Teachers explain the purpose of learning activities and their ideological underpinnings.

- Approach to "at-risk" children – recognizing the impact of the label "at-risk" on all who use it and avoid adding validity to such socially accepted terms. These teachers understand and emphasize the wide variety of ways in which school curricula and instructional methods cause large numbers of children to be at risk.

- Professional-personal orientation to students – establishing very close and supportive relationships with their students. These relationships are built on principals of caring, respect, and trust.

- The care and feeding of the bureaucracy – recognizing the school bureaucracy as a structure that has been systematically organized to prevent effective teaching

and learning.

- Fallibility – understanding and taking ownership of the inherent errors made in the practice of teachers. These teachers to serious errors such as misjudging a child and underestimating a child's ability.

- Emotional and physical stamina – the ability of these teachers to persevere in their practice in spite of the myriad of disappointments that befall heir students and emotionally impact them.

- Organizational ability – utilizing an extraordinarily high level of organization that facilitates the use of varied instructional approaches that engage students in meaningful ways.

- Effort-not ability – a demonstrated commitment to eliciting, fostering, and rewarding effort in daily teaching, in grading practices, and in the manner in which students' work is discussed with parents and students themselves.

- Teaching-not sorting – teachers believing that it is their responsibility to interest and engage children in wanting to learn and aim to make their lessons relevant to their students lives.

- Convincing students, "I need you here" – promoting student attendance in school through the use of team building lessons and activities. Consciously creating opportunities to demonstrate to students that they are active decision makers in the classroom.

- You and me against the material – establishing a form of rapport that communicates teamwork between the teacher and student. Uses coaching as their basic means of teaching.

- Gentile teaching in a violent society – viewing part of their role as teacher as assisting in the process of creating safe haven for students.

- When teachers face themselves – engaging in a thorough self-analysis of the content of their prejudices in an attempt to understand how they inform their practice.

The combination of these teacher characteristics enables teachers to build a classroom culture that promotes success. Teachers who exemplify these characteristics know themselves, know the environment in which they teach, and maintain high expectations for their students (Swanson-Gehrke, 2005).

In spite of examples of urban teachers providing high quality instruction to their students, the statistics-describing teachers in high-poverty urban schools are profoundly disturbing (Foote, 2005). Students of color and low-income students attending high-poverty schools are more likely to be educated by beginning rather than veteran teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). Therefore, the issues confronting high-poverty schools are magnified when teachers are not adequately prepared for this type of environment, lack cultural sensitivity and awareness, and use pedagogical methodologies that are not culturally congruent (Gay & Howard, 2000; McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006).

Efforts to Improve High-Poverty Schools

Legislative Initiatives

Educators and policy makers have long been concerned about the continuing inequities of schooling in America and the access to high-quality instruction for children from low-income communities (Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1995). These concerns

have led to several legislative responses that impact the ways in which schools currently

function. One of the most critical responses to the need to improve the performance of

schools and students was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. An established

goal of NCLB was to improve achievement among low-achieving students in high-

poverty schools (Forte, 2010). Specifically, NCLB requires schools to raise the

achievement of students each year and to eliminate the achievement gap by race,

ethnicity, language, and special education status or face severe sanctions (Byrd-Blake, et

al. 2010).

States were also expected to align their performance goals and indictors for children

with disabilities with their definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP) and report on

graduation rates and dropout rates (Blackorby, et al., 2010). Traditionally, the focus on

how schools documented student achievement centered on the academic performance of

general education students. During that time, schools were only held accountable for

providing data that reflected the learning outcomes of general education students. With

NCLB, schools are now faced with the task of documenting the learning outcomes for

students with disabilities as well. Since its implementation, schools have witnessed slight

improvements in the academic performance of some student groups. However, many

students of color and students with disabilities continue to struggle academically. This

has led many to wonder whether NCLB has been effective in its efforts targeted at

meeting the needs of these groups of students (Forte, 2010).

The requirements of NCLB have created an increased emphasis on the use of

standardized assessment measures. Due to NCLB and the heavy reliance on

accountability measures, districts have placed an increased focus on standards-based

instruction (Causey-Bush, 2005). Murrell (2000) argued that the push to align classroom curriculum with state standards in an effort to increase test scores could sacrifice culturally responsive practices that may have benefited some students. Therefore, limiting the scope of what is viewed as effective instruction can inadvertently contribute to the poor performance of students who can directly benefit from diverse forms of instruction.

Focus on Teacher Credentialing

For many years, teachers have been viewed as the most significant factors in children's learning and key players in educational reform efforts (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). NCLB attempts to strengthen teacher quality and eliminate the disparities in the distribution of qualified teachers by requiring states to ensure that all teachers were highly qualified (Aspen Institute on NCLB, 2007). This provision of the law has been helpful in the process of improving schools, but many students continue to receive instruction from teachers who are minimally qualified. State requirements for teacher licensure set basic performance expectations that focus on competencies needed by entry-level general and special education teachers (Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2006). U.S. Department of Education (2007) reported that the percentage of teachers who are not highly qualified under NCLB is higher for special education teachers and teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools. Moreover, those teachers in high-poverty schools who were considered highly qualified had less experience and were less likely to have a degree in the subject they taught (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). While noble in its intent, NCLB has done little to improve teacher quality in high-poverty schools for students of color and students with

disabilities. The current law does little to address the effectiveness of teachers, rather it simply establishes minimum credentials teachers must have (Rebell & Wolff, 2009).

Emphasis on Measures of Accountability

In the current climate of increased accountability, teachers must contend with new legislative pressure and scrutiny, greater degrees of standardization, and strong attention to bottom lines, outcomes, and accountability (Goldstein & Lake, 2003). With the passage of this act, every state is now required to develop standards, standardized tests, and accountability systems (Hursh, 2005). Causey-Bush (2005) affirmed that standardized testing has served as a major component of school reform in the U.S., often being viewed as the universal remedy in which to rate students achievement. However, just as being merely credentialed teachers does not equate to being effective in their practice, measuring performance on high stakes tests alone fails to appropriately reflect student growth. What has happened in the current climate of school accountability has been a more consistent reporting of student failure. These approaches have had minimal affects in achieving the goals of improving high-poverty schools.

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Deficit Perspective Driven Responses

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Historically, research aimed at gaining a better understanding of the educational outcomes of students in high-poverty schools centered on those schools that were failing or experiencing limited success (e.g., Bryan, 2005; Mitcham, Agahe Portman, & Dean, 2009; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Vera, 2011). Such studies provided the field with knowledge of programs and initiatives that are doing little to improve the educational experiences of students in high-poverty contexts. Although severely limited in numbers, some scholars have made meaningful contributions to the efforts aimed at improving

high-poverty schools (e.g., Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; Harris, 2007; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007; Peck, 2010). For instance, in a literature review examining critical issues impacting the performance of high-poverty urban schools, Foote (2005) offered several viable recommendations for addressing these issues. These recommendations include the articulation of focused initiatives that are directly related to student learning and a concentration of efforts geared at these initiatives over a sustained period of time. Finally, the identification and securing of human, material, and capital resources to address theses initiatives, and a focus on recruiting, developing, and retaining skilled teachers is needed. These recommendations could serve as viable approaches to improving the condition of high-poverty urban schools.

In high-poverty communities, schools have the potential to change the social and educational trajectories of the children and families that inhabit them. With such a critical role in society, it is imperative that specific attention is focused on successful schools in an effort to gain deeper understanding of the policies, practices and procedures that enable them to achieve success in meeting the needs of their students. Information from such research studies could then be used in making strides towards improving schools that continue to struggle in the face of significant social and academic challenges.

Teaching and Student Achievement

Teachers are a critical element of the education system and have a profound influence on the academic and social outcomes of students. Darling-Hammond (2000) asserted that teachers have often been viewed as the most important factor affecting student achievement. Sanders and Rivers (1996) acknowledged this notion when they reported that the effects of teachers on student achievement are both additive and

cumulative. These authors also noted that as teacher effectiveness increases, lower

achieving students are the first to benefit. Moreover, the effects of well-prepared

teachers on student achievement could outweigh other factors believed to impact student

achievement such as poverty, language background, and minority status (Darling-

Hammond, 2000). Recognized as being such a critical component of the educational

process, scholars have sough to further the fields understanding of teachers beliefs,

practices, and methods of preparation.

Brighton (2003) conducted a study that sought to examine 48 middle school

content-area teachers' beliefs about teaching in diverse classrooms to determine how

these beliefs affected their willingness and capacity to differentiate their instruction and

assessment. Data were collected using observations and interviews. Using a qualitative

research design built on an interpretivist conceptual framework, the study examined

teachers', administrators', and students' words and actions to determine the meanings

assigned to them by the individuals involved in the exchange. The purpose was to

determine teachers' beliefs about addressing academic diversity by examining the

interview data, as well as teachers' and students' actions that occurred in the school

context. Findings revealed that despite teachers frequently expressing approval and

support for addressing academic diversity, a significant gap existed between what the

teachers expressed verbally and the practices observed and discussed in their classrooms.

Brighton stated "this chasm seemed filled with teachers' deeply held beliefs about the

nature of middle school, the role of teacher in the middle school, and students' natural

proclivities toward challenging learning" (186). Four prominent teacher beliefs that most

significantly conflicted with the recommended practices for addressing academic

diversity in the classroom emerged from the study. These beliefs were; role of the teacher is to entertain, teaching is talking—listening is learning, academic struggles result in students' resistance and shutting down, equity and fairness necessitates that all students do the same things the same way. These pervasive beliefs about the role of teacher and student inhibited the ability of the teachers in the study to create and sustain learning environments compatible with meeting diverse learning needs (Brighton, 2003).

Peabody (2011) also conducted a study that examined teacher beliefs and practices. The purpose of this study was to understand what impact teacher beliefs and practices can have on student performance on a high-stakes standardized test such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), in an environment in which a majority of students are at-risk for poor performance based on demographic factors unrelated to teaching and learning. Classrooms in high performing schools and in low performing schools were examined. Four public urban high schools in central Florida were included in the study. These schools had a student population comprised of a majority of non— White students from low SES backgrounds. FCAT performance data reported by these schools revealed that two of the schools recorded passage rates on the 10th grade FCAT Reading test the previous year of 65% or higher and were designated "high-performing". The other two schools had fewer than 40% of their 10th grade students pass the same test were designated "low-performing". At each of the schools, one 10th 'English/language arts classroom teacher was observed and interviewed.

Results of the study revealed the teachers in both of the classrooms in high-performing schools displayed several instances of student-led activities, the provision of student choice in the curriculum, and an emphasis on reading-related activities and

assignments, both in and out of the classroom. Interview data from these teachers

revealed that they each held an open and dynamic view of the curriculum and believed

that curriculum is a reciprocal rather than a linear process. Both teachers stressed their

belief that the curriculum should be tailored to the students' needs and also noted that the

curriculum decisions they make do not specifically consider the FCAT. Further, these

teachers reported that they were proponents of empowering students to make choices in

and to take ownership over aspects of curriculum planning.

While in contrast, findings of the study revealed that teachers in both of the

classrooms in low-performing schools displayed a high level of teacher-directed

instruction. Students were provided with minimal opportunities to lead the class or to

conduct any significant, curriculum-related activities in class. In these classrooms, none

of the instructional time was student-directed and reading activities unrelated to the

FCAT were not stressed. Interview data from these teachers revealed that they each

placed a high level of consideration in the FCAT. Both teachers discussed the pressure

they felt from the test and the historically low student scores the school received. The

low performance on the FCAT reading assessment resulted in the state and district being

involved in curriculum decisions made for language arts classes at their schools. As a

result, both teachers viewed curriculum as linear, or top-down, unlike the teachers at high

performing schools. Teacher reported that both students and teachers experienced

pressure and frustration due to state and district demands placed on these schools as a

result of low school grades. These teachers also stressed the challenging nature of their

school environments and they focused on the need to understand and accommodate

students of different cultural backgrounds.

Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles (2005) conducted a study that aimed to identify the attitudes and traits of teachers with an at-risk student population in a multi-cultural urban high school. The study reported that 60 percent of the population for the school included in the study was students of color, with Hispanic children constituting 40 percent and African-American comprising 20 percent. Further, the schools only reported a graduation rate of 48 percent. This qualitative case study used interviews, document review, and one focus as the data collection method. The participants consisted of eight certified teachers, five administrators, and five counselors of varying ethnicity and tenure.

Results of the study revealed six supportive process of effective teaching attitudes and traits: cultural responsiveness; measurement of victories in small successes; encouragement of students; formation of meaningful relationships with students; projection of an attitude of caring; and decision making. Results also revealed four non-supportive processes of effective teaching attitudes and traits: blaming and racism; bureaucratic rigidity; co-dependency; and inflexibility and frustration. The findings of this study affirm the importance of teachers forming caring relationships with students in their efforts to improve their outcomes. Participants of the study agreed that this was at the core of the attitudes and traits of effective teaching.

An additional study that sought to examine the role of teaching on student achievement was Darling-Hammond's (2000) investigation of the ways in which teacher qualifications and other school inputs are related to student achievement. She conducted a study that used data from a 50-state survey of policies, state case study analyses, the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Surveys, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Findings of the study suggest that policy investments in the quality of teachers

may be related to improvements in student performance. Specifically, results indicated that measures of teacher preparation and certification are the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and math, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status. These findings suggest that the preparation and qualifications of teachers play are critical role in their ability to positively affect student outcomes. Therefore, states interested in improving student achievement are advised to pay attention to these variables as they hire teachers into the profession.

Instructional Practices and Definitions of Effectiveness

Responding to the beliefs regarding the importance of the role of teachers in the educational process, scholars have investigated the practices of teachers in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of approaches that lead to improve outcomes for students of various groups of students. For example, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman (2007) conducted an exploratory study aimed at examining what constitutes effective teaching as defined by measured increases in student learning. This study specifically sought to identify the instructional practices of teachers who facilitate high growth in student achievement measures. It relied on the assumption that effective teachers are those who foster achievement gains beyond that expected from the student's past achievement. Data for 1936 students and 85 classrooms were used for the analyses. Key findings indicate that the effective teachers provided more complex instruction with a greater emphasis on meaning versus memorization, demonstrated a broader range of instructional strategies, and used a variety of materials and media that supported the curriculum. Additionally, the study reported that effective teachers were more organized, implemented effective routines and procedures for daily tasks, and had higher behavioral

expectations for students.

Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) examined the relative magnitude of teacher effects on student achievement while simultaneously considering the influences of intra-classroom heterogeneity, student achievement level, and class size on academic growth. Findings of the study showed that the two most important factors impacting student gain are the teacher and the achievement level of the student. The teacher effect was highly significant in every analysis and had a larger effect size than any other factor in twenty-six of the thirty analyses. Further, the findings showed that classroom context variables of heterogeneity among students and class sizes have relatively little influence on academic gain. The results of this study have clear implications for researchers investigating effective teaching as it substantiates claims that teachers are the most important component of the educational process.

With the primary goal of assisting regional and state decision makers in better understanding what constitutes effective teaching, Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) conducted a synthesis of research that describes the various ways in which effective teaching can be conceptualized and measured. Through their synthesis, they were able to develop what they consider a more comprehensive definition of teacher effectiveness. Their definition was developed with the intent of capturing the characteristics that were common to most definitions of effective teaching. This task could be viewed as controversial as that rarely lacks consensus among policy makers, scholars, educators, parents, and students regarding what constitutes effective teaching. One significant exclusion of the Goe, Little, and Bell definition will be presented later in this review. However, the five-point definition they posited consists of the following characteristics displayed by effective

teachers:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help students learn, as measured by value-added or other test-based growth measures, or by alternative measures.

- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade, on-time graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.

- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.

- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.

- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk for failure.

Goe, Little, and Bell (2008) reviewed a total of 300 research studies that met high standards for relevance and methodological rigor for inclusion in this study. Therefore, the definition of effective teaching that they developed should be accredited with a significant level of merit. However, this definition should not by any means be viewed as comprehensive. Cruickshank and Haefele (1990) stated, "An enormous underlying problem with teacher evaluation relates to lack of agreement about what constitutes good or effective teaching" (p. 34). The Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) study has made a critical contribution to the field. This synthesis has furthered the field's understanding of the

many ways in which effective teaching been conceptualized and researched. The five-point definition they have developed provides the field with a possible framework for beginning the measurement of teacher effectiveness. However, when considering how other notable scholars (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles, 2005; Ware, 2006; Gay, 2010) have defined effective teaching of students of color, glaring omissions of critical indicators exist in this definition.

Goe, Bell, and Little's (2008) definition focuses primarily on measurable components of teacher effectiveness (i.e., student achievement gains) while definitions of effectiveness for students of color places an increased emphasis on characteristics such as teacher beliefs, relationships with students, and an ethic of care (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002; Bonner & Adams, 2012). These characteristics are more affective in nature and have been more difficult to operationalize. This problem appears to consistently be attributed to the issue of care. Gay (2010) stated,

> "caring is one of those things that most educators agree is important in working
> effectively with students, but they are hard-pressed to characterize it in actual
> practice, or to put a functional face on it that goes beyond feelings of empathy and
> emotional attachment" (p. 48).

A critical analysis of Goe, Bell, and Little's (2008) definition, could lead to an extrapolation of the notion of relationships and care, although their definition does not appear to place value or emphasis on these notions. However, due to the constraints of language, this type of analysis could be problematic. When the definition is deconstructed, we run the risk of losing the meaning of the various components. For instance, Goe, Bell, and Little's piece of effective teachers planning and structuring

engaging learning opportunities could be easily misinterpreted. When we look a little

closer at the concept of engagement alone, we must consider how this term could be

interpreted in a multiple ways, depending on the interpreter. Thus, this level of analysis

on their definition could be problematic and may result in a their work losing significance

in the discourse on effective teaching. Definitions targeted at providing a description of

effective teaching should all capture all characteristics believed to contribute to the

practices of successful teachers. Specifically, these definitions should not excuse the

importance of teacher beliefs and the ethic of care in the determination of teacher

effectiveness.

Care in the Classroom

Incorporating care into their practice is one of those things that most educators

agree is important for working effectively with students (Gay, 2010). Caring teachers

believe in each student's ability to achieve, and shape the learning process by placing

students' needs at the forefront of their practice (Lumpkin, 2007). Teachers who value,

develop and sustain caring teacher-student relationships provide schools with a solid

foundation to build on when implementing approaches aimed at improving student

outcomes (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez-McHatton, 2009). Noddings (2010)

declared ethic of caring as being relational and based on the premise that the carer is

attentive to the cared-for, and therefore is receptive to and tries to understand the

expressed needs of the cared-for. Specifically, Noddings (1992) contends the caring

relation is,

>…in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a
>
>carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be caring,

both parties must contribute to it in characteristics ways. A failure on the part of either the carer or the cared-for blocks completion of caring, and although theirs may still be a relation—that is, an encounter in which each party feels something toward the other—it is not a caring relation. (p. 15)

This manner of caring is one of the major pillars of culturally relevant teaching for ethnically diverse students and it manifest itself in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students human value intellectual capacity (Gay, 2010).

Alder and Moulton (1998) examined 25 eight-grade students' constructed meanings of caring in the classroom. These constructed meanings were based on the students' interactions with their teachers. Findings revealed that students held six major interpretations of caring. These interpretations were caring as control, caring as equality, caring as forgiveness, caring as talking and listening, caring as knowing students, and caring as good teaching. These findings are important because when teachers genuinely care, students sense it and respond by optimizing their commitment to learning and putting reaching their fullest potential (Lumpkin, 2007).

Alder (2002) later conducted a study that examined how caring relationships are created and maintained between middle school students and their teachers. Using interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, 12 students provided their perceptions of caring relationships with teachers. Findings of this study were consistent with those revealed in the Adler and Moulton (1998) study. This particular study revealed general agreement that students' interpreted teachers' willingness to be strict, have control over disruptive behavior, and pressure students into getting work done as the

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highest forms of teacher care. Additionally, the students emphasized that their teachers demonstrated care when they interacted with the positively, called their parents to urge parental support and involvement and to discuss personal problems the students were having at home or school.

Tosolt (2009) administered a survey to 825 sixth-grade students' perceptions of teacher caring based on student minority status. The students in the study identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, or Hispanic. The purpose of the study was to understand what behaviors students view as caring so that teachers can complete caring encounters with their students. This study found that care looks different to different groups of students and that teachers must care for their students in culturally congruent ways. When teachers implement care in the classroom in culturally congruent ways, all students receive the benefits of caring teacher-student relationships.

Mihalas et al. (2009) stated that the cultivation of caring teacher-student relationships could be a powerful conduit for guiding and supporting students' social-emotional, behavioral, and academic growth. With the myriad issues affecting the learning outcomes of students color with disabilities, the potential for improving the outcomes of these students through positive teacher-student relationships should be considered. Based on the findings of the studies included in this review, it appears that this approach could serve as a starting point in the process of enhancing their educational experiences. Gay (2010) agreed with this belief declaring "when combined with pedagogical competence, caring becomes a powerful ideological and praxis pillar of culturally relevant teaching for students" (p. 75).

Effective Teaching of Students of Color

The identification of effective methods for teaching students of color has traditionally been a challenging endeavor. The critical task of identifying practices that promote efficacy in the learning process of students of color has remains ongoing. While much has been done to further the fields understanding of effective teaching methods for students of color and students of color with disabilities, there continues to remain a need to improve on the work a myriad of scholars. Cook, Tankersley, and Landrum (2009) acknowledged identifying evidence-based practices is a complicated endeavor that requires analyzing the methodological quality and magnitude of effects for studies that measure the effectiveness of specific instructional practices. In an effort to take steps toward identifying effective instructional practices, the author conducted this review of the literature to critically examine the knowledge base informing the field on effective teaching strategies for students of color.

The literature on effective practices for students of color with disabilities revealed that few empirical studies has been conducted that analyze the effectiveness of instructional approaches specifically for this population. Many of the studies examining this phenomenon often did so using qualitative research designs, which employed small participant samples. As a result, this body of research has often been met with questions of validity of the findings of the studies. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) regard this as a traditional critique of qualitative research and have noted that such a critique seemed to come primarily from those quantitatively oriented. While these concerns is warranted, the findings of studies that investigated teaching of students of color in general, and culturally relevant teaching in specific, still hold validity in the discourse on

effective methods to meeting the needs of students of color. Based on this notion, the following studies were reviewed and included in this review of literature.

Over the past ten years there has been increased interest in examining ways to enhance the academic performance of students who are culturally, ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Historically, many students of color have experienced limited academic success and disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion in their educational journeys (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Therefore, the need to increase understanding of how students of color best learn and effective ways of teaching them is imperative.

Guided by this need to identify effective methods for teaching African-American students, Perkins (2001) conducted a study of the instructional practices of 21 fourth grade teachers. The purpose of the study was to identify effective methods for teaching reading, as identified by these selected elementary school teachers, which enhanced the reading abilities of African-American fourth grade students. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine the validity of certain methods identified through a review of research. Through the use of focus groups and interviews, Perkins was able to identify several instructional methods that frequently emerged from the data. She noted that recurring methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion. These methods were: independent reading and writing, phonics and vocabulary, modeling, multicultural education, parental involvement, prior knowledge/schema, and cooperative learning. Each of these methods was also identified in Perkins' review of research as effective methods for enhancing the reading ability of fourth grade African-American students.

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Various scholars and educators have sought to address the need to identify effective teaching practices for students of color through their work. One of the most influential scholars in this endeavor is Gloria Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings' (1994) seminal study of exemplary teachers of African American children was one of the most significant research studies in the field and contributed tremendously to furthering the fields' understanding of effective ways of educating African-American students. While as previously noted, race is not a critical variable in the current study, Ladson-Billings (1994) and many others chose to critically examine its influence in their studies. Specifically, the participants in her study consisted of five African-American and three White teachers. The study was conducted over a three-year period, and utilized classroom observations and in-depth interviews to identify specific teaching behaviors. These teaching behaviors informed the development of a specific instructional approach that is believed to lead to improved academic and social outcomes of students of color. Her findings led to the development of the concept of Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT). This pedagogical approach personifies the notion of using students' culture in classroom instructional activities in order to preserve it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings asserted that CRT is a way of teaching that empowers students' intellectuality, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. CRT consists of the three critical aspects. These aspects are:

- Teachers' conceptions of themselves and others – teachers with culturally relevant practices have high self-esteem and a high regard for others as the hold a belief that all students can succeed. They view themselves as part of the community,

see themselves as making a contribution to the community, and encourage their students to do the same.

- The manner in which classroom social interactions are structured – teacher-student relationships in a culturally relevant classroom is fluid and "humanly equitable". Culturally relevant teaching involves the cultivation of relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom. These teachers are careful to demonstrate a connectedness with each of their students.

- Teachers' conception of knowledge – culturally relevant teaching views knowledge as something that is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared. This form of teaching views knowledge critically and sees excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual differences into account.

These findings purport that the integrated characteristics of culturally relevant teachers significantly impact the learning experience of students of color. This study suggest that by acknowledging the culturally differences of their students, culturally responsive teachers seek deeper understanding of the various dynamics that impact the academic and behavioral development of diverse students. Moreover, when each attribute is present in pedagogical practices, diversity is affirmed in the classroom and students of color make connection with the teacher and the curriculum.

Seeking to build on the Ladson-Billings (1994) study, Cooper (2003) conducted a study on effective White teachers of Black children. Cooper noted that little is known about effective white teachers of Black children. With the exception of the three white teachers that were included in the Ladson Billings (1994) study, this line of research

remains largely unaccounted for. The purpose of the study was to provide a description of what constitutes good teaching of Black children by white teachers as exhibited by a select group of white teachers. A total of five teachers were nominated for participation in the study. However, only three teachers consented to participate in the study. The participants of study consisted of thee white teachers who had been nominated by key members of the Black community in which they teach and identified as being effective teachers of Black children. The years of experience of the teachers ranged from 9 to 29 years. Data collection procedures consisted of interviews and observations. Major categories emerging from data analysis were: operational beliefs and practices and conceptual beliefs and practices. Operational beliefs and practices are comprised of two major themes: curriculum and teaching style. Conceptual beliefs and practices are comprised of three major themes: teaching style, personal norms, and teaching characteristics. Findings of the study indicated that, when compared to the literature on effective Black teachers of Black students, significant similarities were evidenced in the approaches of the white teachers. Some of these similarities were: respect for and commitment to the Black community, authoritative approaches to discipline, high expectations of self and Black children's abilities, and view of self as teaching mother. These findings are consistent with the descriptions of the practices of the teachers included in the Ladson-Billings (1994) study.

Similarly, in an effort to better understand teacher impact on the outcomes of Black students, Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, and Garrison-Wade (2008) investigated Black students' perceptions of their White teachers. The participants for the study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Eight Black students, ranging from 10th to

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12th grades were selected for participation in the study. Each of the students was currently being taught by at least one White teacher in their core academic courses and all maintained a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 grading scale. Responding to open-ended interview questions, the students detailed their experiences as an African-American student with White teachers. Four themes emerged that characterized the experiences of the Black students in this study. These themes were: Respect: I Need Respect, Stereotypes: Don't Pass Judgment on Me, The Administrators Need to Check Themselves, and We Like This Environment. These findings highlight the awareness of these students of the differential treatment in their educational experiences they receives form their teachers and administrators. Such findings could serve as the building blocks for the development of an understanding by school personnel of how to better serve African-American students.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) included both Black and White teachers. Her study reported not differences in the practices of these teachers regardless of race. Therefore, the race of these teachers did not appear to be a significant factor influencing their practice. However, in the Cooper (2003) and Dougles, et al. (2008) studies, the race of the teacher played a critical component in the students' perceptions of their educational experiences. These studies illuminated vital ways in which racial differences between teachers and students, can introduce critical dynamics that impact the classroom environment. The influence of racial dynamics revealed in this study warrants closer examination to determine the extent to which race affects differences between teacher and student affects learning.

Although studies aimed at specifically examining the role that the race of the

teacher plays in their practice are sparse, some scholars have made efforts to address this void. In an attempt to unpack this dynamic, Dickar (2008) investigated the impact of teacher race on their experiences. Participants of the study were 17 educators, 9 Black, and 8 White. Using interview and observations of classrooms and staff meetings at a segregated urban high school, the study investigated the ways teacher race impacts their professional work. Data from the study suggest that racial experiences are far more complex than has been recognized in the literature on race and teaching. Key findings of the study reveal that Black educators described a strong sense of racial solidarity with their students. However, "White teachers expressed conflicted perspectives around race as they were at once race evasive and race cognizant" (p. 115). These findings further emphasize the tensions that the issue of that race can create in schools. Dickar noted that this tension is between the teachers' role as educator and their racial identity.

Douglas et al. (2008) asserted "teachers bring to their classrooms epistemological assumptions formulated from their earlier experiences and teachings. These beliefs may well influence significantly the way they teach." (p. 57). Due to the increase in students of color attending public schools, the Dickar (2008) study is critical to efforts exploring effective ways to improve the outcomes of students of color. However, one consistent assumption underlying the use of CRT is that these practices can address the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students in the classroom. As evidenced by multiple studies (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Cooper, 2003), this belief remains constant regardless of the race of the teacher.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

The impact of the Ladson-Billings study has been widespread and has spawned

other critical studies that attempted to study various components of culturally relevant teaching. Ware (2006) conducted a study of two exemplary African-American teachers. Ware noted that the study was a result of her review of literature that identified common traits of exemplary African-American students. These common characteristics were: an ethic of caring, beliefs about students and community, and instructional practices. Through the use of interviews and observations, the study examined the instructional practices and beliefs of two African-American urban teachers. The study operationalized the warm demander construct by carefully examining two African American exemplary teachers whose teaching practices corroborated the literature's use of the descriptor, warm demander (Ware, 2006). Warm demanders are teachers who are successful with students of color as evidenced by the student's beliefs that their teachers did not lower their standards and were willing to help them (Vasquez, 1989). Key findings of the study posited that the two teachers n the study were identified in the following context: warm demanders as authority figures and disciplinarians, warm demanders as caregivers, and warm demanders as pedagogues. These findings suggest a strong correlation with the findings of Ladson-Billings' study and her conceptualization of culturally relevant teaching.

Using a grounded theory case study methodology, Bonner and Adams (2012) conducted a study that aimed to develop an initial working theory of culturally responsive mathematics teaching (CRMT) that could directly inform classroom practice. CRMT consist of four interconnected, foundational cornerstones: communication, knowledge, trust/relationships, and constant reflection/revision. The study consisted of an in-depth examination of one senior elementary teacher's instructional practices in math. The

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intention of this examination was to focus on mathematics instruction to reveal the characteristics of CRMT. Key findings of the study revealed that the participant's embodiment of CRMT stemmed from her extensive knowledge of mathematics content and pedagogy, knowledge of her students, and knowledge the community that she was able to activate while teaching math. Moreover, the teacher's involvement in the community enabled her to effectively communicate with students and incorporate component of their personal lives in her instruction. Finally, the relationships the teacher was able to establish with her students and community allowed her to maintain a highly structured, mathematics-focused environment while facilitating student development. The researchers concluded that the cornerstone of CRMT give some organization to the practices of a highly successful teacher of African–American students and illustrates the structure of the mathematics classroom.

Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) investigated diverse communication and social interaction patterns in their study of how schools' responses to accountability policies in the United States influence the ability of new teachers of color to draw on their own and their students' cultural resources to engage in culturally relevant teaching. This study consisted of a 5-year study of 17 new teachers of color. Data collection methods consisted of teacher and administrator interviews, classroom observations, surveys, and focus groups. Results of the study revealed that these teachers identified three principal tensions, which correspond to the three dimensions of culturally responsive teaching: cultural and linguistic relevance versus standardization, community of learners versus teacher transmission, and social justice versus enhanced test scores. The teachers also described two mechanisms by which accountability-based programs and policies were

enforced: fear of monitoring and internalizing the link between testing and educational opportunity.

Students' Perceptions of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Epstein, Mayorga and Nelson (2011) examined the effects of a culturally relevant teacher's pedagogy on urban low-income African American and Latino high school students' interpretations of racial diversity, racism, and individual and collective agency in United States history. The study took place in a public high school in New York, which had a student population of approximately 400, three-quarters of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The participants of this study were a teacher, who embodied the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching, and twenty-one African-American and Latino students in her eleventh grade humanities class. At the beginning and end of the school year, students were provided with a set of 25 historical actors and events in U.S. history and asked to individually select and explain in writing the ten most important. The students then summarized the experiences of people of color and whites over the course history and the government's role shaping racial group experiences. Results of the study illustrated several encouraging effects of culturally relevant teaching on students' understanding of the role of racial groups and racism in United States history and society (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011). These results further demonstrate the benefits of culturally relevant instruction in the education of students of color, particularly in that area of history.

The perspectives of students in their perception of culturally relevant teaching and its impact on their educational experiences are critical. Much can be learned from students regarding effective ways to meet their social and educational needs. Howard

(2001) asserted that in spite of the quantity of scholarship documenting the salience of culturally relevant teaching, research examining students' perception and interpretations of culturally responsive environments is minimal at best. In an effort to address this void of research, Howard conducted a study that sought to assess African-American elementary students' interpretations of culturally relevant teaching within urban contexts. Participants in the study consisted of 17 students, with varying academic achievement levels, who were students of teachers who had been identified as culturally relevant teachers for African-American students. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and focus groups with the students. Each of the students was interviewed once individually and later in focus groups with classmates. Key themes emerging from data analysis were: the importance of caring teachers, establishment of community/family-type classroom environment, and education as entertainment. An important factor to note regarding the findings of this study is the relevance the students place on teachers displaying an ethic of care. Howard noted that the students frequently mentioned that their teachers' willingness to care about them and their ability to bond with them was critical in creating a positive learning environment. This finding is significant because it accentuates the need to consider such attributes when determining teacher effectiveness.

Research conducted on the phenomenon of cultural relevant teaching builds on the assumption that if teachers make attempts to ensure that classroom instruction is conducted in a manner responsive to the students' home culture, the academic achievement of culturally diverse students will improve (Phuntsog, 1999). In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported,

learning-centered context, in which the strengths students bring to school are acknowledged, fostered, and utilized to elevate student achievement (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Culturally relevant educators acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse communication and social interaction patterns, and they use them appropriately to enhance the effectiveness of their communications with students and their families (Burns, Keyes, & Kusimo, 2005). These diverse communication and social interaction patterns could at times deviate from the conventional communication and social patterns that typically dominate the culture of schools. What results from this situation is a need of the teacher to reconcile the differences between their personal orientations of effective ways to teach diverse students, and the approaches valued by some educational settings.

Conclusion

Kincheloe (2004) asserted that the existing literature on high poverty schools fails to provide teachers and other educational professionals a balanced understanding of teaching in the urban context. Current literature regarding the academic performance of students of color generally illuminates critical issues that have impeded these students' endeavors to achieve academic and social success. This literature paints a grim portrait of these students schooling experience and offers a prognosis packed with little hope. This prognosis has also been true for many students with disabilities. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of students with disabilities are also students of color. In many cases, the issue of students of color and students with disabilities not meeting positive academic outcomes is exacerbated when examining their experiences in the context of high-poverty schools.

As a result of several legislative mandates, the problem of students of color with

disabilities in high-poverty schools has received increased attention and has caused considerable concern. What has resulted has been a movement geared at identifying methods to address the issue. An approach identified through these efforts is culturally relevant teaching. Some scholars have conducted studies that presented findings indicating the effectiveness of this approach in improving the academic achievement of diverse students. However, what is needed is an examination of the impact of culturally relevant teaching on the learning outcomes of students of color with disabilities in high-poverty schools.

The examination of culturally relevant teaching and its impact on students of color in high-poverty schools should not be conducted at any high-poverty school, but rather in high-poverty schools that have demonstrated an ability to improve the outcomes of students. Contrary to the images of high-poverty schools presented in the literature, such schools do exist. There are many schools in high-poverty communities where students are meeting academic success. These schools are considered places of positive deviance. Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) describe positive deviance as "intentional behaviors that significantly depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (p. 841). Positive deviance is supported by the notion that at least one person in a community has overcome the problems that confound others (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010). In high-poverty schools in which students achieve positive academic outcomes, this is the case. Therefore, research must be conducted in these schools in order to identify what approaches they employ that leads to the success of their students. The proposed study seeks to examine schooling in a high-performing high-poverty setting in order to identify sustainable solutions to the issues that have been traditionally

problematic.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to critically investigate the instructional practices of teachers of students of color with high-incidence disabilities or at-risk of identification for disability in one high-performing high-poverty school. Using case study methodology, the study examined how teachers describe their teaching practices and the extent to which their approaches to teaching students of color are consistent with the approaches that have been articulated and described in the literature informing the field regarding culturally responsive teaching.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

4. What are the instructional practices of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools?

5. What are the approaches taken by teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools to build community and caring in the classroom?

6. How do teachers describe their instructional practices and beliefs?

Case Study Methodology

Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) asserted that case study research refers to the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in real-life settings and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon. The earliest uses of case study methodology in

the United States are associated with the University of Chicago Department of Sociology in the early 1900's (Tellis, 1997). Over the years, case study research has maintained an important role in clinical inquiry. Case study was initially used as a method to empirically study social and behavioral problems, but has since been used extensively in the fields of government, management, and education (Zainal, 2007). Runyan (1982) asserted that case study is believed to be crucially important to clinicians concerned with understanding individuals. This assertion may be attributed to the potential it affords researchers interested in studying the uniqueness of individual lives.

Over the years, scholars have offered several conceptualizations of case study work. Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon using a variety of data sources. Campbell and Ahrens (1998) asserted that the goal of case study is to gather detailed textual data that describes the cases. Most importantly, Stake (1995) views case study as the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case. The goal is to come to an understanding of the activity of the case within important circumstances (Stake, 1995); therefore, in coming to a decision to conduct a case study, the context in which the case is situated is of significant importance.

Criticisms and Strengths of Case Study

"Qualitative research is open and supple, and one of its strengths is that it incorporates philosophies, theories, and research designs and methods as diverse as postpositivist multi-methods approaches and postmodernist social critiques" (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 25). This approach to research has been used to guide a number of research studies that have contributed significantly to

knowledge base of many areas of social science. However, since the beginning of their use, qualitative research methods have been met with criticisms concerning their methodological rigor and analytical defensibility (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) noted a common claim is that qualitative research is inductive and that small numbers of individuals are studied before theories are developed. Several scholars have made attempts to address many of the concerns commonly associated with qualitative inquiry. Specifically, Yin (1989) and Stake (1995) discussed these concerns in relation to case study research.

Traditionally, issues regarding the overall quality of qualitative case study research and how it has been defined have created concern about its use as an empirical research method (Hocutt & Fowler, 2009). Yin (1989) noted that while case study is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry, some research investigators have disdain for the strategy. Some common critiques of case study methodology are a lack of rigor, little basis for scientific generalization, little control over behavior events (Yin, 2003), and arbitrariness in the interpretation of data (Runyan, 1982).

Generalizability

Quantitative researchers aim to establish generalizations that hold over diverse situations (Stake, 1995). Brantlinger et al. (2005) asserted that qualitative research is not conducted to for the purpose of generalization, but rather to produce evidence based on the exploration of specific contexts and particular individuals. Therefore, the concern for generalizability in qualitative case studies is misplaced in traditional research discourse. The nature of debates on generalization should not be positioned in the context of whether findings can be applied to other populations, but rather can findings be applied to

persons in similar situations as the case under investigation (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). In spite of the concerns regarding generalization of case study findings, such concerns can be addressed by providing enough detail on the case to allow the reader of the case report to generalize to other context. The goal of the qualitative researcher must be to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case (Stake, 1995).

Control of Natural Events

While the lack of controls over events that occur naturally or extraneously in a setting may be viewed as a weakness by some researchers (Runyan, 1982), others may view this as strength. Case study examines contemporary events when relevant behaviors are not manipulated or controlled (Yin, 1989). In case study, to control or attempt to control the cases could be considered as an attempt to impact or influence the response of the case to stimuli in their natural environment. If controls were sought in the conduct of the study, it would threaten one of the essential elements in the definition of case study, which is the in-depth examination of a phenomenon in real-life settings to develop interpretations or explanations of that experience (Runyan, 1982; Stake, 1995; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; & Zainal, 2007).

Interpretation of Data

One of the most difficult tasks of the qualitative researcher is to make sense of what is learned through the collection of a variety of data sources (e.g., interviews, observations, document analysis) (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Traditionally, the arbitrariness in the interpretation of data in qualitative studies has been an issue of concern. The failure of some qualitative researchers to explicitly facilitate readers'

understandings of how they arrive at certain conclusions through data analysis has caused some to questions the trustworthiness of the findings. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) noted that the purpose of data analysis is to bring meaning, organization, and order data. This requires the qualitative researcher to be an active participant in attempts to understand and explain social phenomena (Carcary, 2009).

A considerable strength of case study is "that the case study researcher, through a process of thick description, can bring a case to life in a way that is not possible using the statistical methods of quantitative research" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 484). As the case study researcher provides the reader with a thick description of a case, a vivid image of the phenomenon is created. Such an illustration is essential because it ignites the meaning making process of those individuals that share similar experiences as the case as well as those with limited or no prior knowledge of the case under investigation. Thick description enables readers to compare cases with their own situations and serve as a conduit for developing theories, design educational interventions, or take some form of critical action (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Types of Case Study

Stake's Conceptualization of Case Study

Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) are two of the most prominent researchers in the area of case study methodology (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The view of case study developed by Stake (1995) draws from naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods. Stake argues that his emphasis in case study is more on the particular and the situational than on generalization. Three major tenets of qualitative research posited by Stake (1995) are the personal role of the researcher, understanding as

the purpose of inquiry, and the construction of knowledge. He goes on to say that

qualitative researchers press for understanding the complex interrelationships among all

that exists. Stake (1995) argued that the qualitative case study researcher must attempt to

facilitate reader understanding of how important human actions are rarely caused in ways

that can be discovered. All research depends on interpretation and qualitative research

designs call for the individual most responsible for interpretation to be in the field,

making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing and synthesizing, while

simultaneously realizing their own consciousness (Stake, 1995).

Stake (1995) identified three types of case studies; intrinsic case study;

instrumental case study; and multi-case case study. The decision of which method to

implement is guided by the research question and the conceptualized need for conducting

the research. An intrinsic case study enables the researcher to examine a case of interest.

With intrinsic case study, the case is of utmost importance and thus the purpose is not to

learn more about a general problem, but rather to learn more about that particular case.

With instrumental case study, the case serves to help us to better understand the situation

or relationships within it. An instrumental case study enables the researcher to go beyond

the case and accomplish deep understanding of the multiple contexts in which the case is

situated. Multi-case study is a special effort to examine phenomena having many cases,

parts, or members (Stake, 2006). It is designed to enable the researcher to examine

several cases within the same project in an attempt to understand complex phenomena

more thoroughly.

Yin's Conceptualization of Case Study

Yin (2003) asserted, "case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Yin (2009) proposed four distinct designs for conducting a case study. The four types of designs for case studies are single-case holistic designs, single-case embedded designs, multiple-case holistic designs, multiple-case embedded designs. Single case is an appropriate design when it represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory, the case represents an extreme or unique case, it is a representative or typical case, the case is a revelatory case that was previously inaccessible to scientific investigation, and a longitudinal case that will be studied at two or more different points in time (Yin, 2003). When a study contains more than a single case, a multiple case study design is warranted.

Rationale for Use of Stake's Approach

As previously noted, Stake (1995) argues that his approach to case study places more emphasis on the particular and the situational than on generalization. Thick description, experiential understanding and multiple realities are all expectations of qualitative case studies (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the qualitative case researcher constructs knowledge and understanding for others through their interpretation of the happenings of the phenomenon in its multiple contexts. The case researchers' philosophy of knowledge is grounded in the constructivist perspective of research. The constructivist stance is that reality is constructed through the interaction of the creative and interpretive work of the mind with the physical world (Paul, 2005). Therefore the mind of the case researcher is a critical instrument of inquiry.

Qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its specific situation (Stake, 2006). To study a case, we carefully examine its functioning and activities, but the primary objective of a case study is to understand the case. The situation is expected to shape the activity, as well as the interpretation of the activity. Based on this conceptualization of case study, the proposed study will use Stake's (1995) approach to case study methodology. Specifically, this study employed an instrumental case study design. This design enabled me to go beyond the case and accomplish deep understanding of the phenomenon of teaching of students with disabilities in a high-performing high-poverty school. The goal here is to not only identify the specific practices employed by teachers operating these settings, but to also examine the beliefs systems that these teachers retain that lead to their success. This approach to qualitative case study methodology supported the interaction with the case that I believed was needed to unpack the multiple layers of this phenomenon.

Research Design

Creswell (1998) referred to case study as an exploration of a bounded system. The case in this particular study is bounded by time and place and situated in a particular context. Teaching is not an isolated event. The work of teaching is situated in a context that could be described as a complex set of interactions among those present in that space. Case study is appropriate in such situations because a single explanation cannot provide a complete account of this phenomenon (Carcary, 2009). Based on this conceptualization of teaching, I believed case study methodology provided the best opportunity to gain deep understanding of the phenomenon of the teaching practices of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at risk of identification in a high-

performing high-poverty school. In this study, the interest was in gaining deep understanding of the teaching practices and through examination of the case, teachers operating within this context, a thick detailed description of the phenomenon was created.

Background of Study and Research Site

The current study aims to investigate the instructional practices of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification in one high-performing high-poverty school. The study is an extension with a larger multiple-case study project conducted at a high-performing high-poverty school. The larger multiple-case study aimed to substantively examine the multiple factors (i.e., teachers, students, leadership, families and community, student support, curriculum) operating within the school in order to be able to identify how they work and interact with each other and contribute the schools successful functioning. The larger study was interested in gaining deep understanding of the specific processes, approaches, and procedures of a high-performing high-poverty school. The current study extends data collection and analysis procedures employed in the multi-case study with the intent of gaining understanding of how the teachers in this school describe their teaching practices relevant to students of color with disabilities or who are at risk of identification of disability.

A multi-step process informed the selection of the school selected for the multi-case study. The process was based on school accountability measures as outlined by both state and federal guidelines. The first step of the process was to identify all elementary schools in the selected school district that met Federal Title I criteria. Once this list was compiled, a review of the school grades for the years of 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2011-12 was conducted. Key study personnel then reviewed school grades as determined by the

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state accountability system and identified schools that had earned a grade of A for each of the three identified years.

The school in which the multi-case study took place is located in the southeastern United States. The majority of the districts students are ethnically diverse with these students accounting for (58.8%) of the student population. Of the 285 schools in the district, 153 are elementary schools, and more than half (54%) are designated as Title One schools. Of the Title One schools, 28 report extreme poverty levels (90% or more). At the school selected for the study, there are a total of 57 teachers. The school has a total of 680 students, of which 550 (80%) are considered students of color. The teachers participating in the proposed study were drawn from this school.

Participants

This study employed a purposive sampling method. The goal of purposeful sampling is to select cases that are likely to be information rich as it relates to the purposes of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Creswell (1998) suggested that the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case. The goal of this case study was to get a deeper understanding of the practices of teachers of students of color in a high-performing high-poverty context. In order to accomplish this goal, six teachers were selected for participation in this study (Creswell, 1998). Table 1 provides demographic information and the current teaching setting of the six participants. These six teachers enabled me to study the phenomenon of teaching students of color with disabilities in a high-performing high-poverty school in greater detail and provide a thick detailed description of their practices and beliefs.

Table 1

Teacher Profiles

Teacher	Race	Years of Experience	Culture of Reference	Teaching Environment
Johanna	Hispanic	7	Hispanic	1st Grade General Education Classroom
Elizabeth	White	6	White	1st Grade General Education Classroom
Teresa	White	3	White/German/Czech	3rd Grade General Education Classroom
Jasmine	Black	3	Black	3rd Grade General Education Classroom
Hannah	White	3	White	5th Grade General Education Classroom
Allison	White	5	White	5th Grade General Education Classroom

Twenty-two teachers consented to participate in the multi-case study. The multi-case study examined the teacher's role in curriculum and its enactment as they contributed to the high-performance of a high-poverty elementary school. These teachers were interviewed regarding their implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms, the ways in which they assess student learning, how they respond to students experiencing academic and behavioral challenges, and their approaches to including families in the learning process. Teachers were also observed in their classrooms interacting with students and delivering instruction. Through this process, several

teachers' practices appeared to be consistent with the essential elements of culturally responsive teaching posited by Gay (2002). These elements include developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and culturally diversity content in the curriculum, building learning communities through the demonstration of caring, effectively communicating with ethnically diverse students and families, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. Based on this interpretation of the practices of some of the teachers who participated in the multi-case study, I believed that further examination of their practices was warranted. Specifically, I wanted to conduct a study that would focus on gaining a deeper understanding of how these teachers explicitly address the needs of students of color with disabilities.

Four of the six teachers selected for participation in this study were chosen from teachers that participated in the multiple-case study. These teachers were Elizabeth, Teresa, Jasmine, and Allison. Johanna and Hannah did not participate in the multi-case study and were recommended by the school principal as potential participants in this study. After, a detailed discussion of culturally responsive teaching and the purposes of the current study, the principal recommended Johanna and Hannah for consideration for participation in the study. I then had a meeting with Johanna and Hannah and provided them with explicit details of the purpose of the study. After this meeting I decided to request their consent to participate.

Initially, the fact that Johanna and Hannah did not participate in the multi-case study caused some concern. The primary concern I had was whether their classroom practices would be consistent with the essential elements of culturally responsive teaching posited by Gay (2002) and those of the other four participants. Fortunately,

there was a great deal of consistency between their practices and beliefs as compared to the other four participants. Moreover, in several of the essential elements, Johanna and Hannah displayed higher levels of frequency. The essential elements in which this was evidenced in are developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, building learning communities through the demonstration of caring, and effectively communicating with ethnically diverse students and families. The findings presented in Chapter Four provide further evidence and explicit details of the practices of all six teachers.

Data Collection

According to Runyan (1982) "case study is not dependent upon any single data collection technique, but is rather a form for organizing and presenting information about individuals and their circumstances which may draw upon a variety of techniques of data collection" (p. 445). Multiple sources of data will be collected to determine evidence for each phase in the evolution of the case (Creswell, 1998). The primary data collection procedures used for this study were interviews and observations.

Interviews

Interviewing is a form of data collection involving direct interaction between the researcher and the participant using oral questions by the interviewer and oral responses by the interviewee (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Interviews were conducted with an interest in understanding the lived experience of the teachers and the meaning they make of their experiences in teaching (Seidman, 2009). The main purpose of interviews was to obtain unique information or interpretation held by the person being interviewed and to determine consistency based on multiple data points (Stake, 2010). Qualitative

interviewing allows you to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

An initial interview was conducted to gain background knowledge and information regarding the teachers personal orientation, teacher preparation paths, teaching experience, and credentials. I also gathered information on their beliefs about students with disabilities and their current understanding of how these students best learn. The information gathered through this interview was used to create a biographical sketch of each of the participants. This biographical sketch is used to introduce each of the participants as I share their narrative in the final report.

The interview process consisted of a three in-depth interview series as suggested by Seidman (2009). Each of these interviews was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews involved asking structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Interview one was designed to enable me to put the teacher's experience in context (Seidman, 1991). The teachers were asked to reconstruct their early experiences. This entailed the teachers detailing how they initially developed the desire to teach as well as how they were prepared to do so (see Appendix A). The purpose of the second interview is to focus on the concrete details of the participants' present experiences as a teacher (Seidman, 1991). The teachers were asked to provide details of their experience teaching students of color with disabilities or at-risk for identification of disabilities at a high-performing high-poverty school (see Appendix B). Teachers were also asked to talk about their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. The third interview was designed to allow the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience as a teacher

of students of color with disabilities or at-risk for identification of disabilities (Seidman, 1991). In this interview, the teachers were asked to explicitly discuss their beliefs on how their specific practices enable them to successfully meet the needs of their students (see Appendix C).

In addition to the three in-depth interview process, a final interview was conducted to collect information that was used to conclude the evolution of the case. The intent of the final interview was to gather any additional information that was used to provide a holistic representation of the case. The holistic representation of the case allows readers to develop a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of teaching students of color with disabilities in high-performing high poverty settings.

The use of a three in-depth interview series is critical to the purpose of the study. Seidman (1991) asserted "the combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives" (p. 12). This level of reflection by the teachers permitted them to make meaningful connections with themselves and their work with students of color with disabilities or at risk for identification of disability. The three in-depth interviews lasted approximately 20 to 45 minutes in length. The time between these interviews was from two to three weeks. Seidman (2009) recommends this structure because it allows the participant to think about the preceding interview but not enough time to lose the connection between the two. The interview process is critical, because it allows us to get understanding of things we are unable to observe (Stake, 1995).

Observations

Observations work researchers towards greater understanding of the case by enabling examination of the case in its natural context (Stake, 1995). Observations allow researchers to witness those things that the participant may not be able to articulate, the subtleties of what goes on in interactions between themselves and others (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They give access to everyday life occurrences that are otherwise unattainable through other data sources (Mayan, 2009). The observation process involves recording information through field notes (Creswell, 1998). Field notes should tell the social and interactional processes that make up the teachers everyday lives and activities in their classrooms (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This written account is a description of my reflections, feelings, ideas, moments of confusion, and interpretations of what is being observed (Mayan, 2009).

The purpose of conducting observations was to detail the teachers' experiences of planning and implementing instruction, collaborating with other professionals, interacting with students and parents, and developing classroom culture. A minimum of three formal observations was conducted in the classroom. However, additional informal observations were conducted in various school settings. Field notes were recorded using an observation protocol during and immediately after the observation has been conducted.

To provide structure for collecting data during observations, an observation protocol has been created. The observation protocol consists of the following sections; context, description of setting, interpretation, and questions (see Appendix D). The context section of the protocol is a direct description of the nature of the observation. This includes information such as time of observation, setting of observation, grade level

of the classroom, number of people present in the setting, and explicit details of what specifically took place during the observation. The data recorded in this section is free from my feelings or interpretation and only includes what actually occurred. The description of setting section includes a detailed depiction of the setting in which the observation has taken place. The interpretation section of the protocol is my initial interpretations of what has taken place during the observation. This includes my thoughts on the teacher behaviors and student responses the teachers' actions. Finally, the question section of the protocol includes any questions that I may have regarding what has been observed. These questions were used to guide the debriefing interview that took place after the observation.

Through the debriefing interviews, I learned more about teacher decision-making and their rationale for instructional approaches. The debriefing interviews were all unstructured. An unstructured interview does not involve the use of a detailed interview protocol (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This debriefing interview entailed asking the teachers a series of questions that progressively leads them to provide additional information. The intent of the interviews were to ask a variety of probing questions about things observed as well as gaining deeper understanding of the specifics about teacher decision-making and rationales for instructional approaches. Moreover, teacher beliefs about teaching students of color with disabilities and how these beliefs have informed their practice were explored. This interview provided me with the opportunity to discuss in further detail, the data collected in the observation with the teacher.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a critical component of the research process. It is imperative that

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researchers employ sound procedures for analyzing and interpreting gathered data (Figure 1). Data will be analyzed using a grounded theory methodology informed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss, the intent of a grounded theory study is to generate a theory that relates to a particular situation (Creswell, 1998). Alvarez-McHatton (2009) noted, "grounded theory consists of an iterative process requiring simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis" (p. 128). The grounded theory approach to data analysis consists of collecting rich data to saturate categories, identification of categories, coding of data, memo-writing, and constant comparisons. Grounded theory methods foster seeing the data in unmarked ways and exploring ideas about the data through early analytic writing (Charmaz, 2006).

Interviews were transcribed prior to conducting the next interview and a summary of the interview was written. A copy of the transcript and interview summary was provided to the participants in order to obtain feedback and assure that I have accurately recorded their responses. Once this process was completed, a review of interview transcripts and observation field notes was conducted. This initial review procedure allowed me to obtain a sense of the overall data that had been collected (Creswell, 1998). Once an initial sense of the data is obtained, the coding process began.

Coding of data entailed multiple iterations and constant comparison of findings. Coding is the sorting of all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study and gives us a structure for making comparisons with other segments of data (Stake, 2010). The Initial Phase of Data Analysis section of Figure 1 provides an illustration of the specific coding procedures employed for data analysis. Open coding was conducted on all transcripts and field notes to identify themes within the data. Open

coding is breaking apart of blocks of raw data and delineating concepts, which are

qualified in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz

(2006) asserted that coding should inspire us to examine hidden assumptions in both our

personal use of language and that of our participants as well. As I engaged in the process

of examining how the teachers and I describe certain concepts relative to teaching, my

initial thoughts were recording throughout the study.

My reflections as I analyzed the data were presented as a memo with each memo

being labeled as a concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos captured my initial

perceptions of and questions about the data. Charmaz (2006) noted that "memo-writing

is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts papers." (p.

72). Conceptual labels reflect my interpretation of what is being said in the data. Once

conceptual labels have been defined, I will proceed with axial coding. Axial coding is

the process of relating concepts to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Comparisons

and connections were made between the codes in order to determine what themes have

further developed. This comparative analysis process was conducted on both transcripts

and field notes in order to determine consistency among data points. This process

enabled me to reach data triangulation demonstrating trustworthiness of the data. The

Comparative Analysis Phase section of Figure 1 provides an illustration of the analysis

process that led to the thick detailed description of the case.

Figure 1. The Data Analysis Process. This figure illustrates the data collection and analysis process.

Credibility Measures and Quality Indicators

Brantlinger et al. (2005) outlined a specific set of credibility measures for qualitative researchers to follow in order to establish trustworthiness of their results (Table 2). The credibility measures that I believe the proposed study is able to meet are triangulation (data and investigator), disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checks, external auditors, peer debriefing, audit trail, prolonged field engagement, thick-detailed description, and particularizability.

Data triangulation was reached through the use of multiple data sources in the study. The current study employed interviews and observations as data collection measures. Through the use of these varied data sources, I was able to determine the convergence of or consistency among data sources. This process led to the identification of themes emerging from the data.

Disconfirming of evidence was completed through the comparative analysis processes of the study. After establishing preliminary themes and categories, I looked for

evidence inconsistent with these themes. In the comparative analysis process, I made comparisons and connections between the codes in order to determine what themes have further developed. This comparative analysis process was conducted on all data in order to determine consistency among data points.

Researcher reflexivity was met through my attempt to understand and disclose my personal beliefs, assumptions, values and biases regarding teaching students of color with disabilities in a high poverty context. A personal narrative was written prior to conducting the study. In this narrative, I discussed my experiences as a special education teacher in a high-poverty high-performing elementary school. I also kept a researcher journal in which I made frequent recordings of the challenges to my personal beliefs and values that I encountered while conducting data collection and analysis procedures. The data collected in my personal journal, was used to facilitate the writing of my closing narrative. In this narrative, I attempted to provide a detailed description of how I have been impacted personally and professionally through conducting the study. It is important to provide readers with this understanding of experiences as researcher in this study. By providing this narrative, readers are better able to understand my role in the study.

Table 2

Credibility Measures for Qualitative Research

Credibility Measure	Conducted in Study	How Measure will be Met
Triangulation	Yes	• Multiple data sources
Disconfirming evidence	Yes	• Comparative analysis
Researcher reflexivity	Yes	• Personal disclosure narratives
Member checks	Yes	• Providing members with interview transcripts and final case reports
External auditors	Yes	• The use of a trained qualitative researcher to independently code data
Peer debriefing	Yes	• Frequent discussion of analysis with experts in special and multicultural education
Audit trail	Yes	• Organization of data
Prolonged field engagement	Yes	• Multiple interviews and observations conducted until saturation is reached
Thick, detailed description	Yes	• Supporting interpretations with sufficient field notes and quotes
Particularizability	Yes	• Thick detailed descriptions of participant experiences

Two levels of member checks were performed on all interview transcripts, interview summaries, and the final report. The first level of member checks entailed providing the participants with a copy of the interview transcripts and summaries for review to determine if I had accurately captured their thoughts. The second level entailed me providing the participant with a copy of their final report for their review. This process allowed the participants to determine if my interpretations of their experiences

are accurate. The participants determined that my interpretations of their practices and beliefs accurately depicted their reality.

Additional steps taken to increase trustworthiness and credibility in results were the use of an external auditor and peer debriefing. The external auditor used in the study was a trained qualitative researcher who has earned a doctoral degree in Special Education from the University of South Florida. A codebook was created which contained the codes and definitions of the codes. The external auditor was trained on the appropriate use of the codebook. This training entailed discussions of the codes and their accompanying definitions. The external auditor independently coded two of the interviews using the codes to determine if my inferences are logical and grounded in findings. During the peer debriefing process, I engaged in critical discussions with peers who have expert knowledge in the areas of special and multicultural education. The peer debriefer provided me with feedback on my description, analyses, and interpretations.

Finally, keeping track of interviews conducted and specifics regarding observations such as dates, times, and information on individuals observed during the observation allowed for the development of an audit trail. This process documents and substantiates time spent in the field in order to increase dependability of results and to pinpoint exactly when saturation of the data was reached. With this trail, other researchers will be able to follow the sequencing of the study in order to arrive at their independent conclusions of on the trustworthiness of the findings. Prolonged field engagement was evidenced through the substantive observations and multiple interviews that I conducted. Through this process, I was able to provide readers of the report with thick-detailed descriptions of the experiences of teachers of students of color with disabilities in a high-poverty school

to an extent that they will be able to determine the degree of transferability to their own

situations.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct research involving human participants was gained from the

Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to submitting an application for approval to

conduct this study, I completed the Protection of Human Subjects course as provided by

the IRB. Completion of this training course assured that I have an understanding of the

guidelines and principles that ensure that participants are treated in an ethically

responsible manner. Measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of all participants

and research site. Informed consent was collected from the teachers who agreed to

participate. All informed consent forms included a statement that reiterated the voluntary

nature of the research. This provides participants with the understanding that they are

free to stop at any portion of the research study at any time.

Reporting the Case Study

Reporting a case study means bringing its results and findings to closure (Yin,

2003, p. 141). The reporting of the case should be organized in a way that contributes to

the reader's understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). In an effort to enable the reader to

develop a deep understanding of teaching students of color with disabilities in a high-

performing high-poverty school, I present individual narratives of the teachers. These

individual narratives are structured in a manner that highlights the extent to which the

behaviors exhibited by the teachers are consistent with the five essential elements of

culturally responsive teaching as defined by Gay (2002). Each individual narrative opens

with a biographical sketch that also describes how the teachers came to teach and critical

experiences that have influenced their perspective of teaching. Chapter four provides the

narratives of each participant as well as an expanded discussion of data analysis

procedures and results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The overall purpose of the study was to critically investigate the instructional practices and beliefs of teachers of students of color with disabilities or at-risk of identification of disability at a high-performing high-poverty school. Specifically, the study examined how teachers described their teaching practices and the extent to which their approaches to teaching students of color are consistent with the approaches that have been articulated and described in the literature informing the field regarding culturally responsive teaching. The significance of the study was embedded in the fact that currently students of color, students with disabilities, and students educated in high-poverty settings are failing to meet adequately yearly progress according to NCLB measures (Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2007). In the face of this reality, effective approaches to improving the educational outcomes of these students must be identified.

The research study employed an instrumental case study design as defined by Stake (1995). Initial analysis of data was conducted using grounded theory methodology informed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). However, multiple-case study analysis (Stake, 2006) was employed for final data analysis. The multiple-case analysis enabled me to examine the extent to which each individual case exemplified Gay's (2002) five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching when compared to the other cases. This approach provided an opportunity to understand the complex phenomena of teaching in a

high-poverty setting more thoroughly and further distinguish those characteristics held by successful teachers of students of color. A total of six teachers participated in the study. Each teacher was an elementary schools teacher of students of color with disabilities at a high-performing high-poverty school. Moreover, these teachers were all general education teachers, teaching in inclusive settings.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter is presented in eight sections. The first section is an expanded discussion of my role as the researcher. In this section, I share my reflections and initial interpretations of the data during the data collection process of the study. These in-depth reflections are thoughts and/or questions that emerged throughout the study that I captured in my researcher journal. Journal writing exercise was critical to the analysis of the cases and the overall trustworthiness of the findings of the study. Through this process, I was able to capture those moments when my thinking was challenged by what was being shared by the teachers. Moreover, my impressions of those moments in the research process that "aroused strong positive or negative feelings" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p.463) were secured.

Following the reflexive narrative is the reporting of each individual case. Each case will open with a biographical narrative of the teacher. The narrative provides detailed information regarding the teachers' orientation, philosophy of teaching, teacher preparation paths, teaching experience, and credentials. Next, the findings from each case are presented. Interview transcripts were coded according to the five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching; a) developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity; b) including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; c)

demonstrating caring and building learning communities; d) communicating with ethnically diverse students and families; and e) responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by each teacher reflected essential elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied. Frequency charts accompany each individual case report and provide a visual description of the prevalence of each characteristic in each teachers practices as evidenced through interview and observation data. A summary of my overall reflections of the time spent with the participant will be provided at the end of each case report. This is followed by the cross case analysis and a summary of the findings.

Role of the Researcher

Throughout the course of this study my personal beliefs about effective ways of teaching students of color have often been challenged. These challenges have caused me to continuously reflect on my experiences as a learner, teacher, and father and juxtapose these experiences with my work as a scholar and the new understandings I have gained about teaching students color with disabilities through my research. During the first interview cycle, a great many questions in the interviews focused on the teachers' beliefs about students of color. In some of the interviews, I initially believed that the responses I received from the teachers could be considered politically correct and to an extent, responses that the teachers believed were "safe". Throughout these interviews, I began to critically examine the racial dynamic at play in the interaction between some of the teachers and I. All but two of the participants are white and do not identify themselves as a person of color. Of the final two participants, one is Black and the other is Hispanic. Moreover, all of the participants were women. Because of this, I wondered whether the

questions I asked of the teachers pertaining to their beliefs about students of color would have been received and responded to differently if I were not a Black male. When discussing issues related to race, a few of the teachers appeared to struggle with how to answer that question. Some of the teachers stated that they didn't look at their students based on race or they attributed the differences among their students strictly to socioeconomics. Initially I believed this was problematic because in a way, it would appear that the teachers are avoiding the role of race in the classroom. If this were the case, then it appears that these teachers were failing to recognize the students race and ethnicity and its impact on their learning. Such a failure would ultimately be a direct contradiction to the approach to educating students of color posited by several scholars. Namely, Ladson-Billings (1994), Tatum (1997), and Gay (2002) have asserted that racial identity is a critical characteristic of the learning experience of students of color, and that the failure of teachers to acknowledge race is a failure to acknowledge an important aspect of their existence. The teacher's lack of explicit attention to race led me to believe that the beliefs of these teachers may not coalesce with those beliefs that are reflective of culturally responsive pedagogical perspective. However, when discussing their classroom practices, the teachers described approaches that evidenced that they are distinctly aware of their students' individual cultures and racial differences. Therefore, I again wondered whether or not their appeared reluctance to discuss with me the characteristics their students of color bring to the classrooms could have possibly been affected by the fact that I am a Black male. Such a situation indicates a need for researchers to attend to racial differences between themselves and their participants.

During an interview with Johanna, one of the teachers who participated in the study, I asked if she could describe any characteristics students of color brought to the classroom. Johanna responded by saying that she believed these students bring a special passion and energy to the classroom. She continued by stating that she believes that these characteristics are a reflection of the family structures of many of her students. As I listened to her perspective on this topic, I began to think about a recent conversation I had with my son's teacher. There were some critical similarities in what she shared and my son's experiences at school. Specifically, Johanna is a first grade teacher and my son also is in the first grade. Early in the school year, my son's teacher shared with me that he was very talkative in class and liked to share stories of things he has done. Without much thought, I agreed with his teachers' assessment of his behavior. I agreed because I too think he is very talkative and see this when we interact. I also began to hope that his talkative nature would not present a challenge for his teacher. However, after talking with Johanna I wondered how one teacher could view the very same behavior as a strength and another as an issue. In fact, Johanna stated that she believes that it is her responsibility to find approaches to her instruction that enable her to benefit from this characteristic of her students. She even stated that she often finds herself veering off of her prescribed instructional course in an effort to take full advantage of every teachable moment she is presented with. Perhaps, in a climate of prescribed curriculum and pacing guides, some may view this as an inefficient use of time. Obviously this is not the case for Johanna. She believes that these situations create opportunities to enrich student learning.

Case Reports

Case one: Johanna's Opening Narrative

Johanna is a first grade teacher in her seventh year of teaching. She is a Hispanic woman in her late 20s and is a wife and mother of two. Originally from New York, Johanna moved to the southeastern part of the United States approximately eleven years ago. Johanna loved school as a child and often passed time playing school at home. Currently pursuing a Masters degree, she asserts that she always wanted to be a teacher. Johanna's love for working with children led her to tutoring. Much of her interest in becoming a teacher was influenced by her mother who worked at an elementary school as an ESOL paraprofessional. Beginning in middle school, Johanna would visit her mother at work and volunteer in her classroom. Her volunteer efforts continued through high school when her mother moved to a position at a middle school.

Johanna's early experiences in education made her choice of a major in college simple. When she entered college she was confident that she wanted to study to become a teacher. As she worked to earn her Bachelors in Elementary Education, she completed practicum experiences in several settings. Johanna completed her level-three practicum at the school where you is currently employed. Her experience during her practicum revealed the students' love of learning and of their teachers, and the extent to which teachers' attended to the needs of their students. It was the experiences during the practicum that led Johanna to seek a permanent position at this settings; she has been there for seven years.

Johanna asserts that her decision to remain at the school is not one of convenience but rather, a result of the pleasure she receives from teaching a population of students that

some may perceive as being challenging. She values the work she does and believes that the school is a great place for students to learn. Johanna's commitment to the school is evidenced in the fact that she drives over an hour a day to work. She understands that she has other options for work that are closer to her home. However, she prefers to teach in a setting in which teachers like her are most needed. In addition to her decision to remain teaching at the school, Johanna has also decided to allow her son to attend the school. This decision further exemplifies her belief in the schools and the efforts of the teachers who work there.

Table 3

Johanna's Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	20
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	1
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	30
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	14
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	4

Johanna started the year with 13 students in her class. Two students transferred to another school so she currently has 11 students (4 males and 7 females). The group is extremely diverse consisting of seven Black students, three Hispanic students, and one Asian student. Of the 11 two are identified as in need of special education services, three are English Learners, and one is served at tier three of RTI. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by Johanna reflected essential

elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied (Table 3). The above table displays the actual number of times she discussed each essential element.

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

Johanna relies heavily on her experiences as a teacher of students who are ethnically and culturally diverse as a basis for developing her knowledge base about cultural diversity. She shares that the preparation she received as a pre-service teacher did little to prepare her for the diversity she encounters in her current school. Johanna noted that in college, diversity is discussed in generalities and rarely deals with the complexity of teaching students of color in high-poverty schools. Additionally, she shared that the professional development workshops she attends appear to follow this same format. Johanna asserts:

> I would honestly say that I don't think I was very prepared for that [diverse learners]. Then, like trainings now, it's kind of the same thing. I think its just one of those things that from practicing for so long you just learn how to do it. You know every year I learn something more. Something that worked with that particular group and you know it might work with this next group as well so [it is] trial and error.

Through this trial and error approach, Johanna has broadened her knowledge base and understanding of her students in a way that enables her to make the necessary adjustments in her practice resulting in improved outcomes for her students.

One learning experience that appeared to be meaningful for Johanna was the manner in which her students of color interact with others in class. Johanna noted that

her students of color bring a lot of passion. She asserted that she thinks this is due to the size of their families. Johanna affirms:

> A lot of them do come from big families so they appreciate like again that's that whole conversation piece too where they're always going to - they talk about going to their aunts house or their cousins so it feels like they kind of extend out to their families more than other children do.

Johanna believes that this results in her students of color being more social in class. The sizes of some of the student's families appear to cause them to want to be recognized in school.   She believes that this may due to the students frequently being in environments that allow them to express themselves freely. While she embraces this characteristic, Johanna shares that the challenge is teaching her students to understand when it is appropriate to be social and when there is a need for them to focus on academic content.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

Johanna shared that due to the limited access of books and materials that address ethnic and cultural diversity, the inclusion of culturally relevant content in the curriculum is not always the easiest thing for her to accomplish. However, she remains mindful of the need to do so and continuously seeks to find books and materials to share with her students that are more representative of their cultures. She believes that this issue is reflective of a larger problem that our society as a whole appears to be confronted with. Johanna feels that to a large extent our country's historical narrative is void of the experiences of diverse individuals. She notes that while our country is growing increasingly diverse, most of the books that are written are representative of the lives of

White children and families. Because of this, Johanna believes that the books that are available in schools fail to tell the stories of the many cultures that are represented in our society. Johanna asserted:

> The country is much more diverse now, and it gets more diverse as the years go by. But yet you still see the same types of books, the same representation in education in general. And so, I do think it's still projected [singularly] that way and I its not fitting with what is realistic.

Johanna does not allow the lack of resources addressing ethnic and cultural diversity content prevent her from including these materials in her classroom. She just understands that she must do deeper levels of research in order to identify such materials so they can be shared with her students. Therefore she works with the school librarian to get books for her students as well as locating sources online. However, she stated that pulling stories and articles from the Internet has been the most helpful in her attempts.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Johanna believes it is important to create a sense of community in her classroom where students learn to respect each other. She shared that establishing this collaborative environment with the students is important for the building of their classroom culture. Johanna asserted that the best way for her to approach this task is by modeling respectful behavior for her students. One of the ways in which she models the care she has for her students is by displaying her awareness of and sensitivity to the issues that affect her students. Johanna believes that these issues have heightened the importance of building a caring learning community for her students. She noted that at least half of her students

have been confronted with a number of different challenges outside of school. Johanna shared:

> I have children who do not live with their biological mother or father because either dad is in jail and you know mom has been removed from the environment for some reason or another. I have another child that I just found out that her mom is over protective because of things that happened to her that she is just overwhelmingly so with her children. But there are other issues in the same family where the brother has had all kinds of issues and the two sisters literally seem to not like each other at all. Not like sibling rivalry but like really bad like they're going to hurt each other. And then that stuff is being brought into the classroom. I have two students that have very, very serious emotional behavioral issues that have not been completely diagnosed yet so we're working through that process of trying to find out what is going to work best for them. How we can help them out. It's been a trial and error thing all year long.

As a result of these circumstances, Johanna reports that she has to make sure that she utilizes an ethic of care in her classroom because in her opinion these are the students that often get brushed aside. However, she recognizes that these are the students that need her most. Therefore, Johanna she approaches the responsibility of building a caring learning community cautiously in order to assure that her students receive what they need from her.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

Johanna's ability to effectively communicate with ethnically and culturally

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diverse students and families is most prominently displayed when addressing discipline

issues in her classroom. While most teachers in the school use structured classroom

management systems, Johanna has opted to implement a less structured system that

focuses on helping students to learn to make better choices and take responsibility for

their actions. She noted that her approach requires that she first teach the students what

the classroom expectations are. When this is done, Johanna can then have personal

conversations with students when situations arise in which students are not meeting these

expectations. Johanna detailed this process when sharing:

> But I don't even do time out as much. Its just like going to that person and
>
> talking about what did you do, what were you suppose to do, how can you make
>
> sure you are doing that? Go ahead and show me, that kind of conversation. And
>
> they always know and usually correct it.

Most importantly, Johanna reported that this approach to addressing student behavior is

individualized and that these conversations are tailored to the students' personal

situations.

Johanna's understanding of the need to have conversations with her students

appears to be a reflection of the knowledge she has gained in a course on classroom

management in her Masters program. She shared that in this course, she has acquired

new ideas that she is able to readily implement in her class. Johanna referenced a

program that she learned of in her program titled *Love and Logic.* She asserted the

program has truly influenced her beliefs on how to interact with her students when

addressing their behavior. Johanna shared:

It's made a huge difference because they're used to being yelled at and used to

people communicating with them in a negative manner when they do something

wrong. So it's shocking when they hear someone just talking to them. And how

things are phrased makes a big difference too and they tend to respond to that a lot

more so.

In addition to her decision to abstain from implementing a more traditionally

structured classroom management system, Johanna has also opted not to use assigned

seating in her class. Instead, her classroom management system allows for student

autonomy in selecting his/her seating arrangement without resulting in behavior issues.

In the rare instances when a student has difficulty interacting appropriately with the other

students in the group, the student loses the privilege of choosing his or her seat and has to

earn back the privilege. When this happens, Johanna chooses a seat for the students. In

order for the student to earn the privilege of choosing seat back, he or she must interact

appropriately with the students that Johanna sits them near for the week.

During a visit to Johanna's classroom, I witnessed an example of a situation in

which one of her students had lost his privilege to choose his own seat. This particular

student approached Johanna and asked for permission to select another seat. Johanna

engaged the student in a conversation where she reminded him of the behavior choices

that caused him to lose his privilege. She also reminded the student of the expected

behavior. Johanna then asked the student to reflect on the choices he had made compared

to the choices he is expected to make and then asked the student whether he believed he

deserved to have the privilege of choosing his own seat reinstated. The student

responded by saying he did not believe he had earned it back and concluded by assuring

Johanna that he would work hard to do so. In this situation, Johanna's ability to communicate effectively with her student made it possible for him to understand how his poor behavior choices resulted in a lose of privilege. Moreover, it led to him accepting responsibility for his choices.

Johanna reported that unfortunately many of her ethnically diverse students come from homes where there is a lot of negativity. She also reported that because of this she has decided that an approach to communication that demonstrates her care for them is imperative. Johanna noted that her ethnically diverse students need positive feedback and guidance aimed at helping them understand why it is important that they work to meet the expectations of the classroom.

A critical factor contributing to the success of Johanna's approach to addressing discipline has been the constant communication she keeps with the families of her students. She believes that keeping parents aware of what is going on in the classroom enables them to provide support and reinforcement at home. Johanna prides herself on her ability to establish good relationships with parents. She reports that she rarely has any issues communicating with them and always attempts to accommodate their personal schedules. Johanna stated that while she uses the students' agenda books to correspond with parents on a daily basis, she also frequently makes phone calls when necessary and maintains an open door policy. Johanna's goal in her efforts is to communicate to her parents that she is committed to doing everything she can to support them and their child. She believes that it communicates to them that they can come to her in times of need and she will do all she can to help them.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Johanna's approach to responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction involves making attempts to obtain an understanding of the students' prior knowledge and interests and then incorporating this information into lesson planning efforts. Her belief is that any attempt to include this information should always be driven by the individual needs of the students. Johanna prefers to get the students involved in this process as well. She noted that the conversational style she employs in the building of her classroom culture lends well to her efforts to gain an understanding of her students' varying levels of prior knowledge. She shared that she uses a variety of hands-on games and activities that tap into their interests.

Johanna discussed an example of how she develop activities that connect with students interests from the previous school year when she had a lot of boys in her classroom that were all interested in football. Johanna used the students' interest in football to create an activity on making predictions that involved the Super Bowl. She shared that by doing these types of lessons she is able to increase students' interest in the content and motivate them to learn. Technology is also used to enhance her ability to bring the content to life in a way that is meaningful for the students. While Johanna does recognize the importance of responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction, she chooses to focus more on the learning styles her students present and effective ways of meeting them.

Closing narrative.

As I spent time with Johanna, I became impressed with her keen sense of awareness and understanding of her children and their needs. This sensitivity to the

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needs of her students and their families appears to drive Johanna's efforts in teaching her students. It seems that she embraces the challenges that many of them face outside of school and works to assist them in overcoming those challenges. While many teachers place emphasis on the academic development of their students, Johanna places an equal emphasis on the social/emotional development of hers.

Johanna highlighted her ability to understand some of the challenges her students are confronted with when discussing her perception of the difference between the schooling experiences of the students she teaches in her high poverty school and the experiences of students in middle class communities. Johanna asserted that the lack of resources in high-poverty communities significantly impacts the school readiness of many of the children who attend school in those communities. An example she referenced when discussing this difference were the low percentages of students who attend a structured pre-kindergarten program. Johanna asserted that while VPK is available in high-poverty communities, there appears to be a difference in the quality of instruction that takes place in these programs. When making this assertion, Johanna referenced her son's experiences in a VPK program in a more affluent community. Johanna believed that the instruction in her son's program was more aligned with what is expected of children as they enter kindergarten. While, the instruction provided to children in high-poverty communities may be at a lower level. Because of this, she noted that children who attend VPK programs in middle class or affluent communities might arrive to kindergarten more ready to learn than students from high-poverty communities. Johanna affirmed that when this happens, the teachers in high poverty schools must begin instruction at lower levels in order to meet their students' needs. She states:

We can't instruct them the same way that teachers would in a middle class school

because our kids aren't ready for some of that stuff. We have to take a step back

and do what we can to move them forward.

Johanna concluded her analysis by sharing that because of this occurrence, she believes

that there is often a perception developed by many people about teachers in high-poverty

schools that are inaccurate. She asserted:

So I think a lot of times people look at Title 1 schools and they don't feel we're

doing as much for their children but the thing is when our students are starting

lower than where they need to be we need to meet them, not meet them at that

level like we definitely want to challenge them but we can't get them the same

thing.

Johanna's attempt to highlight some of her perceptions of the social inequities she

believes confront her students is a vivid example of her understanding of her role in her

school and the lives of her students. She realizes the challenges that lie before her on a

daily basis and she has accepted the responsibility of confronting them. Johanna feels

that regardless of all of the trials she faces as a teacher of students of color with

disabilities in a high poverty school, she refuses to give up. She is willing to do

everything in her power to help her students. Johanna asserted that this is her purpose for

being at this school and anything less that doing this will be a disservice to her students.

Case two: Elizabeth's Opening Narrative

Elizabeth is a first grade teacher in her sixth year of teaching. She is a White

woman in her late 20s and is originally from Buffalo, New York. Elizabeth moved to the

southeastern part of the United States six years ago after accepting a teaching position.

After relocating, Elizabeth continued her education and earned a Masters degree in Reading. As an undergraduate student, she studied both elementary and special education and earned a dual degree. Elizabeth's original objective was to become a special education teacher. However, after graduation she was unable to find a position as a special educator. Her interest in becoming a special educator is inspired by her aunt who was a teacher of hearing impaired students. Elizabeth was inspired by how hard her aunt worked to bring out her students potential. Her aunt often shared stories of how successful her students were becoming. As a result of these experiences, Elizabeth learned that students with disabilities are capable of performing at high levels if provided with the necessary supports. Elizabeth applies these lessons in her classroom today as she works to unlock the potential in her students.

Elizabeth believes that teaching is about the child. She feels that it is the responsibility of the teacher to identify what works for the students. Elizabeth's current class is comprised of all ethnically or culturally diverse students. She recognizes the challenges that many of her students face and how these challenges impact them in school. Currently, she has 16 students in her class. Of these 16 students, seven are male and six are female, nine are Black, four are Hispanic, two are Asian, and one is Multiracial. Elizabeth has one student who is in need of special education services and five students who are English learners. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by Elizabeth reflected essential elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied (Table 4). The table below displays the actual number of times she discussed each essential element.

Table 4

Elizabeth's Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	13
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	1
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	27
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	8
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	1

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

Elizabeth's knowledge base about cultural diversity has been established through her experiences teaching culturally diverse students. She believes that her culturally diverse students all have talents that they bring to the classroom and are each driven in their own way. Elizabeth shared that when these talents are hidden, teachers must find them. She approaches this task by adjusting her teaching style in ways that meets the individual needs of her students. Elizabeth noted that she must make sure that she is presenting the content so it is understandable at the students' present level.

Elizabeth shared that she also allows the students to educate her on their background and experiences by having conversations with them. She discusses how through this process, she learned of a difficult situation one of her diverse students faced at home. Elizabeth reports that when she was a third grade teacher, she had a student who was not completing his homework. After talking with the student, she learned that the students' parents worked at night and he was often left responsible for the care of his younger siblings. While the student did have an older sibling at home, he still had to

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assist with childcare. Elizabeth shared that this experience truly opened her eyes to the issues that can confront her students outside of class and how these issues can impact their learning.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

While Elizabeth affirmed that she believes that it is important to include ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, she did not discuss a systematic approach for completing this task. Elizabeth approaches the process of including ethnic and culturally diverse content into her instruction from an inclusive perspective. She shared that there are core curriculum standards that are focused on highlighting specific events in American history that pertain to diverse cultures. When teaching these concepts, Elizabeth notes that she invites others to come into the classroom to share their background experiences. This sharing process may be either formal or informal. Elizabeth reports that the parents of her ethnically diverse students are always welcome to come into the classroom and share their experiences. She asserts that she remains open to taking advantage of these teachable moments when they present themselves.

Elizabeth's knowledge of how to create culturally responsive learning environments is evolving. She is currently taking a graduate course on culturally relevant leadership. She notes that this class has furthered her understanding of the need for schools to be accepting of all cultures and including their perspectives in the educational process.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Elizabeth uses her child-centered philosophy as the foundation of her caring learning community. She asserts that it is important to understand the students and

recognize the fact that they are simply children that need to be taught. Elizabeth noted that regardless of the students' circumstances, teachers must teach them according to their needs. She affirmed that while it is important to understand the students' background, this understanding should not negatively impact how she feels towards them. Instead, it should be used to inform how to better serve them. Elizabeth affirms:

I define care by treating each other respectfully, understanding each other, and just making sure that there is that sense of family within the classroom. That the students know that they can come to me with any situation and then I won't judge it and that I'm here to listen to them. Just that sense of togetherness, that we're all in this together, and that regardless of whether they get their homework done…I'm still going to care about them and I'm still going to help them.

The caring community that Elizabeth has been able to establish has allowed her to implement peer teaching in her class. Elizabeth shared that she likes to have her students work collaboratively in an effort to assist one another in learning activities. She stated that when the students work together, they are able to dialogue about the lesson. During this dialogue, students are able to explain content in different ways. Elizabeth reports that she enjoys seeing how her students respond to being able to teach their peers. She calls this process the *circle effect* because she teaches the students, they teach each other, and she learns more about them in the process. Elizabeth shared, "*We're all teaching each other and if I can reach one they can help me reach the other ones too in more than one way.*"

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

Elizabeth's ability to effectively communicate with ethnically diverse students and families is embedded in her understanding of the role that parents play in the education of their children. Elizabeth believed that parents play an important role in their child's education and their involvement is essential. She asserted that certain schools have higher rates of parental participation than others. Unfortunately, her school and schools that share similar demographics as hers are those that often experience low rates of parental participation. Elizabeth stated that the issue of low parental involvement at high-poverty, highly diverse schools is not a matter of the parents lacking interest in their child's education, but rather more of attributable to the families' individual circumstances. She believes, *"It's based on lack of ability to get to the events or the ability to come to conferences because I see it in the students in this classroom. The parents aren't able to make conferences."* Elizabeth understands the barriers that may prevent parents from participating at the level that they would prefer, so she makes attempts to entertain alternative ways they may do so.

Elizabeth believes that effective communication is an efficient way to circumvent the barriers that hinder the parent ability to participate at higher levels. She noted that while it may not be a popular option among teachers, she provides her personal cell phone number to parents. Elizabeth makes it clear to parents that they are free to call her during the day or in the evening. She shares that she does this because:

> If they're [parents] willing to show me that they're interested and they want to
> find out about how their child is doing or they have questions, just extending that

to them so that they know there is that relationship where I don't mind if they're calling outside of school hours.

Elizabeth shared that by increasing the parents' access to her, she has increased their ability to be involved.

Elizabeth detailed an example of her ability to effectively communicate with diverse parents when discussing an experience she had with child with autism. She noted that this particular child had experienced several challenges the previous school year that led other teachers to not want him in their classroom. Elizabeth shared:

Earlier before the school year started teachers were looking at their rosters saying who do you have, who do you have and I put my blinders on because I don't want to hear any white noise about prior years because how a child was for one teacher was is completely different for another teacher.

Using this approach, Elizabeth entered the school looking to establish her own relationship with the students and his parents. By doing so, she was able to assist the student in having a very successful school year. This experience resulted in the parent sharing with her how much she appreciated the positive impact she had on her child.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Elizabeth shared that she uses the support of paraprofessionals when responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. She shared that the paraprofessionals enable her to provide her linguistically diverse students with additional instruction in areas in which her ethnically diverse students are struggling academically. Additionally, she provides her linguistically diverse students with accommodations on any assignments or assessments that are administered.

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Closing narrative.

As I engaged in conversations with Elizabeth, I arrived at the understanding of her as an educator. She is a passionate child advocate who understands the importance of recognizing the child's individual needs in providing effective instruction. Seeing her students experience growth in their learning fuels Elizabeth to do the work she does. She shared a recent experience in which one of her students was struggling in reading. Elizabeth reported that at the beginning of the school year she administered a sight word checklist with the student and the student only knew 12 out of 40 sight words. However, she shared that after two months of instruction she completed the checklist with the student again and the students knew 28 of the sight words. Elizabeth asserted:

> Just seeing that growth is just really a driving factor for me. It really is. It motivates me and helps me to create engaging lessons because if they can make these gains in that amount of time imagine what they can make between August and May. So just their constant progress and performances is what motivates me.

Elizabeth discussed how her work is guided by an ethic of care. She asserted that in order for teachers in high-poverty settings to be effective, an ethic of care must accompany their practice. She believes that care is communicated through the presence of meaningful relationships. Elizabeth also believes that when a teacher's work is guided by an ethic of care, they are able to understand the importance of getting to know her students on a personal level. She notes that over time, she has become this kind of teacher. Elizabeth acknowledges that while in the beginning of her career she thought she was a caring teacher, her refined understanding of care in the classroom has revealed to her that she may not have been as caring as she thought she was. However, with what

she knows now, Elizabeth is able to display this ethic in her practice and encourages others to do so as well.

Case three: Teresa's Opening Narrative

Teresa is a White woman in her late 20s. She is currently a third grade teacher in her third year of teaching. As an undergraduate she studied Criminology and sought a position in law. After graduation, Teresa worked in a law office for several years. She enjoyed this experience but believed she needed a change. After some reflection, Teresa made the career change to become a teacher. She did so because she wanted to assume a more proactive (i.e., early intervention, prevention) rather than a reactive stance (e.g., punishment) toward societal challenges. Moreover, she states she realized that it was better to do what made her happy everyday. With this as her mission, Teresa entered the M.A.T in Elementary Education to receive her preparation as an elementary teacher. She talks highly of her experience in the MAT program and credits it with having the most consequential bearing upon her understanding of the profession. Specifically, she appreciated the time she spent as an AmeriCorps tutor through the work-study program during her graduate studies. She took advantage of this experience and used it as a means to determine if teaching was really something she wanted to do. Teresa recalls how the AmeriCorps experience provided her with the opportunity to work with second and third grade students with a variety of learning needs. Ultimately, this experience enabled her to develop an idea of the type of school in which she preferred to teach.

Teresa noted that while her personal philosophy is in a bit of a transition, she does identify herself as being the kind of teacher that seeks to construct meaningful learning opportunities for her students. This year, Teresa shares that the mix of students in her

classroom has presented some unique challenges. She attributed this to the fact that half

of her class is comprised of students with disabilities. This was drastically different from

her previous two years. Typically, she only had one to three students with disabilities

and was in need of accommodations to meet their needs. Based on her previous

experiences with students with disabilities, Teresa was confident working them. She

shared that she believed she had a good general understanding of the needs of these

students and had been able to identify some strategies that had worked. However, with

such a dramatic increase, Teresa realized she did not know what to do. After all, she was

a general education teacher and she believed her pre-service program didn't prepare her to

for this type of classroom setting.

To adjust to this dramatic change in her student population, Teresa states that she

has attended several professional development workshops. She also sought the advise of

special education personnel at her school. In these workshops, the facilitators really

stressed the importance of explicit instruction more frequently than she was typically

used to using in her classroom. While she readily recognizes the value of this type of

instruction, she also understands the importance of facilitating her students' knowledge

construction process as they take ownership of their learning. However, with a classroom

of 18 students, 15 of which are children of color, nine of which are students with

disabilities, and five others who either have a Section 504 plan or are at Tiers two or three

of RTI, Teresa has been open to implementing any approach that will benefit her

students. Nevertheless, it appears that Teresa still finds ways to teach her current

collection of students in a way that is reflective of her preferred teaching style.

Table 5

Teresa's Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	22
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	4
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	22
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	15
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	7

What is presented next is a more comprehensive reporting of findings that provide

a thick-detailed description of her beliefs and practices as a teacher of students of color

with disabilities in a high-poverty setting. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or

instructional practices discussed by Teresa reflected essential elements of culturally

responsive teaching were tallied (Table 4). The above table displays the actual number of

times she discussed each essential element.

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

Teachers engage in the process of developing a knowledge base about cultural

diversity in a variety of ways and from many different perspectives. Teresa discussed her

approaches to gaining an understanding of her culturally diverse students. One of her

primary approaches she shared consists of her reviewing research relevant to effective

practices in educating students of color. Specifically, she shared a situation in which she

was reading some research on reading comprehension and students of color. This

particular piece mentioned that students of color comprehend various texts in different

ways. She goes on to disclose that the article affirmed that these students enjoy and

better comprehend more episodic tales that include many characters and contain extended plot lines. With this new knowledge, Teresa decided to incorporate such reading material into her classroom. She reports that thus far, this approach has worked with her students. Not only have the students comprehension improved, but this approach also lends itself to other activities that develop higher order thinking skills. It is apparent that this approach to reaching a better understanding of her culturally diverse students has been effective for Teresa and the new understanding has inspired her practice. She noted that she consistently attempts to create opportunities that *authentically meet students' needs*. Such an approach appears to provide her with the knowledge that enables her to accomplish her task.

Evidence of Teresa's attempts to develop a knowledge base about diversity was also revealed when discussing how teaching in a high-poverty school with a high population of diverse students may be different from a teaching experience in a more affluent neighborhood. During her discussion of this issue, Teresa made a thoughtful observation. She noted that to her one of the biggest differences was in the *financial divide* and how a lack of resources deprives students from impoverished neighborhoods from certain meaningful experiences. She explains this position by adding that in some cases, the curriculum is structured such that there is an assumption that all learners have similar background knowledge. However, in the case of her students, they often lack some of the necessary background knowledge and therefore struggle with some of the content. Because of this, she often finds it difficult to activate student prior knowledge relative to a given topic because the students do not own those experiences. As a result, Teresa notes that she attempts to account for the experiences her students may have been

deprived of by investigating alternative text and curriculum materials that may further her students' understanding on the topics being covered.

With the knowledge base that Teresa has developed, she is able to avoid making assumptions about her students and their individual cultural differences. She noted:

I pay a lot more attention to what is in their story…and honestly it just comes down to knowing each student that comes in and their family. Because no matter what background they're from their family and home life can be completely different than what you know you might generally think or over generalize.

As assumption about her students of color that Teresa has had to confront is related to parent participation. Teresa stated she often talks with her students' teachers from previous years to gather information on what has worked for them in the past. Teresa enjoys this approach but acknowledges that it sometimes results in her being provided with negative information about the parents of her students.

Teresa shared that some of the parents of her students had developed the perception among other teachers that they were not providing their children with the necessary support at home. She made a point to stress that during these conversations, her intentions are to focus solely on stories of success and those things that the families liked and were capable of doing at home. She states:

I'm very fortunate with all my families a lot of them have had a stereotype that they don't get the help they need at home. But every single parent I've had that has come in they want to help at home. They just either aren't sure how, have trouble with the hours or just have a language barrier. So really just finding a way

to have the home support makes a student more willing when they come to class because their families are happy.

Through this process, several things regarding the parents of her students are revealed that could have resulted in Teresa making faulty assumptions about her students' parents or caregivers. Although this information was provided to her through discussions with her colleagues, Teresa did not formulate her opinion of her parents based on it. Rather, she established her perceptions about her parents involvement in their child's learning on her personal interactions with them. Teresa's willingness to challenge previously held assumptions about the parents of her students has paved the way for the building of meaningful relationships that have benefited her, her students, and their families.

Teresa's method used for enhancing her knowledge about cultural diversity is the use of family surveys. She shared:

Families get a whole lot of surveys too from me. Actually at the beginning of the school year I'm about to do my midway one and then do an end of the school year one. A couple of the questions are the same but I mix up a few relative to the time of year.

This method may serve as the most beneficial because of the types of information it provides. The use of the surveys enables Teresa to access information about the needs and interest of her families specific to her current students. Such information can be immediately utilized to adapt classroom approaches according to student needs.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

When discussing her attempts to include ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, Teresa states that she often has to struggle to find books and other forms

of print media that contains images or characters that are reflective of her students'

cultures. Teresa noted that many of the texts that are provided for her are evidence of this

lack of diverse content. Teresa informed me that because of this, she purposely looks for

books and other reading materials that do not have all White characters in them. She

shared that she most often has to result to using articles as a means of helping her

students understand the experiences of diverse cultures through text.

An approach that has been beneficial to Teresa is her weeklong culture study that

the students complete at home with their parents. She notes that this project provides her

with specific information about her students and their cultural backgrounds. Teresa

reports that once she collects this information, she then plans her instruction throughout

the year in order to account for the individual cultural differences of her students.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Teresa began the building of her caring learning community at the very beginning

of the school year. She discusses how she solicits the students' assistance in "designing"

the curriculum for the school year. In her classroom, students are active participants in

the curriculum development process as they provide their input on the things they would

like to learn. Discussing this process and her approach to doing this in her classroom,

Teresa shares, that she employs an upfront process at the beginning of the year in which

she has the students complete surveys. Through these surveys, she learns her students'

interests, likes, and dislikes. With this data, she begins the process of designing their

instructional course. One of the things that was revealed through the survey was that

approximately 90% of her students were interested in cheetahs. Because of this, Teresa

designed a science unit on cheetahs that included a collaborative effort with the local zoo.

Her students had significant interest in the unit and were able to produce some quality products. At the end of the unit, the students' hard work was rewarded by the zoo organization and they received a visit to the school from a live cheetah. Teresa credits this experience with her students as one of her most impactful moments as a teacher. The students may also make this observation as their interest in this unit and motivation to learn was also extended to math.

A significant component of Teresa building her learning environment through the demonstration of caring is her awareness of her students and the conditions that impact them outside of school. Teresa spoke of an African-American girl in her class who had unfortunately developed the reputation among some teachers as being an angry student. She discloses that after meeting the student, developing a relationship with her, and learning of the challenges the student is confronted with in her home life she had a deeper understanding of her and why she displayed anger in certain situations. Teresa noted that given the student's background and home life, she believed that most individuals would display an angry demeanor.

According to Teresa, the situation with this student's home life has regrettably been consistent with that of many of her students. She shares similar stories of how her students are confronted with challenging circumstances once they exit her classroom door. These circumstances undoubtedly have an impact on her students. Additionally, Teresa believes that they also impact the classroom environment. Therefore, she aims to create a place in which her students can learn with the necessary support and without unnecessary distractions. Teresa credits her emotional attachment and a profound desire to understand whom her students are on a deeper level with serving as the impetus for

creating a caring environment. She strongly believes that the only way you can serve

your students and their families is to know them, their circumstances, and their needs.

Teresa states that many teachers may not be adequately prepared to work with such a

diverse demographic of students and therefore many teachers struggle in these settings.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

A critical component of the communicative process is the ability of the teacher to

communicate a vision to students and families when opposing viewpoints may be

present. Teresa discussed how prior to accepting a teaching position in a high-poverty

school, she heard of the many challenges that she would face. She shares that she was

continuously told, *those students need extra help* or *those families can't do the homework*

at home with them. However, such statement did not distract her because she believed

that working in high-poverty schools with diverse students was her calling. Teresa

shared that based on her prior experiences, she believed that students in these schools

were highly capable of success and their families were capable of helping them to be

successful. To her, the issue of these students not achieving academic success was not a

result of their ability, but rather a result of teachers' failure to adjust to their unique

needs.

Teresa discusses an incidence related to her beliefs about what may be appropriate

for her students when completing assignments at home. She notes how based on their

experiences with their children's former teachers, a lot of her students' parents were

expecting homework assignments to take a particular form. However, some of her

parents desired more valuable reading activities for their children to complete at home.

Similarly, Teresa wanted to make the time her students spent at home learning with their

parents more meaningful as well so she sought to introduce them to new, more creative assignments. She shared an experience in which her parents and students were used to completing book reports as a homework assignment. Teresa noted that she found herself questioning the value of such an activity and whether this assignment served as an authentic learning opportunity. Because of this, she created a cereal box book report project that also required the students to create a commercial to accompany their report. She believed that this assignment was more beneficial because it appeared to provide the meaningful learning that both her and the parents desired. The parents and children still completed book reports, an assignment they apparently enjoyed, while she was able to increase their level of engagement with classroom material at home. This experience was an example of Teresa's ability to recognize that the importance of communicating with parents in an attempt to reduce discontinuities in the students learning experiences.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Teresa attempts to match the instructional techniques she uses in class to the learning styles of diverse students. She discusses how her students were performing poorly on reading assessments and she questioned whether or not this performance was due to effort, interest, or ability. She realized that her students were not only having difficulty with reading they were also struggling with word problems in math. However, they were performing well in science. Teresa noted that she recognized that much of her science instruction included a lot of kinesthetic and tactile strategies. Teresa shared:

> For every vocabulary word for science we had some kind of movement to go with
> it. So I thought alright we're going to have to move with everything now to go
> with it. But so that it doesn't wear off its just kind of salt and peppered in here

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and there so it doesn't get too old or I can keep it fresh kind of thing. So really I

just try to pay really close attention to what they're successful at.

Teresa's attentiveness to her students learning styles enabled her to adapt her instruction

in order to meet their needs. She was able to incorporate instructional practices that

matched their preferred learning styles. Teresa shared that this approach is an ongoing

process that guides her work throughout the school year.

Closing narrative.

Teresa comes across as someone who is passionate about teaching and truly

believes in her students. Throughout the time I spent with her, I was encouraged by the

way she appeared to be continuously questioning her practice in an effort to identify ways

to best meet the needs of her students. Teresa believes that the overarching school

system has room for improvement as it relates to meeting the needs of students. She

shares how her school district has strict instructional guidelines that teachers are to

follow. These guidelines often require teachers to teach specific content in a specific

manner regardless of student population. Teresa views these guidelines as being

problematic because according to her, there is no uniform instructional approach to

teaching. She prefers to have flexibility when making decisions regarding instructional

in her classroom. Teresa shared that she often has conversations with school

administrators in order to receive permission to make personal decisions regarding her

instructional approaches. Teresa shared an incident in which she met with school

administrators regarding instructional approaches she believed would work best for her

students. She discussed how she provided them with evidence supporting her request to

try something different in her class. This evidence consisted of research or other forms of

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literature that further supported her position. Fortunately, this process worked for her and as a result she has been granted permission to adjust her classroom schedule to better meet the needs of her students. She believes that if more people would be willing to advocate for their students by requesting to be able to change their instructional approaches, it would truly help students to perform better.

Teresa appears to take a critical stance to her role as a teacher. She talks frequently about "questioning" the social inequalities that confront her students. She shared that she believes the inequalities in economic resources that her students face remains one of the biggest obstacles in her work. This perspective appears to be a result of her personal orientation and childhood experiences. Her parents are divorced and her family is unwilling to accepting her aunts' interracial marriage to a Black man. Teresa also discussed how after her parents were divorced, her dad lived in a more affluent neighborhood than her mom. She stated that there was a discrepancy in economic resources between the two neighborhoods. Additionally, there was a difference in the types of activities that occurred in each. She mentions how she often questioned why some of her friends from one neighborhood were not allowed to come see her at her other parents home and when asking why this was so, she was told *that's just how it is*. Her early introduction to the notion of difference left her with some unanswered questions. Teresa appears to still be seeking answers to these questions today. The critical perspective that informs her work has enabled Teresa to achieve success as a teacher and ultimately make a difference in the lives of her students.

Overall, Teresa appears to be keenly aware of whom her students are and the neighborhoods in which they live. Most importantly, she is deeply aware of who she is

as an individual and how her personal identity impacts her as a teacher of diverse students in a high poverty setting. On the surface, it would be difficult to believe that Teresa's childhood contains similarities to the children she teaches. She discusses how she grew up in a trailer with her mom and lacked certain resources. She did not have books at home growing up and did not have anyone available to help her with homework. However, in spite of these challenges she was able to receive her Masters degree and go on to a successful career as a teacher. Because of her personal narrative, Teresa believes that more children who face challenges can still achieve their highest potential. She believes that this is true regardless of the race of the individual or their individual situations. In her eyes, teachers play a significant role in helping their children reach their full potential.

Teresa's belief about the potential for student success is evident in her approach to meeting the needs of her students with disabilities. Teresa has focused a substantial amount of her attention this school year to meeting their needs. She stated that she tailors her instruction and structures her classroom in a manner that enables her to best meet their needs. She shared that she is trying to figure out what consistently works with them. Teresa asserted:

> Once I met them, the very first thing I noticed is getting them to want to learn is not a battle at all. They want to do things; they want to do good. Accessing the best way they can learn and showing them how to learn and to persevere through frustration is where the challenge is.

As mentioned earlier, her students with disabilities account for half of her class population. This is a new situation that presents a new set of challenges for Teresa.

However, she has accepted the challenge and has in many cases been successful. The success she has witnessed can be attributed to Teresa's willingness to remain reflective of her instruction approaches and their impact on her students. Teresa shared:

> So I'm going through, I'm truckin' through, truckin' through, trying to keep up with my deadline and it's not working. They're not making the growth I want to see. They're frustrated. I'm frustrated. So I finally sat down and thought about it, looked through the IEPs again, so now I've structured reading to where I do two of every lesson, and we change activities every twenty to thirty minutes, and that really has helped to keep the flow and their attention. So even though we're changing activities a little bit more frequently, it's sustaining that box of time that they can focus, maintain focus.

Apparently, Teresa's original approaches were not yielding the results she desired or the students deserved. Because she adjusted her instruction to fit the needs of her students, she was able to begin see growth in them. As Teresa learns more about her students, she continues to examine her classroom practices to determine if what she is doing is best for them. This approach to meeting the needs of diverse learners will ultimately prove to be beneficial to Teresa as she continues her work in this highly diverse setting.

Case four: Jasmine's Opening Narrative

Jasmine is a Black woman in her late 20s. She is a third grade teacher and has been teaching for three years. Jasmine is a wife, a mother, and an active member in her church. For as far as she can recall, teaching is all Jasmine ever wanted to do. She attended a local community college and earned an Associates degree and then went on to earn her Bachelors degree in Elementary Education. Always with a smiling face, she

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describes herself as having a childlike spirit. Jasmine enjoys working with children and takes full advantage of every opportunity she is presented with to do so.

Jasmine prides herself on being the type of teacher who is able to meet students at their current level. She attempts to create an environment in her classroom in which students are comfortable learning in the manner that best suits them. Jasmine loves to witness the growth in her students as she walks along side them through the learning process, overcoming the challenges and struggles they may face together. Her goal is to provide her students with the best opportunity to learn. Jasmine believes in providing her students with challenging learning experiences. Whether students are above or below level academically, she challenges her students and encourages them to strive to reach their fullest potential. Her goal is to make sure that her students leave her in a better position that when they met. With this approach, the students are encouraged to take risks and their reward is their personal academic growth.

Jasmine's current class is a diverse mixture of students. She started the school year with 18, but is now down to 16 after two students transferred. Of these 16 students, six of them are Black, three are Hispanic, three are White, two are multi-racial, and one is German. Jasmine has two students who are in need of special education services, two students are English learners, and two students who are at Tier two of RTI. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by Jasmine reflected essential elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied (Table 6). The table below displays the actual number of times she discussed each essential element.

Table 6

Jasmine's Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	16
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	5
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	33
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	16
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	5

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

Jasmine's ability to develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity has proven to be a valuable component to aid her ability to meet the needs of her students. She has a comprehensive understanding of the issues that confront schools in high-poverty settings and the students that attend them. Some of Jasmine's students of color live in impoverished conditions and receive very little instructional support at home. The lack of support that these students receive at home has resulted in some of them performing poorly academically in school. Jasmine explains:

> We have some that can read and some that can't read. Some get frustrated
>
> quicker [and] some that have more patience, have behavior issues, some not,
>
> some that have focus issues because some of their families its just not one sibling.
>
> Its 5, 6, 7 kids so they need that attention. So their focus is somewhere you know
>
> thinking about what they have to do when they get home, thinking about what
>
> they are going to eat for lunch.

Jasmine uses the knowledge she gains on her students to inform the types of relationships

she needs to develop with them and their families in order to meet their needs. She also allows it to guide her investigation of ways to secure additional resources that will allow her to provide the types of learning experiences she deems important for their development.

The combination of a lack of resources and lack of parental support and involvement has proven to be a significant obstacle for some teachers. However, when Jasmine is faced with this hurdle she simply works to identify alternative methods to delivering instruction. She detailed this process when sharing:

> Like last year, I had that situation where I wanted to give the students a research project to work on, but it was difficult for the kids because they didn't have computers at home. So I would have to set out, set aside time in the classroom to make sure they were able to get that time. And even with our project we had this year, there was a part where they had to research. Well, I had to make sure I had the same resources here in the classroom for everyone, because almost half of my kids here don't have computers at home – not a laptop, not a regular computer, nothing.

Jasmine takes the ownership for assuring her students have the necessary tools to succeed. She does not avoid doing certain activities or lessons in class because the students or their families are unable to support her classroom efforts outside of school. This approach to teaching children who may not live in the most ideal circumstances still allows Jasmine to expose her students to meaningful learning opportunities that they may not get otherwise. While Jasmine openly admits that it does hinder what she wants to do in class, it clearly does not prevent her from getting things done. Jasmine asserts:

So, it's different when, you wanna do projects. It's different when they need the

extra help at home and they don't have it, 'cause their parents may have to work

two jobs just to be stable at home, whereas, you know, other households in the

middle class, they may only have to have that one job. So, sometimes it can get

difficult for them, but I try to do all that I can here. Sometimes I just have to

reconstruct what I want to get through to them. I need to reconstruct how we'll get

to that point.

Jasmine's knowledge base about cultural diversity originates from her personal

childhood experiences. As a child, Jasmine lived in a high poverty neighborhood.

Specifically, she lived in the same neighborhood in which she currently works. However,

in spite of the challenges that poverty may have created for her family her parents still

maintained high expectations for her and her siblings. One of the reasons Jasmine was

able to succeed in school was because of the support she received from her parents. As a

result, she understands that if provided with the necessary supports her students can do

the same. These experiences guide her practices and form the foundation of her

knowledge base about the abilities of her diverse students.

Jasmine also shares that the knowledge she gained about cultural diversity from

her personal experiences were also impacted by a course she took while in college.

While she does not recall the name of the course, she vividly recalls the valuable learning

experiences she gained. Jasmine explains:

I can't remember the course for anything but that one thing there and how he

really broke it down and how we looked at the statistics and the low economic

areas compared to the high areas. We looked at the different types of people that

lived in those areas and the different struggles that these groups have compared to

the struggles that the other groups have. So we did a lot of comparing and

contrasting with that different group and schools and what is offered in this

school, how this school have more computers and this one has less, these kids

have access at home and these do not. So that really opened me up because I

never really thought of like that even though I grew up in it but I didn't think of it

like that so I was able to bring that with me when I started teaching.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

Jasmine noted that when students are able to identify their culture in the content,

it increases their interest and enhances learning. She shared that her process for including

ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum is most prevalent in reading.

Jasmine likes to identify articles that connect to the cultures of her students. She reports

that has noticed the benefits of including ethnic and culturally diverse content in her

instruction. She discussed a situation in which she identified an article on Mexico to

share with her students. Jasmine recalls that when she introduced the article to the

students, the student who was Mexican became extremely excited. The student displayed

significant interest in the lesson because she noticed that they were learning about her

culture in school. Jasmine asserted that the importance of this experience was in the fact

that this particular student was one of her struggling students, but the ability of her to

connect culturally with the lesson made a difference in her learning.

Jasmine also has a student who is from Germany. She has done similar activities

with him in an attempt to assist his learning by creating opportunities for him to connect

culturally to the content. Jasmine reported that the student wanted to learn more about

Germany so she spent time with him helping him to research his country on the Internet. She stated that she shared articles with the student that enabled him to make connections to his German culture. Jasmine remembers how when this student went home and shared what he was learning with his mother, it motivated her to get more involved in her son's learning. Jasmine noted that this experience really opened the lines of communication with the parent. She shared that she was excited because up until this point, she had been unsuccessful in her attempts to connect with the parent. Jasmine stated that the mother went from missing conferences and not returning calls, to attending conferences and reaching out to her to initiate interaction. Jasmine asserted that the student's behavior began to change as well. Now the student saw the connection between his culture, his school, his mother, and his teacher and it motivated him to do better in class.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Building a caring leaning community appears to be something that Jasmine takes very seriously. Jasmine reports that on the first day of school, she tells her students that they are a family and that they will thrive as a family. She shares that from that day, they begin working together to build their classroom culture. This is exemplified as she explains:

> We start to work on that environment, that classroom environment that we have to have because if I don't have rapport with my students, I don't know you, and if I don't know you its difficult to for me to teach you, but I need to know your likes, I need to know your dislikes, I need to know what makes you tick so I don't take you there. So I'm an open book when they walk in the classroom.

Jasmine affirms that her goal is to get her students to understand that they are all there to help each other. She loves to see them showing respect for each other as they interact and learn together. Their ability to work well together is important as Jasmine uses a lot of collaborative group learning opportunities in her class.

The emphasis that Jasmine places on building her learning community through the demonstration of caring is based on her deep understanding of her students on a personal level. She understands that some of her students' may be lacking caring relationships outside of school and have a difficult home life. Therefore, Jasmine deems it her responsibility to demonstrate her care for them. Jasmine affirms, *a lot of them, they go through things at home that are unimaginable…but if I as a teacher, can get them to know that someone cares, that one person cares, that's enough for me.* While her recognition of some of her students' unfortunate circumstances endears her to them, she continues to maintain high expectations for them. The beauty of Jasmine's work lies in her ability to delicately navigate the terrain of her classroom that is often made tumultuous by the conditions of poverty. Her ability to do so has resulted in not only the success of her students, but also the self-fulfillment she receives through her practice.

The approach of demonstrating her care for her students has been extremely beneficial in Jasmine's attempts to meet the needs of her students with disabilities as well. Jasmine shares that she continuously challenges all of her students to reach higher academic levels. This includes her students with disabilities. She asserts that her approach to responding to the needs of her students with disabilities is reflective of her experiences as a mother of a child with a disability. Her experiences with assisting her son in overcoming his exceptionality have provided her with the knowledge and skills to

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assist her students. These experiences include collaborating with other teachers to provide her son with the additional support. Jasmine understands the importance of working to help her students with disabilities build their confidence in their abilities. The success Jasmine has witnessed her son experience motivates her work with her students with disabilities. Jasmine affirms:

> Being able to work with them within the classroom is an awesome experience, I mean, because I've lived it, so I know and I understand, you know, their thought process. I understand what's going on in the inside of them, because of the experience I had with my son.

The care that is evident in Jasmine's work extends outside of her classroom and into the homes of her students. She discussed a situation when one of her students was struggling academically. The student's academic struggles were intensified by the fact that her mother had limited education and struggled with assisting her with homework. The student would go home with homework, have difficulty completing it independently, and would return to school with the assignment incomplete. Disappointed that she could not help her child through her academic struggles, the mother reached out Jasmine to discuss the situation. The parent explained that due to her limited education, she was unable to help the child with the work. Jasmine recalls that she was immediately able to connect with the family's situation because as a child she encountered similar circumstances. Jasmine's father did not graduate from high school and could not read either. After explaining to the family that she understood, they were able to put a system in place to help the student. The student would be allowed to attempt the work at home,

but if it was too difficult she could meet with Jasmine individually the following day to receive the additional help.

Finally, Jasmine discusses how she often *teaches* some of her parents' skills and concepts that they are covering in class so they can help their children at home. She noted how parents would come in to meet with her and she would review skills such as multiplication or division with them. Jasmine also provides parents with their own set of strategy cards that they can use at home to help their children.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

Jasmine's ability to communicate with ethnically diverse students and families has resulted in several meaningful relationships that contribute significantly to students' success. She noted that at the beginning of the school year she tells her students parents that:

> Okay, you know that, I've just taken your child as my own right now, and the same way I expect my child to learn and to grow, I expect your child to learn and to grow, because I see them as mine when I walk into this classroom.

Jasmine uses a variety of approaches to keep parents informed of the things that are taking place in the classroom. She noted that most often she communicates with parents via a daily note home. Jasmine says in these letters she lets the parents know how well their child is doing as well as any concerns she is having. Jasmine shared that she has a student who is very intelligent but for some reason chooses to display an *I don't care spirit* towards learning. She notes that she had a conference with his mother and discussed her concerns. Jasmine informed that parent that her son was not performing up to his potential academically. The mother then informed Jasmine that she shared the

same concerns and had also witnessed such behavior at home. She stated that her son had stopped helping out around the house by not doing his chores. After further discussion, the pair realized that it was an issue occurring at home that was causing the student to behave this way. The issue affecting the child was the lack of attention he received from his mother. Jasmine shared that is was difficult for the student's mother to be involved like she wanted to because she worked evenings. When the student arrived home from school, the mother would be leaving out for work and he would be in the care of a sitter.

Recognizing the need to address the student's behavior, Jasmine and the mother decided to develop a behavior plan that would be implemented at home and in school. After implementing the plan, Jasmine noted that they witnessed a shift in the student's attitude and his academics improved. The effectiveness of this plan was based on a communication system established by Jasmine and the mother. Their ability to work collaboratively on a plan that was designed to motivate the student and teach him responsibility demonstrated their care for him. Jasmine's willingness to take extra steps to show her student she cared enough about his progress to develop a plan for his success at home and school provided the student with the positive attention he desired. Even though the mother's work schedule remained the same, the communication between her and Jasmine was a successful way to reach the child.

One of the most powerful examples of Jasmine's ability to effectively communicate with her students is the way she conveys her support for them and encourages them. Jasmine puts forth significant efforts to make her students aware of how much she believes in their abilities. She recognizes their individual differences and

their specific needs. Jasmine builds her students' confidence in their personal abilities so that they are comfortable taking risk in their learning. Her students understand that if they struggle she will be there to support them. This understanding by the students is an extension of the meaningful relationships she has established with them. When discussing an example of how she supported a students who was struggling in math she shared, *I had one [student], that she was terrified; whenever we talked about fractions she had tears in her eyes…math would come up, her whole body language would change, and I would tell her everyday, we're not giving up.* By letting the student know that regardless of her struggles she would not give up on her, the student overcame her fear of fractions, improved her self-confidence, and her math scores eventually started to improve.

In addition to building her students' confidence, Jasmine's goal is to develop her students' independence. She explains:

> They come in brand new and you see the fear in their eyes when they walk in and my job as their teacher in the classroom is to welcome them and get that fear away. Because when they have that fear it blocks them from learning because they get so scared.

One of the ways Jasmine approaches the building of her students' confidence is by celebrating their individual success. She shares that she often has one-on-one conferences with her students to review their performance data. Each of the students has a personal file folder that they store all of their assessment data and graded assignments. During these conferences, Jasmine walks the students through their data and highlights

the areas in which they have shown improvement. Likewise, she uses this time to assist the students in setting goals for improvement in the areas in which they struggle.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Jasmine shared some very interesting project she conducts that enables her to respond to ethnic diversity in her classroom. She talked about a unit she teaches in her class on cultures that enables her students to explore their personal histories and culture and to learn about the cultures of their classmates. This event she called a Multicultural Celebration and was a response to a conversation she had with one of her former students. Jasmine shared that one day she was having a conversation with one of her students about different cultures and asked him to share some things about his culture with her. To her surprise, the student did not know much about his background and culture. As a result, she designed a unit that she hoped would provide the student with the opportunity to learn more about himself.

Jasmine explains that this unit got parents involved because it required students to research their backgrounds by interviewing family members. One of the activities within the unit was the development of a recipe book. Each student worked with their parents to identify a recipe for a dish that was representative of their culture. The unit culminated with the parents coming in for a day and each family bringing in the prepared food dish that was representative of their culture along with them wearing clothing that was representative of their culture. Over food, the families talked of their cultures and shared their experiences with the teacher, parents, and students. Jasmine's willingness to teach such a unit on cultural diversity truly displayed her interest in and appreciation for the

diversity among her students and their families. The information gained from such an experience can allow Jasmine to build a bridge with the families.

Closing narrative.

After spending time with Jasmine, I was impressed with the way she is able to relate to her students. As you enter her classroom, it becomes evident that those who *live* there enjoy being apart of it and learning is taking place. The smile that brightens her face is matched by the many smiles on the faces of her students. She cares for them, and they care for her. They function as a family, each person holding each other accountable for the success of the group and providing each other with support as they all strive for success.

Jasmine sincerely believes in each of her students regardless of his or her personal academic and/or behavior struggles. When discussing her students who display challenging behavior, Jasmine seems to offer rationales for their behavior that are rooted in the idea that the student is only doing so because he or she is struggling academically. She affirms:

> We have students that come in that love to read and some that don't like to read. Some have behavior issues especially when they can't read because they can't understand what we're doing and it's frustration that kicks in. Then they'll start showing behaviors that they shouldn't be showing and it will become a behavior issue then its all a "I don't understand" is all they are saying. I don't know what I'm doing and I'm frustrated and maybe to get attention from you this is what I'm going to do.

This perception of her students' behavior then places the responsibility of addressing these concerns on Jasmine. You get the sense that she believes that if her children are not meeting success and making growth, then she has somehow failed them. It is this philosophy that drives Jasmine and it is this philosophy that contributes to her success. Her success is defined by the joy her students have regarding learning. Jasmine affirmed this by saying:

> And that alone, is worth it. It's worth coming in this door every morning, even though we have our struggles and our problems. They come in, they have their own family problems, they come here with tears in their eyes. They leave. You know, that joyfulness is what I love to see, because they're children and children should be happy, they should be joyful.

Jasmine's dedication to the students, their families, and the community she serves may be unmatched by any other teacher. She reported that when she accepted the position at her school, she also made the decision to move in the school's neighborhood. Jasmine's decision to do so was motivated by the fact that she not only wanted to be a representative of the school, she wanted to be a representative of the community as well. She believes that part of her obligation to her students is to provide them with positive role models both outside and inside of school. Jasmine stated that living in the community provides her with *the opportunity to be in the atmosphere and in the environment outside of the school with the kids*. Because of this, Jasmine is able to connect to the community on levels that many others may be unable to do. She says that it is *awesome* to see the kids being able to connect with her outside of school. One of her hopes is that by her living in the community, others will see that it is a good

neighborhood and that there are good people that live within it. Jasmine believes that through her actions, she will be able to improve the school and community by working from the inside.

Case five: Hannah's Opening Narrative

Hannah is a White woman in her late 20s. She has been teaching for approximately three years. Originally from Boston, Massachusetts, she moved to Florida in 2001 to attend college and study history. While a History major, she considered completing a double major in Secondary Social Science Education. However, due to time and tuition cost she decided to abandon that option and earned her History degree. After graduation, Hannah quickly realized that her options for earning a living as a History major were limited; therefore she opted to take the teacher certification examination and became a teacher.

Hannah's first teaching position was at a middle school as an eight grade American History teacher. She held this position for a year and during this time she made two discoveries. Hannah quickly realized that she did not want to teach eight grade and that in order to be a good teacher she needed a lot more education. Consequently, she took a few years and pursued her MAT in Elementary Education. Hannah is currently teaching fifth grade reading at a high-poverty school. This is the second position she has held at such a school as she previously served as an elementary teacher at another school.

As a reading teacher, Hannah presently has a total of 40 students. At her school, the fifth grade utilizes the departmentalized instructional model. In this approach, one member of the two member teaching team delivers instruction in reading, writing, and

social studies. The other member of the team is responsible for math and science instruction. Her teaching partner for this school year is Allison, who also a participant in this study. Of the 40 students, 19 of then are female and 21 are male. Six students have been identified as having a disability and are receiving services from a special education teacher through the inclusion model. One of her students has a Section 504 plan and three of them are at Tier three of RTI. Additionally, four of the students have been previously retained. She also has a student who is gifted. Thirty of her forty students are culturally or linguistically diverse. Eighteen Black students, seven Hispanic students, five are multiracial, and one student is Asian.

Hannah describes herself as a person who approaches the role of teaching with an open mind. She believes that such an approach is imperative to those who teach diverse student populations in high poverty settings. Hannah recognizes that her students come from a variety of backgrounds and are confronted with a myriad of challenges outside of school. Nevertheless, she believes that each of her students is capable of achieving success if provided with the necessary supports. This belief drives her practice as she sets high expectations for her students and challenges them to be successful. She does so using instructional methods that may be viewed as unconventional by some. However, Hannah's approaches have been immensely beneficial for her students and embraced by her parents. Evidences of these approaches will now be presented. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by Hannah reflected essential elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied (Table 7). The table below displays the actual number of times she discussed each essential element.

Table 7

Hannah's Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	14
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	5
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	29
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	16
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	7

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

The need for teachers to develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity is

essential. For teachers who teach in schools that have high percentages of students color,

the ability to do so may be the determining factor in the success of their students.

Hannah credits her early experiences as a learner with helping her to come to understand

diversity and its impact on schooling. She shared that as an elementary student in

Massachusetts, she attended a school that was predominately White. In fact, Hannah

disclosed that there were only two Black students in the entire school. According to her,

the school district in her small rural hometown appeared to be structured in a manner that

segregated students. Her high school only had one Black family in the entire school.

Hannah noted that because of this experience, her understanding of diversity was limited

until she enrolled in a college course on the Civil Rights Movement. In this course,

Hannah learned that during the early 1980's there were race riots in Boston due to busing.

This information was new to her and provided further clarity on her personal school

experiences. Although her school experiences did not provide her with a great deal of

exposure to diverse populations, Hannah asserted that her family was accepting of diverse cultures.

Hannah contrasts her schooling experiences and those of her current students. She asserted that the most significant difference between the two is the prominence of diversity in the school experiences of her students. Hannah noted that because of their diversity and that of their classmates, her students are more welcoming to those that are different from them. She shared that the students of color often bring a lot of personality to the classroom. Her students of color like to dance and have fun with each other. Hannah believes that the personalities of her students of color contribute to their classroom and she seeks opportunities to enable them to display this in their classroom interactions.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

The inclusion of ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum appears to be woven into the fabric of Hannah's practices. She is very mindful of the needs of her ethnic and culturally diverse students and recognizes the necessity of providing them with opportunities to connect culturally with instructional content. Hannah approaches the task of including ethnic and culturally diverse content by attempting to educate her students on the contributions that individuals in their culture have made as well as the struggles that many of them have had to endure. Hannah believes that good literature can serve as a conduit for the teaching of cultural and ethnic diversity.

Hannah details one of her thematic units on figurative language and poetry and how she connects this content to the students' cultures. The centerpiece of this unit was several of Langston Hughes' poems. In addition to teaching students about figurative

language, one of the underlying purposes for using Langston Hughes' poems was to expose her students to artistic examples of how people of color spoke out about their experiences of being a Black person in America. This unit was directly connected to a unit on The Civil Rights Movement that Hannah had taught earlier in the school year. In the unit on The Civil Rights Movement, Hannah educated her students on the purpose of the movement while exposing them to biographical accounts of influential figures of the era. She taught them about the contributions of people such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Ruby Bridges. Because of the level of interest her children displayed about learning about their history, Hannah assumed that they would also enjoy seeing another aspect of how people spoke out about how they were treated at that time.

Hannah is passionate about the figurative language unit because of her purpose of teaching it. She feels that students often are only exposed to non-fiction texts that only teach them about facts relative to the role of ethnic and culturally diverse individuals role in history so they know what happened, but she believes that what is often missing is the personal and intimate aspect of the experiences of diverse individuals in history. Hannah asserted:

> They don't get the personal touches that people like Langston Hughes, or like Martin Luther King's letters to people have more emotional about what's going on at the time. So they don't get that background of who the people were, they just kind of know their names, or know that before a certain time, people didn't have equal rights and all those things, they just don't know how that really felt. They can imagine how that felt, but they don't hear it from the person's point of view. And it's good because it ties in a lot of the skills that we want them to

know, like author's purpose. Well why did they write this poem? What made them do it?

Her attempts to facilitate their growth and understanding in this area often become complicated due to the curriculum she is provided to teach. Hannah noted that while the prescribed curriculum does offer rich literature to immerse the children in, it does not serve as the best avenue for exposing students to diverse cultures. Because of this, she identifies alternative texts to use in her class that enlighten her students to ethnic and culturally diverse content. Hannah believes that this approach not only teaches her students about their own culture, but it also teaches them about other diverse cultures that are different from their own. She shared:

> They need to understand that to be able to really grow as people. And I think that's one amazing part of literature is that they can, it can teach you lessons that you weren't really sure that you had to learn. You know, a lot of my kids love Harry Potter and I think that that's great. But they need to be exposed to literature that's not fantasy. So I'm gonna use The Watsons Go to Birmingham with another group. It's important because you have to be able to understand the child and where they're at, not only in their academics, but, also, in their life, and what is important for you to expose them to.

Hannah affirms teachers have to know the lessons their students need to learn that will enable them to be both productive students and citizens. She also believes that once these lessons are identified, the teacher must be willing to provide the students with the opportunities to learn these lessons.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Hannah demonstrates caring and builds her learning community by making sure that her students each understand what it means to respect each other and their learning environment. She noted that she has conversations with then to discuss classroom expectations and compose a classroom constitution. This constitution contained specific behaviors that the students deemed were respectful to everyone in the classroom environment. Likewise, they also identified appropriate ways in which they would respectfully handle situations when students were not living up to the constitution. Hannah shared that her purpose for doing this is to prepare her students to handle similar situations outside of school. She believes that this is an important social skill for her students to acquire.

Hannah maintains high expectations for her students. She believes that all students, including those with disabilities are capable of achieving grade level expectations if provided with the necessary accommodations and instructed at a high level. Hannah challenges her students to reach higher levels of achievement. She questions the effort that students often display when learning. Hannah believes students have been allowed to settle for mediocrity in their academics. Specifically, Hannah asserts:

> We need rigor in our classrooms. I feel like that's what's lacking is that they've been taught since they're in kindergarten that they can do the bare minimum to get by and they do. So now when they're in my classroom and I'm like oh no, that's not acceptable. You need to do, you need to be reading chapter books.

Hannah noted that her beliefs regarding rigor in the classroom are influenced by a documentary she viewed which examined the current state of education in the United States, India, and China. She asserted that one of her responsibilities as a teacher is to prepare her students to develop the skills that will enable them to acquire high skill level jobs. Therefore, she must provide them with experiences that assist them in building those skills. One of the ways Hannah has approached this task is by deciding not to use the district mandated guided readers. Instead, she has chosen to expose her students to more challenging text that introduces them to multiple genres of literature that they may not be exposed to otherwise.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

Hannah displays a tremendous ability to communicate with the parents of her students. She openly acknowledges the role that parents play in their child's education and she embraces their attempts to do so. Hannah asserted that she finds that when she can involve parents in the learning process, the students become stronger readers. Hannah appreciates the fact that she has been able to establish open lines of communication with the parents of her students. Parents often call her on her cell phone to discuss their children's progress, stating that she gives that number out to anyone who asks for it because she wants to be available to them. Hannah shared how she has often sent text messages to parents during class to share various happenings occurring in the classroom. The fact that the parents are swift to respond displays their acceptance of and appreciation for her attempts to include them in the learning process.

Hannah tells the story of one of her students who is shy and is not open with his feelings. She noted that sometimes things would happen at school that the child does not

like. Due to the students' shyness, he may not share these situations with her. However, the student would share these situations with his father. Due the relationship she had established with the child's father, the father would contact her and discuss his concerns. Hannah then is able to address the situation at school the following day. She appreciates this because it could possibly prevent her relationship with the student becoming strained. Additionally, Hannah stated that her ability to communicate with the student's father puts her in a better position to responds to his individual needs.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Hannah's approach to responding to ethnic diversity in her classroom involves the use of many different projects. She states that some of these projects involve students choosing the projects they will work on. She shares that she has one student who likes music and likes to rap. According to Hannah, the student raps about everything. Recently, they completed a unit on explorers and the students were allowed to select the way they want to display their work. Hannah stated that the student who loves to rap will be making a rap song to share with the class that will help everyone remember who the explorers are.

Another unit Hannah discussed involved a compare and contrast lesson they completed on presidents. She noted that eleven weeks before the election they spent time in class discussing the past and present president of the United States. One of these discussions involved the students doing a compare and contrast activity on the lives and contributions of two past presidents. The two Presidents she selected for the activity were Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. Hannah stated that she provided the students with an article that discussed the accomplishments of each of the presidents.

She noted that outside of the article, she purposefully did not provide the students with any information that specifically highlighted the things they did for African-Americans. Hannah stated that she wanted the students to figure this out independently. After the students spent some time completing the assignment the class came together to have a discussion of their work. Hannah stated that she was surprised at the amount of insight the students provided about each of these presidents and how they were connected because of their roles with African-Americans in our country. She shares that ultimately her goal was to make this connection explicit for them, but they were able to come to this understanding on their own, particularly, those students who themselves were African-American. Hannah stated, *I was really happy to have them in the class to be able to make that connection because the other kids didn't get there at all.* She ended by affirming that her Black students were very helpful in furthering the other students understanding in this lesson. She also shared that this experience opened her eyes to the importance to background knowledge and how it enhances the students learning during this lesson. Specifically Hannah states, *you know you always look for what will the kids know but it [background knowledge] was definitely a lot deeper thought than I thought would be there.*

Hannah shared that she has attempts to match her instruction to the interests of her students because it enables her to best meet their needs. She affirms:

I have certain kids who really need to read a book about a culture they're not familiar with. I want my next book that I'm gonna do with some of my high groups is about a girl in Afghanistan that is on, basically, like a death march. I'm

gonna use it because they make comments, but they're not really sure. They don't

really understand.

Hannah reports that the district provided reading series has some rich literature but fails

to account for the need to address individual student differences through literature. She

believes that the district series is *like a one size fits all for learning, and that's not how*

any learning should be.

Closing narrative.

Throughout the time I spent with Hannah, I was struck by her passion for teaching

reading. She takes pride in exposing them to various reading genres that are not always

openly embraced by the district or other fifth grade teachers. I asked Hannah to share

with me how she handles the possible mismatch that occurs between what she wants to

teach and what she has to teach. Hannah stated that due to district requirements, she has

a schedule that she is supposed to follow guide her instruction. She stated that this

schedule does little more than reinforce reading skills that have been taught to the

students over and over in earlier grades. Examples of these skills are compare and

contrast, cause and effect, etc. These are the skills that are tested on the state exam so

they receive the majority of the attention by the district instructional calendar. Hannah

states that the students already know what these skills are so her job is to teach them to

apply those skills in a real world context. Hannah shared with me an approach that some

may view as unconventional for a fifth grade teacher. She stated that she primarily uses

fiction and non-fiction novels and poetry as texts in her classroom. Some texts that she

has recently used are *The Hobbit, Gregor the Overlander*, *The Westing Game*, and *The*

Missing book series. Hannah opts to use this type of literature to anchor her guiding

reading lessons over the reading series adopted by the district. She notes that she teaches

the necessary skills through these texts. Her goal is to make sure her students are good

readers and once they reach this point, they will perform successfully on the state exam.

She stated that she is aware that other fifth grade teachers are not doing this as much but

she believes that this is the best way to prepare her students to be good readers.

When asked about the thought process behind her decision to take this approach

to teaching reading, Hannah reflected on a statement that one of her college professors

shared with her. Hannah stated that this professor told her, *do what the district tells you

to do but when you close the door it's your classroom. So you've got to figure out what's

gonna work for your kids.* She shares that in the previous school year, she taught the way

the district preferred, focusing on skill acquisition and she did not believe it was

effective. Hannah based this belief on the conversations she would have with her

students during reading lessons.   She reported that her students would often get so

focused on the skill being taught, that they would miss other important components of the

text. Moreover, the students were unable to transition the skill outside of a testing

situation and apply it to other reading situations. As a result, Hannah shifted her

instructional approach from teaching specific skills to teaching her students to develop a

purpose for reading. Through this approach, she requires the students to apply a variety

of reader strategies as they focus on several different skills.

One of the most significant illustrations Hannah shared regarding her approach to

teaching reading was a situation involving the book *The Hobbit*. Hannah was looking for

an interesting text to teaching reading comprehension strategies and decided to use the

book as the focus of her guided reading groups. She only had a set of five of the books

so she could not start everyone on the book at once. She introduced the book to one of her groups and the students were excited to start reading it. The excitement these students displayed about reading the book generated interest in the book among their classmates. Hannah shares, *these kids are just going nuts for The Hobbit. They love it. And it's not a book they would have ever picked up if I hadn't told them to. So my kids response to it has been amazing.* Hannah informed the remaining students that they would be reading the book once the first group was finished. However, the other students preferred not to wait and wanted to begin reading the book immediately. As a result, Hannah was forced to consider a way to acquire more copies. She had gone so far as to purchase the first five copies and was not in a position to purchase anymore. She checked with the school and city library but could not secure any additional copies. Therefore, Hannah had a conversation with the remaining students in the class and told them that if they wanted to start the book right away, they would have to ask their parents to purchase it for them. To her surprise, all of her student's parents purchased the book except one. She then purchased another copy for that student and they all read the book together.

The enthusiasm that was created in class regarding *The Hobbit* extended to the student's homes. Adding to the overall excitement for reading the book was the impending release of the movie *The Hobbit* that was based on the book. Hannah shared that after talking to a parent of one her students, the parent suggested taking the children to see the movie. While Hannah too thought it would be a great idea, she communicated to the parent that she could not coordinate such a trip due to the policies of the school district. At that time, the parent informed Hannah that she would contact the other

parents and invite them and their children out to the movies. The parent also expressed to

Hannah that it would be great if she just *happened* to be at the movies at that same time

they could all sit together. This situation not only displays Hannah's ability to teach

reading in a way that generates interest in her students, it is also evidence of her ability to

establish relationships with the parents of her students. It began as a simple idea for

teaching reading comprehension but eventually blossomed into an enthusiastic display of

commitment by herself, her students, and their parents.

I came away from my time spent with Hannah thinking that she must really love

reading, but I was shocked when she told me that she herself was never a fan of reading.

Hannah stated that she did not become a reader until a freshman in college when she read

Harry Potter. I truly branded her as an avid reader who probably used her spare time

reading. Additionally, I thought her goal was to create that same zeal for reading in her

students. For me, there appeared to be no other explanation. Why else would someone

approach the task of teaching reading with such fervent devotion? Why else would a

teacher spend inordinate amounts of time outside of class reading the previewing the

volumes of text outside of school that she does? To me, this appeared to be the logical

explanation. However, for Hannah there was another explanation. Her explanation was

that she wanted her students to be prepared to do more that just read to pass a state

mandated test. She wanted her students to know that reading can and should serve a

greater purpose on their lives. Hannah asserts, *I feel like there is so much good literature*

out there that the kids don't even know exist because they've never been exposed to it.

Because of this, Hannah seeks and finds this literature and her hunt results in an

enjoyable learning experience for all involved in this classroom experience. The interest

in reading that her students have developed is something that will accompany them well after the state test. Additionally, this passion will accompany them when the school year ends and their time with Hannah have ended.

Case six: Allison's Opening Narrative

Allison is a White woman in her late 20s and is originally from Rochester, New York. She moved to the southeast five years ago after finding a position as an elementary school teacher. Allison has a Bachelors in Elementary Education degree with a minor in Psychology. After graduating in 2005, she took a quasi-administrative position at a charter school. Allison recounted that the charter school had recently opened prior to her arrival. She served in several capacities as she assisted the director of the school. One of the roles Allison served in while at the charter school was the volunteer coordinator. She noted that this role was one of the most beneficial experiences at the charter school because it helped to prepare her for the important task of developing relationships with families. In addition to working with families, Allison also engaged in professional development workshops and worked with the state assessment coordinator. While each of these experiences were certainly beneficial, Allison soon reminded herself that teaching was her dream and that she needed to be teaching. She recalls that her time spent at the charter school helped her to see the "big picture" of education. Allison asserted that now she understood how a classroom was supposed to look and how teachers are supposed to interact with kids. She believed that she was now a better-prepared teacher and could effectively do the job of teaching students. As a result, she sought a teaching position and began her career.

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Allison's first teaching position was as a one-on-one instructor of a child with autism. This student was in fifth grade and she taught him in an inclusive setting. Allison shared that the teacher whom she co-taught with was a phenomenal influence on her as well. Here, she gained an even stronger understanding of how to structure a classroom to best meet the needs of students. Allison is currently in her fifth year of teaching. She is still team teaching in a sense as she is Hannah's partner teacher in the departmentalized instructional model teaching math and science. Allison shared that she believes it is imperative for teachers to build relationships with their students. She asserted that without the establishment of meaningful relationships, teachers do not have a lot to build upon with their students. These relationships must be based on an understanding of the students' interests. That way, the teacher is in a better position to educate the whole child. Moreover, Allison believes that the social and emotional well being of her students is an important component of who they are as learners. She asserted that if she does not get to know her students, it would ultimately be very difficult for her to teach them. Allison believes that philosophy of teaching is necessary for teachers of all students but critical to her current students because some of them need additional support to be successful. The frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by Allison reflected essential elements of culturally responsive teaching were tallied (Table 8). The table below displays the actual number of times she discussed each essential element.

Table 8

Allison Evidence of the Essential Elements

Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching	Frequency of Discussion by Teacher
Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity	15
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum	1
Demonstrating caring and building learning communities	25
Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families	12
Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction	3

Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.

Allison's knowledge base about cultural diversity comes directly from her students and their families. She asserted that even though students may share a particular cultural identity, they are all different. Allison prefers to take time to get to know her students on a personal level and respond to them based on their individual needs. When describing her current group of students of color, Allison reports them as being, *full of personality and very outgoing...they just like to have a good time.* Allison responds to this characteristic of her students by looking to develop lessons and activities that keep them actively engaged at all times. She feels that if she engages them, there will not be room for the types of off-task behaviors that lead to problems in the classroom. Allison asserted, *if you have their attention and you know them well enough that you've got their interest and you're relating it to something on their level then you shouldn't really have too many problems.* As the fifth grade team leader, she often shares this philosophy with her colleagues. Allison encourages them to make strong attempts to engage their students

in activities that the students are able to relate to. Most importantly, she believes that these activities should allow the students to have fun while they learn.

Allison has also developed a knowledge base of the needs of her students of color with disabilities. She shared that even though some of them may display limitations academically, she still sets high expectations for them. Allison believes that some of her students with disabilities have been allowed to put forth minimal effort in past classes and have therefore developed the belief that they are unable to achieve success in certain areas. Her approach to assisting the students in overcoming these thoughts of self-doubt is by offering continuous encouragement and motivation. Allison reported that while she challenges her students to strive for success, she understands that some of her students with disabilities may require additional accommodations to do so. Her consciousness of her students' individual needs, coupled with her personal desire to treat them equitably enables Allison to make connections with her students at levels that may not be otherwise possible. What results is a student who is willing to take risks and ownership of their learning.

Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

As a math and science teacher, Allison shared that it is often a challenge to include ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum. She shared that when teaching subjects such as history, she is able to include culturally diverse content more fluidly. However, Allison does make attempts to include ethnic and culturally diverse content in her classroom instruction. She noted that she is able to do so during her morning work activities. During this time she discusses different ethnicities and cultures with her students and attempts to highlight significant calendar events. She finds that the

open dialogue about diversity is beneficial for her students. Allison uses current events to help facilitate these discussions as much as possible. She also integrates the discussion of various cultures into her math and science lessons by exposing students to the backgrounds of culturally and ethnically diverse scientists and mathematicians.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Allison begins demonstrating caring and building her learning community at the beginning of the school year by including the students in the process of developing the classroom procedures. She shared that she does several activities that enable her to get to know her students on a deeper level. One of these activities is their morning meeting. During these meetings they discuss as a class their plan for navigating their school day. Allison stated that they discuss any changes in their routines that may occur. She informed me that she prefers to always have a clear understanding of the expectations and believes that her students deserve this as well. Allison describes her classroom as being a family or community and that these morning meetings enable her to interact with her students in a way that further establishes this culture.

Allison emphasized that the most important function of these morning meetings is that they provide her and her students with a structured time to get to know each other. Here is where she believes the relationship building process begins. This process places her in a better position to identify issues that may be affecting her students and thus respond to them accordingly. Allison declared that once she has established a relationship with her students, she is then able to establish a relationship with their families. Allison has acknowledged this as one of her keys to her success. She affirmed that the task of teaching her students couldn't be done by her alone and therefore she

values the relationships she builds with her parents. Allison stated that she makes every attempt to take advantage of these relationships by including parents in the learning process.

An important component of their community is the relationships that all members are able to establish with one another. Allison reported that her goal is to model the building of relationships that are based on care and respect. She believes that this will allow them to communicate effectively with each other regarding possible issues or challenges they may encounter in their classroom. Allison's hope is that the students would adopt the philosophy that she displays and allow it to transfer to settings outside of their class. Allison shared that she and the students spend a lot of time together throughout the school year and if they are all going to meet their full potential, they must have a high level of respect for one another and be willing to help each other. She shared that she often communicates this belief with her students through heart to heart talks. Allison recounted one of these conversations she recently had with one of her students. She recalls asking her, *Do you know what was going to happen to you next year if you don't straighten up because the choices you're making here? You're gonna get involved with the wrong crowd.* Allison affirms that these conversations are only made possible because of the relationships that are forged, which is why she takes great pride in structuring her classroom so that these conversations can take place.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families.

Allison believes she is able to effectively communicate with her diverse students and families because she treats them with respect and recognizes their role in the learning process. Consistent with her theme of it taking a village to educate her students, Allison

understands how critical it is that she can effectively communicate with her families. She shares that she has noticed a difference in the overall academic performance of her students when their parents are involved in their learning. She reported that it s important for the students to be aware that they have consistent support from both the home and the school. Allison feels, *it makes a huge difference in their grades and their social skills, in their emotional skills.*

Due to her belief on the difference parents can make when actively involved, Allison works hard to get to know her parents and get them involved. She shared that her school has volunteer Fridays and she continuously invites parents to participate. She notes that she talks to parents when she sees them at school, calls them at home, and sends home letters soliciting their assistance. Allison shared that she is sure to communicate to them that they are welcomed to volunteer in her room according to their time and availability. This persistence and flexibility has resulted in high levels of involvement from parents and community members.

Allison noted that there are some times when for some reason or another, her students may be lacking the level of support they need from home. For these students, she makes daily attempts to have private conversations with them so they still receive that extra support and encouragement. Allison shared:

> Trying to fill that mom role because I know they need it and I understand I'm not their mother and I never will be their mother. But I know that no matter little boy, little girl they need somebody. So I try to have those conversations built like that to fill in that relationship. Letting them know. Hey, when you get here tomorrow I will be here so they have something to look forward to.

Allison reports that unfortunately this happens too often in her class. However, she asserted that it is important that her students' receive the attention they need. Once this is achieved, learning is able to take place.

Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Allison shared that as she develops relationships with her students, she gains a deeper understanding of the specific experiences they have had and the prior knowledge they bring to the classroom. She noted that her students often lack background knowledge on topics covered in class. When this happens, she uses technology to attempt to account for her students' lack of knowledge on the subject. For instance, her students are aware that she is from New York and are curious about the city. Allison, shares that she took the students on a virtual field trip of the city and some of the famous landmarks. One of these places was Broadway. This was a place of great interest because of the desire of one of her students to become a singer. Allison reported that she shared with her students that there was schools for the arts that they could attend to further develop their skills. Such activities provide Allison with the ability to educate her students about educational options that enable them to build on their personal interest as they gain an education.

Closing narrative.

As I spent time with Allison, I got the impression that she was a caring and committed teacher. She is excited about her work and she appears to find true fulfillment in it. Her realization of the fact that for her to ever be able to adequately educate her students, she would need the help of both the parents and community was commendable. Because of this she often seeks opportunities to include parent and others in the

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educational process. Allison discussed how she often uses some of her friends who are professional athletes in the local area to provide mentorship and support to struggling students. This is powerful and further exemplifies her commitment to her students and families. She also said that she approaches her experience as a teacher with one particular belief. This belief is that one-day, her students will be expected to take care of her and our society and if they are going to be able to meet this expectation, she must prepare them to do so.

Allison brings a style to her teaching that demonstrates her genuine care for her students. Her approach to building community and providing her students with structure are evidence of this. Apparently her peers within her school have also recognized these attributes as they voted her the teacher of the year for the 2011-2012 school year. Her service to students extends beyond her classroom and into the school as a whole. Allison currently serves as fifth grade team leader and recently led a food drive during the holiday season.

> When discussing her school, Allison shared that in order to teach there:
> You have to have a passion. You have to want to work with these types of students. I mean anybody can say that they can teach, but I think that having that passion and that commitment to dive down and give that extra emotional piece that social piece is important.

Allison has shown herself to be a teacher who embodies the level and passion and commitment that she declares teachers of students of color in high-poverty schools must possess. Consequently, she is able to see the benefits of her practice.

Cross Case Analysis

Cross-case analysis provides researchers with opportunities to find what is common across cases, what is unique to each case, and to emphasize the common relationships across cases (Stake, 2006). In this cross-case analysis, I compare each participant within each theme. Emphasized within this analysis will be a discussion of the levels at which each participant displayed each element as compared to the other participants. The cross-case analysis procedure entailed coding the interview transcripts and observations to determine the frequency with which the beliefs and/or instructional practices discussed by each teacher reflected essential characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Elements were tallied according to their frequency of discussion. Transcripts were coding by the teachers' complete thoughts or response rather than line-by-line of the transcript. It enabled me to contextualize the data rather than coding the data by the mentioning of a word. Coding using a line-by-line approach may have resulted in adding an additional tally to a theme that truly represented one mentioning of the element. A codebook that defines each element of culturally responsive teaching was developed to facilitate this process. The codebook consisted of terms or phrases from the literature that described each element. The terms or phrases used to code each characteristic are shared in the discussion of the characteristic. This approach is an adapted version of that used by Perkins (2001).

Developing a Knowledge Base about Cultural Diversity

Gay (2002) asserted that teacher acquiring explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative in their approaches aimed at meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students. Developing a knowledge base of culturally diverse students

must be based on gaining factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups (Gay, 2002). The terms or phrases that were extracted from the literature and used to code the data were; knowledge of community Bonner and Adams, 2012), knowledge of diverse students (Bonner & Adams, 2012), cultural responsiveness (Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles, 2005), beliefs about students and community (Ware, 2006), respect for and commitment to the Black community (Cooper, 2003). Figure 2 details the number of times each participant described this essential element as compared to one another.

This essential element of culturally responsive teaching was evident in the practices and beliefs of all of the teachers. Each teacher appeared to place a high level of emphasis on gaining and understanding of their students, their families, and the community as a whole. All of the teachers relied on either their personal experiences of working with ethnic and culturally diverse children, conversations with diverse children and families, and/or their own experiences as an ethnic or culturally diverse individual as the foundation of their knowledge base. While these approaches are each meaningful and appropriate in their own right, they may have a limited effect depending on the individual. Personal backgrounds and prior experiences can have a significant impact on an individuals understanding of diversity, but it may also cause a person to make generalizations about diverse groups. Even though there are similar characteristics, cultural norms, and expectations within ethnic and cultural groups, there are distinct differences among individuals within that group.
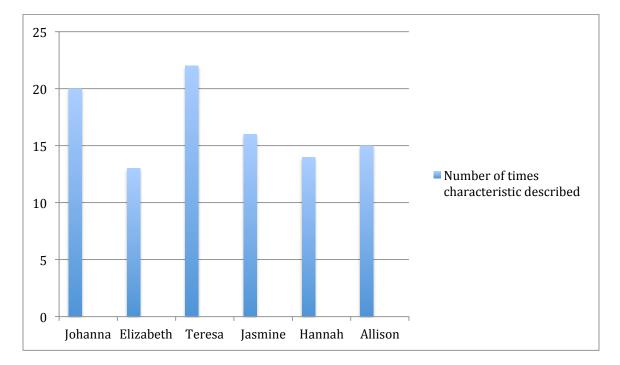
Elizabeth was probably most at risk of making such generalizations. Much of her approach to developing an understanding of cultural diversity was based on her
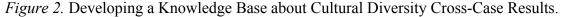
experiences working with diverse students and families. Elizabeth did not articulate an approach that demonstrated that she included the students and families in this process by allowing them to communicate their needs to her. However, she consistently talked about the importance of knowing the needs of her students. This assessment of Elizabeth's approach to developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity does not minimize her ability to effectively serve her students and families; it simply highlights a possible limitation in her practice.

The participant whose practices truly evidenced a unique approach to developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity was Teresa. There were several consistencies between her practices and those described by the other teachers, but Teresa engaged in several activates that enabled her to acquire explicit information from families. Teresa used surveys as a means to learning about her diverse students. Her surveys provide students and their families with opportunities to communicate their needs to her. These surveys also provide students the opportunity to educate her on their preferred learning styles interests. The surveys are more objective nature and using them can account for the individual differences of students and families.

Respect for and commitment to the community are also important factors in developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity. All of the teachers communicated an immense level of respect for the school and the community. In fact, it was apparent that the high level of respect they had for the community served as their inspiration for choosing to work at the school. This was clearly the case as it related to Johanna and Jasmine. Both of these teachers shared that they decided to teach at the school because the believed that they were most needed at this school as opposed to other schools. Their

dedication to their work at the school was commendable and their passion was obvious as they interacted with their students. Moreover, their pride in the school and community was evidenced by their decisions to enroll their children at the school.

Figure 2. Developing a Knowledge Base about Cultural Diversity Cross-Case Results.

Including Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Content in the Curriculum

Curriculum content is critical to academic performance and is an essential component of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). The inclusion of ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum involves the identification of textbooks, standards, literacy and trade books, and mass media that reflect the experiences and perspectives of diverse cultures (Gay, 2010). The terms or phrases that were extracted from the literature and used to code the data were; used a variety of materials and media (Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2007), understanding the experiences of people of color through text (Epstein, Mayorga and Nelson, 2011), creating images and

constructing knowledge about ethnic diversity (Gay, 2010). Figure 3 details the number of times each participant described this essential element as compared to one another.
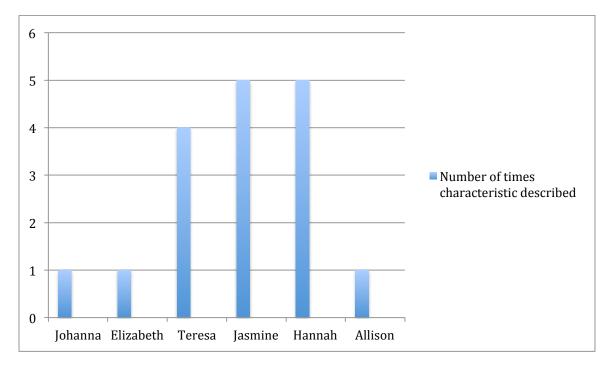
Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum was minimally evident in the practices and was not explicitly described as the teachers discussed their beliefs. As several of the teachers discussed their work, they described classroom experiences that would indicate that they were including diversity content. However, this was not the case with all of the teachers. Although the questions in the second interview asked specifically to discuss their instructional practices, very little was mentioned about including diversity content in the curriculum. Because the teachers made little mention of how they included diversity content in their curriculum, a question asking them how they went about doing so was included in the final interview. Each of the teachers recognized the importance of including diversity content in the curriculum, but it was apparent that they were at varying levels of proficiency with implementation. When asked to describe their process for including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, several teachers struggled to specifically detail their process. Most often, teachers pointed to how they included stories, articles, and had discussions with their ethnic and culturally diverse students as their way of including diversity content in the curriculum.

Johanna, Teresa, Jasmine, Elizabeth, and Allison all included less ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum than Hannah. Johanna, Teresa, and Jasmine's approaches were more along the lines of the additive approach to multicultural education described by Banks (2008). The additive approach is characterized by the addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives without changing the fundamental structure

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of the curriculum (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Johanna and Teresa expressed how

they frequently sought to include books and other materials that were representative of

the cultures of her students but often had difficulty locating these materials. Elizabeth

and Allison's approaches were commensurate with the contributions approach to

multicultural education described by Banks (2008). The contributions approach is

characterized by the insertion of ethnic heroes and discrete cultural artifacts into the

curriculum (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Neither of these teachers articulated a

systematic approach to including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.

They mainly described conversations that they had with their ethnic and culturally

diverse students and how they creating an inclusive environment. Based on the

information provided by Elizabeth and Allison, their practices are more indicative of their

ability to demonstrate caring and building a learning environment and less attributed to

the inclusion of diversity content in the curriculum.

Hannah's approach to including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the

curriculum was the strongest approach described by the teachers. The unit she explained

was purposely designed and included diversity content in a meaningful way. Her

approach was more consistent with the transformation approach to multicultural

education described by Banks (2008). The transformation approach is characterized by

changing the basic core of the curriculum to focus on viewing events, concepts, and

themes from multiple perspectives (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Hannah's unit

entailed a critical examination of literature that was written about individuals from

diverse cultures. The Civil Rights Movement served as the backdrop for the unit.

Specifically, she guided the students in an examination of the lives and contributions of

several ethnic and culturally diverse individuals. Exploring literature written about this era to investigate the reality of what it was like to be a person of color living during this time in history from multiple perspectives.

Figure 3. Including Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Content in the Curriculum Cross-Case Results

Demonstrating Caring and Building Learning Communities

Gay (2010) stated "caring interpersonal relationships are characterized by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for participants" (p.49). Teachers must be able to care for themselves, their students, the content, and other members of the school community (Owens & Ennis, 2005). The terms or phrases that were extracted from the literature and used to code the data were; ethic of care (Ware, 2006), persistence (Haberman, 1995), establishment of community/family-type classroom environment (Howard, 2001), formation of meaningful relationships with students (Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles, 2005), projection of an attitude of caring (Calabrese,

Goodvin, and Niles, 2005), high expectations of self and Black children's abilities (Cooper, 2003), and view of self as teaching mother (Cooper, 2003). Figure 4 details the number of times each participant described this essential element as compared to one another.

Demonstrating caring and building learning communities was the most resounding theme present in the beliefs and practices of all of the teachers. The teachers displayed immense commitment to building a caring learning environment for their children. As the teachers described their classrooms, they constantly referred to them functioning as a family. The teachers believed that it was important to communicate their care to their students. They perceived that their ability to do so enabled them to establish meaningful relationships that with their students. The remarkable aspect of the importance that the teachers placed on demonstrating caring and building learning communities was that fact that each of the teachers appeared to do so from a genuine place. The beliefs of the teachers about the importance of caring for their students was a result of the understanding of the needs of their students and the challenges they face as well as the empathy they had for them. The teachers aimed to mitigate these challenges through the ways in which they interacted with their students in the learning environment.

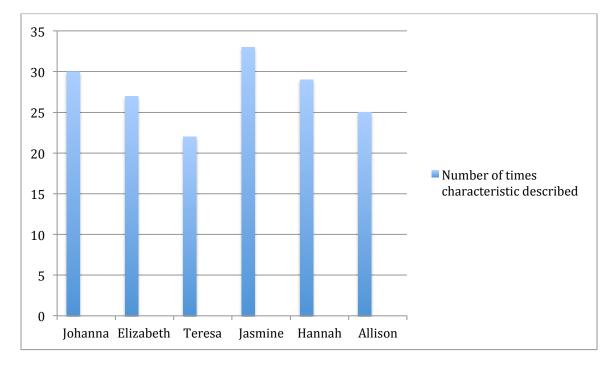Allison conducted morning meetings with the students on a daily basis. During these meetings, she reviewed the classroom expectations and discussed any changes in the schedule. Allison also used this time to problem solve any challenges that may have aroused in the classroom. Her students were actively involved in establishing the classroom motto, rules, and expectations as she empowered her students to become
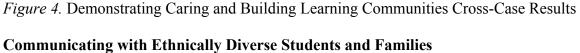
owners of their classroom. As a result, she was able to authentically hold students accountable for meeting the classroom expectations.

Hannah and Teresa employed a similar approach to demonstrating care and building the learning community. They both involved their students in the process of designing the classroom and establishing the expectations for acceptable behavior for her classroom. However, Hannah's approach was more focused on helping her students to build character skills. Hannah believes it is important that her students understand the importance of respecting themselves and others. In fact, the classroom constitution drafted by her and the students outlined these expectations. The focus on building a community based on respect for all in the environment demonstrated by Hannah was similar to the approach adopted by Johanna. Johanna believed the learning community she created for her students should be based on her demonstrated her care for her students by modeling respectful behaviors.

When asked to describe an effective teacher of students of color with disabilities or struggling academically in a high poverty setting, most of the teachers asserted that such a teacher was one that didn't care for the children at the school. Additionally, they each quickly came to the defense of the school and declared that none of these types of teachers existed at their school. The ethic of care articulated by the teachers is a culture that is promoted within the school as a whole and it permeates the classrooms and the beliefs of the teachers. This culture was most exemplified in Jasmine's classroom. Jasmine viewed herself as functioned in a motherly role for her students. She took ownership of her students and took their success academically and socially very personally. The care Jasmine possessed for her students was communicated to both her

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students and their parents. She believed that this was an essential component of her work and guided her ability to meet the needs of her students.

Figure 4. Demonstrating Caring and Building Learning Communities Cross-Case Results

Communicating with Ethnically Diverse Students and Families

To effectively adjust to the needs of the students and families, teachers must be able to acquire information about the specific needs of the students and their families. Gay (2002) noted that "determining what ethnically diverse students know and can do, as well as what they are capable of knowing and doing, is often a function of how well teachers can communicate with them" (p. 110). The terms or phrases that were extracted from the literature and used to code the data were; encouraging students (Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles, 2005), teachers' conceptions of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and empowering students (Peabody, 2011). Figure 5 details the number of times each participant described this essential element as compared to one another.

Communicating with ethnically diverse students and families was the third most prominent essential element described by the teachers. The teachers displayed their ability to effectively communicate with their students through their ability to get to know them on personal levels. They discussed how they were able to have conversations with their students in which they affirmed their belief in the student's ability to meet classroom expectations. The teachers were equally as effective in communicating with the parents of their students as well. The teachers used a variety of methods to encourage and maintain communication with the parents. The teachers used phone, email, daily agendas, and even text messaging as options for communication with parents. The diversity in the ways in which teachers communicated with parents was a result of their desire to accommodate parents' personal preferences and schedules.

The ability of the teachers to communicate with parents enabled them to create relationships that contributed to the success of their students. This was most evident in Jasmine's classroom. She discussed several situations in which she was able to effectively communicate with students and parents. In each of the situations she shared students were struggling either academically and behaviorally, but her ability to connect with them improved their outcomes. Jasmine established an open line of communication with her students and parents. She highlighted situations in which she collaborated with parents of her students in hopes of helping her students to be successful.

Figure 5. Communicating with Ethnically Diverse Students and Families Cross-Case Results

Responding to Ethnic Diversity in the Delivery of Instruction

Teachers who are able to effectively teach students in a culturally responsive manner have a clear understanding of how ethnically diverse students learn (Gay, 2010). Having an understanding of how ethnically diverse students learn provides teachers with the necessary knowledge to adjust their instructional approaches. The terms or phrases that were extracted from the literature and used to code the data were; cultural and linguistic relevance versus standardization (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2012) and matching instructional techniques to learning styles of diverse students (Gay, 2002). Figure 6 details the number of times each participant described this essential element as compared to one another.

While overall responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction was the second least evident characteristic among participants, several of the teachers discussed

great ways in which they accomplished this task. For instance, Jasmine teaches a multicultural unit in her classroom that aims to help her students become informed about their own culture and the cultures of their classmates. In this unit the students are required to interview family members about their customs, practices, and beliefs. The unit culminates with a multicultural fair in the classroom. During this event, parents and their children do a presentation about their cultures and answer any questions that others may have about their backgrounds.

Other teachers made attempts to connect instructional content to student interests and preferred learning styles. Specifically, Hannah incorporated rap into her instruction and even allows students to write raps as a way of displaying their work. Teresa noticed that many of her students were tactile and kinesthetic learners and therefore she delivers instruction in ways that enables her to stimulate their learning based on their preferred learning style. Johanna's students enjoyed hands-on activities, so she engages them in activities that connects with their prior knowledge and allows them to be hands-on with the content. Additionally, Johanna infuses technology throughout her instructions as well. She shared that this allows her to expose her students to experiences that they may be lacking due to the limited resources they may have at home. Allison and Elizabeth are the two teachers that did not appear to have a specific approach to responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery on instruction. While Allison attempts to connect content to students' prior knowledge so they take greater interest in the lesson, Elizabeth prefers to rely on the assistance of ESOL paraprofessionals in providing support to her linguistically diverse students.

Figure 6. Responding to Ethnic Diversity in the Delivery of Instruction Cross-Case

Results

Summary of Findings by Research Question

A summary of the findings from this study is provided by research question.

1. What are the instructional practices of teachers of students of color with

    disabilities or at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools?

Participants in this study explicitly discussed the use of collaborative instruction, peer

assisted learning, reciprocal teaching, explicit teaching, differentiated instruction, and

hands-on activities as effective instructional practices for students of color with

disabilities or at risk of identification. In addition to these practices, the teachers

frequently discussed the use of reading, math, and writing response journals.

2. What are the approaches taken by teachers of students of color with disabilities or

    at-risk of identification in high-performing high-poverty schools to build

    community and caring in the classroom?

Findings of the study revealed that participants employed multiple and varied approaches to building community and caring in the classroom. These included developing meaningful relationships, engaging students through classroom meetings, including students in the process of establishing classroom rules, guidelines, procedures, and expectations. Additionally, the participants discussed gathering specific knowledge about their students in which were used to tailor a classroom environment that in order to best meet student needs.

3. How do teachers describe their instructional practices and beliefs?

Participants in this study described their instructional practices and beliefs by providing examples of how they engaged with students and families. Moreover, the teachers described their beliefs and practices using language and terms that were common to their educational setting. Overall, the participants described themselves as caring and committed teachers who allowed the needs of the students to drive their efforts to serve them.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the findings according to the themes that emerged from the study. Chapter five also provides a conceptual model of effective instruction for students of color with disabilities and provides a detailed discussion of the implications for teacher education and future research.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Using case study methodology, the study examined the practices and beliefs of six teachers of students of color with disabilities or who are at-risk of identification in a high-performing high-poverty school. Moreover, the study examined the extent to which their approaches to teaching students of color are consistent with the approaches that have been articulated and described in the literature informing the field regarding culturally responsive teaching. An examination of their practices through a culturally responsive pedagogical lens revealed many similarities in how the participants described their work and alignment with what has been promoted in the literature as being effective for meeting the needs of students of color.

Interviews and observations were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the practices and beliefs of the six teachers participating in the study. During this process, the teachers discussed a variety of issues related to their work with students of color with disabilities or who were struggling academically in a high-poverty school. In this chapter I discuss the findings according to the themes that emerged from the data. These themes are instructional practices, building community and caring in the classroom, and description of instructional practices and beliefs. I describe the overall significance of culturally responsive teaching in high-poverty schools and offer a conceptual model of effective instruction of students of color with disabilities in high-poverty settings. Additionally, I detail the limitations of the study and share recommendations for teacher

education and future research. Finally, I revisit my discussion of my role of the researcher in this study.

Discussion of Findings

Instructional Approaches

In relation to the overall topic of effective instructional practices for students of color with disabilities, the participants in the study consistently implemented several instructional approaches that have been supported by research. These practices included culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), direct/explicit instruction (Diliberto, Beattie, Flowers, & Algozzine, 2009), collaborative grouping (Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Dimino, & Peterson, 2006), and peer assisted learning (Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Al Otaiba, Yen, Yang, Braun, & O'Connor, 2002). Additionally, the participants consistently discussed the use of hand-on activities, reciprocal teaching, response journals, and the need to differentiate instruction in an attempt to best meet student needs.

The instructional approaches employed by the participants were consistent with the types of instruction promoted by Gay (2002). Gay encouraged the use of cooperative group learning arrangements and peer coaching as well as the use of motion and movement, music, frequent variability in tasks and formats. Along with the implementation of evidenced based practices, the teachers also attempted to align their instruction to their students preferred methods of learning and to connect content to the students prior experiences. In an effort to take advantage of their student's interests and learning preferences, the teachers developed innovative lessons and also allowed students to display their learning in alternative forms.

The participants' attempts to align their instruction to the needs of their students took different forms. Most of them appeared to be confident that the curriculum and materials that they were provided by the district enabled them to address student needs while a few did not. The response of the participants, their approaches to instruction, and actions led me to reveal them as rule keepers, rule changers, or rule breakers. Elizabeth, Johanna, Jasmine, and Allison are considered to be rule keepers. They all relied heavily on the prescribed curriculum to meet the learning needs of their students. Although they sometimes deviated from the pacing calendars mandated by the district, their preference was to not do so. Instead, they believed that they should teach the curriculum in a manner that was enjoyable to the students and enabled them to connect with the content. Their approach has its merits and enables them to be effective in their efforts.

In previous school years Teresa may have also been considered to be a rule keeper. However, due to many of her students being in need of special education services, she has developed into a rule changer. Teresa found herself in a situation in which her preferred method of designing lessons in a manner that benefitted the students was not producing the student outcomes she desired. As a result, she began to investigate alternative instructional approaches that would enable her to best meet the learning needs of her students with disabilities. Teresa realized that she needed more flexibility to utilize practices such as explicit instruction. She needed to spend more time teaching certain difficult concepts to her students. Therefore, she sought to change to rules as dictated by the pacing calendars and prescribed curriculum by lobbying to school administrators for flexibility in her instructional decisions and succeeded in doing so.

Thus, she determined a change was needed and proceeded through the appropriate channels to ensure approval for the revisions she wished to implement.

On the other hand, Hannah would be considered a rule breaker. After reviewing the state standards, examining the curriculum, and considering her students learning needs, Hannah made the conscious decision to design her instruction using materials that were independent of what the district provided. She did not seek administrative approval to do so; she simply acted on her belief that the prescribed curriculum failed to meet the diverse needs of her students and therefore did not give them the best opportunities to learn. Hannah prefers to use novels instead of traditional textbooks when teaching reading. She believes that student exposure to richer and more diverse genres of literature generates higher levels of interest in learning reading. Hannah did not appear to be concerned about getting in trouble for her instructional decisions because she believed was doing what was in the best interest of her students learning needs. To Hannah, her students came first and so she was willing to accept the consequences for not following the rules.

Whether they were rule keepers, rule changers, or rule breakers, all of the participants made instructional decisions that they believed would lead to the success of their students. They crafted their instruction ways that enabled them to capitalize on their students' strengths while using evidenced-based practices to build their weaknesses. The differences in the participant's methods to instructional design and delivery provide others with several approaches to consider when making instructional decisions. Evidence of the study suggests that teachers must not only be made aware of the importance of implementing evidenced-based instructional practices, but also the need

for them to match their instruction to student needs. Coupled with their approaches to building caring classroom environments, the participant's ability to implement effective instructional practices was critical to the academic success of their students of color with disabilities.

Building Caring Classroom Communities

An important element contributing to the success of the teachers in the study was their ability to build caring learning communities. A distinct quality that was visible in each of the participants' classrooms an ethic of care. While a combination of beliefs and practices contributed to the effective building of classroom community, the ethic of care was prominent as the teachers articulated their beliefs. The significance of these participants allowing their practices to be guided by an ethic of care is immeasurable and should not be overlooked. Several scholars (i.e., Lumpkin, 2007; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez-McHatton, 2009; Gay, 2010) have posited that caring teacher-student relationships are essential components of an effective classroom and serves as impetus for student success. As a result, teachers must be able to care for themselves, their students, the content, and other members of the school community (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

Noddings (1992) describes the caring relation as the "connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). There was a clear connection between the participants and their students. This connection was displayed by the ways in which they interacted with their students and how they described their relationships with them. However, there appeared to be a deeper level of connection that guided their display of care. These participants seemed to care about

their students as if they were their caregivers. This is what Valenzuela (1999) referred to as "authentic caring" (p. 63). Valenzuela revealed that when teachers authentically care for their students, they genuinely seek to take actions that are in their students' best interest. It is imperative that all teachers understand that it is not enough to simply care for their students without placing equal emphasis on seeking opportunities to improve their learning. While the participants' ability to effectively communicate their care for their students was important, what was critical to their practice and the success of their students was their willingness to allow their care to lead to them taking actions that resulted in an improved learning environment.

The level of care displayed by the participant's led to their willingness to take certain actions and make critical decisions regarding best approaches to meeting the needs on their students. Such actions were evidenced when Teresa pleaded to her administrators for the power to make changes to the mandated curriculum and instructional model in order to meet the needs of her students with disabilities. An additional example of critical action was Hannah rejecting the districted mandated curriculum altogether because she believed it failed to meet the needs of her students. The result of their actions was as the challenging and/or changing of the curriculum as they approached the delivery of instruction.

Therefore, findings of the study suggests an additional framework the can be used to further understand the practices of the participants. Starratt (2012) provides a powerful ethical framework that can also be used to make meaning of these teachers' practices as well. While using a culturally responsive pedagogical lens as a conceptual framework for understanding these teacher's practices is extremely appropriate, Starratt's ethical theory

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of educational practice enhances that lens and embraces a critique of the overall context of schooling. Starratt's multidimensional ethical framework consists of the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique. As described by Starratt (2012), the ethic of care "places human persons in relationships of absolute value; each other enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth, and, given the chance, will reveal genuinely loveable qualities (p. 36). This conceptualization of care is consistent with Gay's (2010) beliefs about care, but the ethic of justice and the ethic of critique capture the need for the teachers to think critically about their work with students with disabilities in high-poverty schools. Additionally, teachers need to think critically about effective ways of identifying others who can effectively contribute to the change process. Accompanied by an ethic of care, these two ethics further explain the participants' success as well as why they have chosen to teach students in a high-poverty setting. The partnership of culturally responsive teaching and the multidimensional ethical framework is appropriate because as Gay (2010) stated,

> Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the power of teaching while fully realizing that, without accompanying changes in all other aspects of schooling and society, the very best of teaching will not be able to accomplish the systematic reforms needed for ethnically diverse students to receive genuine educational equity and achieve excellence. (p. xxiv)

The teachers in this study demonstrated the ethic of critique and the ethic of social justice a various times throughout the study. Whether it was Teresa calling attention to the stark difference in economic resources between affluent and impoverished communities, Johanna highlighting the fact of how our nations historical narrative fails to

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accurately depict the role persons of color have played in the building of our society, or Hannah acknowledging that the prescribed curriculum fails to adequately address the diversity of her students, these teachers recognized the inherent inequities in our society and sought to challenge them. Coupled with an ethic of care, their critique of schooling and society served as conduits for the building of a learning environment that enabled their students with disabilities or who are at-risk of identification in a high-performing high-poverty school to thrive.

Each of the participants demonstrated care for their students and their care for them was accompanied by concern. The participants expressed concern about what they perceived to be negative effects of the circumstances that they believed confronted their students outside of the classroom. While teachers should be concerned with how the challenges confronting a community impact their students, they must refrain from allowing these challenges to define the community. The findings of the study suggest that the participants allowed the overall perception of the impoverished community in which they worked to dictate their beliefs about the community. The participants rarely discussed they ways parents and other community members were supporting their efforts to educate the children. Rather, their focus often appeared to be centered on the things their students were lacking at home. Their descriptions of the parents and the community did not serve as an accurate illustration of the communities potential. As evidenced by Hannah's account of the parents of her student's willingness to purchase books for their children and coordinate a field trip, many members of high-poverty communities are willing to support schools and teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of students. Therefore, the issue may not be the community's unwillingness to support the school.

The issue may be the inability or unwillingness of teachers and schools to communicate to communities how they can be productively involved in the educational process. However, for this to work teachers and schools must challenge their conceptions of high-poverty communities and be open to allowing communities to inform them of the ways they can support the schools educational efforts.

Further, the findings of the study reveal a need for all stakeholders to consider how the ways in which we choose to describe high-poverty communities can cause some teachers and schools to presuppose that the community is only a place of despair. Likewise, we must also consider how our descriptions of high-poverty communities could impact the members of the community. While the lack of resources and the reported incidences of violence and crime are a reality, there are also many positives that can be identified within these communities as well. Therefore, key stakeholders must refrain from viewing high-poverty communities from a deficit perspective in order to see the potential of students from high-poverty communities. This assertion is consistent with my belief that researchers must change the discourse on research in high-poverty schools by conducting research in high-poverty schools that are experiencing success in meeting the needs of students.

Description of Beliefs

The most significant beliefs expressed by the participants in the study were in their students, the community, and in their work. All of the participants in the study believed in their students' unique abilities as well as in their personal ability to help their students reach their full potential. This belief extended to students with disabilities as well. The participants expressed belief that students with high incidence disabilities who

are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade level standards. These teachers were driven by the potential of what their children could accomplish if provided with equal opportunities to learn. They were dedicated to providing them with these opportunities to learn because they believed it was their responsibility to do so. Regardless of the challenging circumstances their students faced or the overall condition of the surrounding community, these teachers believed that they were making a difference in the lives of their students. Several of the teachers expressed that they made the decision to work at the school because they personally believed that they were most needed in this type of type of setting.

Throughout the study, there were moments when I would ask the participants to describe a particular practice that I observed them implementing. I would also ask them where their knowledge of the practice or a particular belief originated. Most times they would attribute their acquisition of the skill to their pre-service education or professional development. Other times they attributed it to their prior teaching experiences. However, when attempting to provide details of their practices the participants struggled to find the appropriate words that could adequately express their thoughts. When this happened, the participants would give a response of, "I don't know how to explain it, I just do it." Because of these situations, I was drawn to the work of Feldman (1997), Eisner (2002), and Halverson (2004), on varieties of teacher knowledge and wisdom. Halverson (2004) noted that teachers rely on a complex blend of knowledge, skill, theory, disposition, and values in their work to improve student learning. This complex blend often results in the teacher's inability to describe their practices or beliefs because of the intersection of various thoughts as they operate in practice.

Feldman (1997) suggests the "teaching as a way of being" (p. 757) perspective that looks closely at how teachers act within their educational situations to improve their practice and to come to understand it better. This perspective views teaching as a highly contextualized art form that is situated socially, spatially, and temporally in teachers' practice. As I consider the beliefs of the participants in the study through Feldman's suggested perspective, I come to better understand that these teachers often rely on a certain degree of spontaneity in their practice. Moreover, they rely on knowledge and a skill set that is developed over time through their work with students of color with disabilities in high-poverty schools. Such a perspective on teacher places value on the type of knowledge that is only acquired through actual classroom practice.

Traditionally, knowledge is viewed as being value neutral (Eisner, 2002). This view of knowledge minimizes the value of the lived experience that often governs our actions and beliefs. This particular view of knowledge does not appropriately describe the beliefs of the participants. For it is their lived experience—their personal narratives that have driven them to commit to the field of education as a whole and this high-poverty school in particular. As humans, our beliefs are impacted by our experiences. Therefore, the beliefs of the participants in the study about teaching students of color with disabilities in a high-poverty school are informed by their personal histories and their experiences actually working in such a school.

Significance of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Evidenced-Based Instruction in High-Poverty Schools

Culturally responsive teaching is a means for illuminating the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic

abilities (Gay, 2010). The effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching is contingent upon the willingness of educators to acknowledge the cultural differences of their students. Culturally responsive teachers seek deeper understanding of the various dynamics that impact the academic and behavioral development of diverse students. By affirming diversity in the classroom, culturally responsive teachers enable their students of color to make connections with them and the curriculum.

The teachers in the study exemplified the practices of culturally responsive teachers. Visible strands of the all five of the essential elements of culturally responsive teaching described by Gay (2002) were present in their practices. However, several of these elements appeared to dominate their approaches. These elements that were prominent in these teachers' beliefs and practices were; developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, demonstrating care and building learning communities, and communicating with ethnically diverse students and families. The essential elements of including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction were not as prevalent in the practices of all teachers. The teachers in the study chose to place more of an emphasis on gaining an understanding of the needs of their students and demonstrating their care for them as opposed to including ethnic diversity content in their curriculum. Their decision to take this approach appeared to be appreciated by the students and parents. Moreover, these findings were significant in the discourse on the use of use of culturally responsive approaches in high-poverty schools. The significance of these findings rest in the fact that we know have a better understanding of what elements of culturally responsive practices are essential in efforts aimed at meeting the needs of students of color in high-

poverty schools. Based on these findings, teachers of students of color in high-poverty schools must begin to place a higher level of emphasis on developing a knowledge base about their diverse students that enables them to create a caring learning environment.

Findings from this study suggest the need for a more comprehensive framework of instruction for students of color with disabilities in high-poverty settings. The framework I propose attempts to capture the most prevalent essential elements of culturally responsive teaching and integrates the evidenced based instructional approaches most discussed by the teachers in the study (Figure 7). Rather than reject the notions of culturally responsive teaching and the importance of an evidenced-based practice, this framework includes both as integral to effective teaching of students of color with disabilities or who are at risk of identification of disability. The effectiveness of this model rests on teachers of ethnically and culturally diverse students having high self-esteem and a high regard for others (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The framework begins with this premise because it is important that teachers of ethnic and culturally diverse students believe that they are capable of teaching their students and that the students can achieve high academic standards. Once this belief is established, teachers can then begin the work of developing a knowledge base that will assist them in creating a caring learning environment that promotes student success, which is the second component.

The second component is where teachers establish meaningful relationships with their students that will allow the teacher to connect with the student on a personal level. The personal relationships with then enhance communication between the teacher and student. Once communication is established, the teacher can utilize effective motivation strategies to encourage students to meet classroom expectations. The final component of

the framework requires teachers to use their knowledge of the needs of their diverse

students to match evidence-based instructional practices to the student's preferred

learning style and interests. The result is a conception of teaching that is inclusive of the
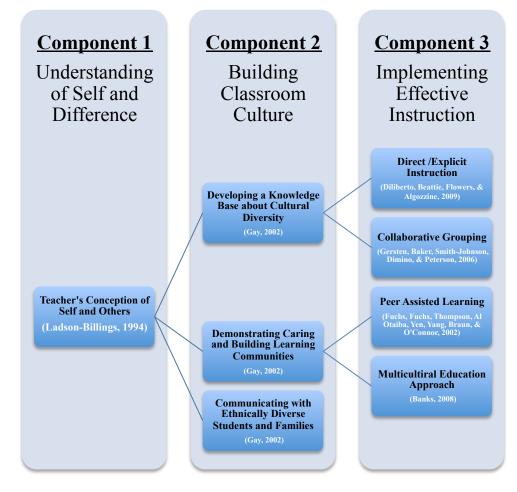
needs of both the teacher and the student.

Component 1
Understanding of Self and Difference

Component 2
Building Classroom Culture

Component 3
Implementing Effective Instruction

Developing a Knowledge Base about Cultural Diversity
(Gay, 2002)

Teacher's Conception of Self and Others
(Ladson-Billings, 1994)

Demonstrating Caring and Building Learning Communities
(Gay, 2002)

Communicating with Ethnically Diverse Students and Families
(Gay, 2002)

Direct /Explicit Instruction
(Diliberto, Beattie, Flowers, & Algozzine, 2009)

Collaborative Grouping
(Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Dimino, & Peterson, 2006)

Peer Assisted Learning
(Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Al Otaiba, Yen, Yang, Braun, & O'Connor, 2002)

Multicultiral Education Approach
(Banks, 2008)

Figure 7. Conceptual Framework of Effective Instruction

This conceptual model of effective instruction for students of color because it

takes into account the need for teachers to acknowledge ethnic and cultural diversity prior

to delivery of instruction. The teachers in the study understood this need and their

students benefitted from it. Due to the requirements of No Child Left Behind Act

(NCLB) of 2001, which have increased emphasis on accountability measures, districts

have placed an increased focus on standards-based instruction. However, Murrell (2000)

argued that this push could sacrifice culturally responsive practices that may have

benefited some students. I believe the framework will improve the outcomes of students

with color disabilities by placing equal emphasis on teachers building culturally

responsive environments and integrating evidenced-based instructional practices.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study including the sample size and lack of

generalizability. The study included six teachers as participants. While this was an

appropriate number of participants for a case study, it reduces the ability to generalize

findings to other teachers of students of color with disabilities in other high-poverty

settings. However, Eisner (2002) affirmed that lessons learned from case studies could

be treated as anticipatory schemata that facilitate our search processes because a case is

not only about itself but an example of things like it. Furthermore, Stake (1995) affirmed

that case studies are conducted to make the case more understandable. The thick detailed

description of the practices of the six teachers of students of color with disabilities or who

are at risk of identification of disability in a high-poverty school more understandable.

As a result, readers of the cases are able to make naturalistic generalizations. Stake

(1995) noted, "naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal

engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person

feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). Therefore, by reading the case reports of

these six teachers, readers will be more informed of appropriate practices to be used in

high-poverty schools.

An additional limitation of the study was my connection to the school and

principal. In the multi-case study that served as the background of the current study, I functioned in a leadership role of the interdisciplinary research group conducting the study. My leadership responsibilities in the research group included securing support for the project from district officials and establishing partnerships with school administrators. The partnership that I was able to establish with the principal played a significant role in both the current case study and multi-case study. As a result of this relationship, the principal was very receptive to my request and was willing to do what she could to accommodate the research. This relationship was witnessed by all individuals in the school and could have resulted in members of the school developing a favorable opinion of me. Even though the principal did not directly ask the teachers to participate in the study, I understand that their knowledge of our relationship may have impacted their decision to consent. Therefore, the willingness of the participants of the study to cooperate could have been influenced by my relationship with and connection to the school.

<div align="center">**Implications of the Study**</div>

Teacher Education

When considering the learning outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings, Cook (2002) affirmed that if teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills to work in inclusive settings, the students would have diminished opportunities to attain desired outcomes. Teacher education programs are in a position to ensure that pre-service teachers are provided with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, dispositions, and skills required to succeed in educating students (Turner, 2003). Forlin (2010) noted that how to best prepare teachers to work in schools with an increasingly diverse student

population is of concern to educational academics, professionals, and governments around the world. With such a critical role in the development of children, it is imperative that teachers are effectively prepared to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

The findings of this study suggested that teachers of students with disabilities in high-poverty schools must possess an immense understanding of the needs of diverse students and must possess the ability to demonstrate care in building a learning environment. With that said, teacher education programs must engage in a critical examination of effective approaches aimed at assuring that teacher candidates acquire these skills. In relation to assisting pre-service teachers in developing an understanding of the ethic of care, Owens and Ennis (2005) asserted that current teacher education programs often fail to address the ethic of care and its impact on the educational process. Owens and Ennis continue by asserting that while many teachers say they care about students, without a true understanding of what this really means, teachers may become overwhelmed by the realities of care. Teacher education programs must avoid making assumptions that teacher candidates understand the ethic of care and its importance or that they have a knowledge base about cultural diversity. The conceptual framework I have provided can address this by serving as a tool for teacher educators to structure their curriculum. Additionally, the framework can facilitate professional development efforts for in-service teachers

Future Research

The findings of this study have resulted in a deeper understanding of the practices and beliefs of teachers in a high-performing high-poverty school and a conceptual

framework of effective instruction for students of color with disabilities. These findings also highlight the importance of continuing to conduct research in other high-performing high-poverty schools in order to refine this conceptual framework. There also exists is the need to investigate the practices of teachers of students of color with disabilities in low-performing high-poverty schools. The goal of investigations in low-performing schools must be the development of a comprehensive description of the practices and beliefs of the teachers in the low-performing school. Once this description is developed, we can begin to determine whether any discrepancies exist between the practices and beliefs identified in both settings. The framework that I have developed can be used to facilitate this process as it captures the three distinct elements of effective instruction of students of color with disabilities in high-poverty schools. This approach to research could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of teaching in high-poverty schools and ultimately better inform teacher preparation efforts.

Finally, findings of the study revealed the differences in the language used by researchers and teachers when discussing evidenced-based instructional practices. When the participants described their instructional practices, they often used terminology that was not consistent with how we as teacher educators have come to describe instructional practices. However, when I observed them implementing instruction I was able to make immediate connections with their practices and how we describe effective instruction. This situation revealed two critical needs for researchers to consider as they move forward with conducting research on teacher practice. The first need to consider is that researchers must go beyond interviews and/or focus groups to the inclusion of observations as data collection methods as they investigate teacher practice. In order to

develop an accurate description of teacher practice, researchers must be willing to engage in prolonged field engagement. Doing so will enable them to capture what teachers have been unable to articulate about their practice and could potentially account for the difference in language. The second need is for the establishment of meaningful relationships between researchers and teachers. The goal of these collaborative relationships must be an open discourse that facilitates an exchange of ideas that can lead to a better understanding of each stakeholder's role in the education reform process. This discourse will enable each group to identify ways to support each other's work. Moreover, it will lead to identification of effective approaches for meeting the needs of students of color with disabilities.

Role of the Researcher

The process of challenging my previously held beliefs of teaching students of color in high-poverty settings continued through the study. During an observation of one of my teachers I had an epiphany. The teacher was leading a whole group discussion with her students. During the lesson, I noticed her using higher order questions in an attempt to challenge her students to think critically about the topic. As I watched the teacher interact with her students, I realize that what I was seeing was no different from what I had been observing in the other classrooms of teachers in the study. In fact, what was being observed was very consistent with what can be observed in many classrooms in many schools. This revelation was meaningful because the teachers in this study were not implementing some obscure instructional methods that were unknown to the general teaching force. Rather these teachers were using common instructional approaches that are often promoted in teacher education programs and professional development courses.

These methods included direct instruction, scaffold instruction, collaborative instruction, effective use of questioning strategies, and peer tutoring. With that said, I came to believe that it is not so much the type of instruction these teachers deliver but more so the beliefs they possess about teaching students of color that enables them to be successful. It has become apparent to me that it is important that teachers in high-poverty schools must have an ethic of care and ethic of community in order to effectively meet the needs of their students.

During the planning of the study, one of the most significant issues that occurred was the change in the school grade. This issue was critical to the study because one of the goals of the study was to investigate the practices of teachers at a high-performing high-poverty school. The school had previously been identified as being a high-performing school and was therefore selected as a site to conduct the study. However, the change in school grade created concerns to the ability to continue to consider them as high performing. Concerns on whether the selected school should continue to serve as an appropriate site for the study were alleviated after conducting a closer examination of the states revised criteria for assigning school grades. During the planning phase of the study, the state in which the school is located introduced new standards that would be used to measure student progress. The timing of this shift was not conducive to student's ability to adequately display their progress towards meeting them. Specifically, the mandated curriculum focused on student's acquisition of the old standards, while the standardized assessment measured students according to the new standards. As a result, many schools in the district that had previously been identified as being high performing witnessed a reduction in their school grade. Because of this, I made the decision that the

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change in school grade had less to do with the practices of the teachers and more to do with the unceremonious change in standards by the state.

In spite of my personal views regarding the change in school grade, the school still faced the realities of a grade reduction. Due to this change, the school was required to make several critical changes to the ways in which it functioned. These changes included increased requirements for teachers and additional demands on their time. Along with the general implications of the change in grade, these changes had a profound effect on the perspectives of the teachers in the study. Because of the changes that were taking place in the school, these teachers begin to question whether or not their work was being appreciated. Throughout the time I spent with the teachers during the study, I gained an immense level of appreciation for these teachers and their work. I believe that this was a result of my ability to recognize the parallels between their work and that of mine as a K-12 educator. They were committed to their students and their communities and I always prided myself on being the same. Moreover, I too have been apart of a school faculty that had to endure the psychological, social, and organizational ramifications of a reduction in grade. Therefore, I understood their feelings and felt compelled to make them aware of this. I also shared with them that the way I was able to reconcile these issues was to reflect on the response I received from my students and their families as a means to validating my work.

At the conclusion of the study, I encouraged these six teachers to view their work and success through this lens. I did so because I believe that the ability for them to do so was critical to their continued success in their school. The teachers appeared to appreciate being reminded that they were successful teachers and that the work they did

was valued. My hope is that this resonates in them and is thus enough to keep them committed to working at the school because what they are capable of doing is just what we need in high poverty schools.

The personal connection I was able to establish with the participants was a result of my prolonged engagement in the field. As I acknowledged when discussing the limitations of the study, my connection to the participants, the principal, and the school ultimately impacted their receptiveness to my research. Additionally, my connection with these stakeholders impacted the lens in which I viewed their work. While this may be regarded as a limitation, it could also be perceived as strength of the study. My ability to establish relationships with the participants enabled them to be comfortable speaking openly about issues that some might view as being delicate. These issues include the participants' beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse students, beliefs about students with disabilities, and beliefs about schooling in high-poverty communities. In all but the case of one of the participants, I represented a different race and culture. Moreover, I am a male and the participants were females. The dynamics of race and gender could have significantly impacted my interactions with the participants.   It was critical to the conduct of the study that I was able to establish a level of trust with the participants. An individual discussing their personal beliefs about diversity with someone who may represent a culture that is different from their own is one that must be considered when conducting qualitative research. Therefore, I believe that researchers must carefully approach the process of establishing relationships with their participants because their ability to do so could impact the findings.

While I understand that researchers must carefully approach the process of establishing relationships with their participants is important, I also believe researchers s must be mindful of how these relationships could impact their ability to respond critically to the case. As noted earlier, my extended time in the field allowed me to develop relationships that resulted in open dialogue between the participants, but it also resulted in me developing preconceived notions about who they were as teachers. For instance, based on my work with Jasmine in the multi-case study I entered the current study expecting her to be an exemplar of a culturally responsive teacher. However, after spending more time in her classroom and having more detailed discussions about her practice, it became apparent that some of the other participants displayed certain elements of culturally responsive teaching with higher levels of frequency. For instance, Hannah displayed more depth in her approach to thinking about effective ways of including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. I made the assumption that Jasmine's race and culture would naturally make her culturally responsive, but Hannah's commitment to creating meaningful learning experiences for her students led her to exploring multiple ways her students could connect with the curriculum. Therefore, regardless of the relationship a researcher has with the participants, they must be willing to challenge any preconceived notions that these relationships may have caused them to develop. Ultimately, the ability of the researcher to do significantly impacts the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview 1

- Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?
- How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe works?
- Can you think of any characteristics that students of color bring to the classroom?
- What kinds of things have you done in the classroom that have facilitated the academic success of children of color?
- How much of what you know about teaching students of color did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?
- What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of students of color? How would you describe the kinds of relationships you've had with parents of students you've taught?
- How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of students of color should know about discipline?
- How do you handle the possible mismatch between what you want to teach and what you have to teach?
- How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach in this high poverty setting differs from that of students in middle-class communities?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview 2

- How would you describe your classroom?
  - Culture
  - Characteristics

- Tell about a typical day (instruction-collaboration-students).

- Tell me about your students.

- Tell me what are your goals for your students.
  - Achievement
  - Social
  - Character

- How did you come to understand students with disabilities?

- Do you believe that students with high incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade level standards?

- How do you know your students learned what you wanted them to learn?

- What instructional approaches or teaching methods do you find successful in your classroom?

- Are these the same approaches you use with struggling students or students with disabilities?

- How did you identify these approaches?
  - Professional developments
  - Experience

Interview 3

- How do you determine whether a teaching method is effective?

- Tell me about a time a student had a problem with behavior – how did you address the issue?

- Tell me about a time when a student was academically successful – what contributed to the success?

- What is an effective teacher of students of color with disabilities?

- What is a struggling teacher of students of color with disabilities?

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Context

Description of Setting

Interpretation

Questions