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Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Investigation of Effective Practices for African American Learners

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: AN INVESTIGATION OF
EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN LEARNERS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

ANTONIA L. HILL

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2012

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Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. (Ecclesiastes 7:8 KJV)

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This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Mr. Anthony J. Lippitt.

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Sleep tight, good Soldier! Daddy, you would be proud!

The desire accomplished, is sweet to the soul... (Proverbs 13:19 KJV)

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ABSTRACT

Diversity increasingly characterizes the population of the United States. As the number of African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian populations increase, there will be drastic implications for teaching and learning in classrooms where students of color dominate. The purpose of this mixed methodological study was to examine the characteristics, practices and frequency of use of 52 strategies employed by two teachers in a predominately African American urban public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement. The 52 effective and culturally responsive strategies used in this study were created by Dr. Johnnie McKinley, Professor in Educational Psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle. Furthermore, this study sought to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers and instructional leaders detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and ultimately achievement of African American students.

This study used Activity Theory as its theoretical framework to understand how culturally responsive teaching strategies and the frequency of their use impact student engagement and motivation within the classroom. The components of the 52 strategies and practices as well as the preparation of culturally responsive teaching examined in this study, is not inclusive. However, of the 52 strategies observed by the researcher and

executed by the teachers, it was those strategies where the teachers collectively developed and established clear goals and standards through planning of the lessons/activities and day; selected and used culturally relevant curriculum and materials that recognized people, events, traditions and cultural aspects of the students in their classroom; connected students' learning to prior knowledge; and engaged students in real-life, project-based, meaningful, challenging and relevant curriculum that were most effective in the instruction of the African American students within this study.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2011, the U. S. Department of Education released the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (commonly referred to as “NAEP”) or the “nation’s report card”, of the fourth and eighth grade students that were tested nationwide in both reading and math. This test allows for a comparison of student achievement across states, and allows states to track changes in student achievement over time. The results in 2011 showed that there was no significant difference from the average scores in reading for fourth graders in 2009 (221) than those of students tested in 2011 (221) or in 2007 (219)¹ (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, the results of the average score gaps that compared African American and Latina/o fourth graders and their white counterparts in reading scaled scores was 26-25 points respectively. In eighth grade reading, the gap for African Americans compared to their white counterparts was 25 points and for Hispanics, the gap was 22 points (2011).

The U.S. Department of Education (2011) describes the “gaps” in achievement as the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups. This gap better known as the “achievement gap” is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges

¹Comparisons (higher/narrower/wider/not different) are based on statistical tests. The .05 level was used for testing statistical significance. Statistical comparisons are calculated on the basis of unrounded scale scores or percentages.

that every state in the Union currently faces (Ladson-Billings, 2005). O'Connell (2008) defined the gap as the disparity between the academic performances of white students and other ethnic groups as well as that between English learners and native English speakers, socio-economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities as compared with students without disabilities (O'Connell 2008).

For years, evidence of disparities or “gaps” in achievement have shown up in test scores, drop-out, graduation rates, and other relevant indicators of academic performance (Noguero, 2000). In 2008-09, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported the national event dropout rate² for Caucasians was 2.4%; 4.8% for African Americans, and 5.8% for Hispanics (NCES, 2011). However, the national graduation rate was reported close to 93.8% for Caucasians; 87.1% for African Americans, and 76.8% for Hispanics (2011). According to this data, there are significant differences in measures of performance among African American, Latina/o, and Native American students which generally fall on the lower end of the achievement spectrum. Whereas the trends for years have shown larger numbers of white and Asian students more likely found at the higher end of the spectrum (Noguero & Akom, 2000).

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), scholars have offered a plethora of explanations for the existence of the gap. To better understand the gap, scholars and researchers alike have used the Coleman Report of 1966, *Equality of Educational*

²The national event dropout rate describes the percentage of youth ages 15 through 24 in the United States who dropped out of grades 10–12 from either public or private schools in the 12 months between one October and the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential, such as a GED.

Opportunity (Coleman et al., 1966) to advance their research regarding the gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). James Banks (2004) and Geneva Gay (2004) both multicultural education researchers have focused on the cultural mismatches that contribute to the gap. Curriculum theorist Thomas Popkewitz (1998) and sociologist Pedro Noguero (2000) have focused on the role of curriculum, culture and schooling as sources of the gap. Whereas, teacher educators such as Chistine Sleeter (2001), Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004), Sonia Nieto (1999), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2004, 2005, 2006), just to name a few have focused on the pedagogical practices of teachers as contributors to either widening or narrowing the gap. There is evidence that supports the existence of an achievement gap among African Americans, Latina/os, Asians, and their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). But this long term focus on the gap and possible contributing factors that have caused the gap, have only led to short-sighted solutions that unmistakably fail to address the underlying issue.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is not that an achievement gap exists, but that an educational debt or deficit due to huge disparities in the education of African Americans, Native Americans and Latina/os has accumulated over time (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This educational deficit has resulted in or contributed largely to the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Over a period of time, students of color have experienced an accumulation of educational debt. Robert Haveman, Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin's Department of Economics, stated:

The education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g. crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. This required investment sucks away resources that could go to reducing the achievement gap. Without the education debt we could narrow the achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006 AERA Presidential Address).

The educational debt caused by educational depravity which dates back as far as before free and compulsory schooling for African Americans and other minorities has had a major impact on the present educational issues of today. The educational deficits that have been experienced by children of color over the years have contributed largely to the achievement gap. So how can restitution of the debt due to the inequality in education be recompensed for students of color?

The educational deficits, particularly those of African American students, “need to be addressed due to the implications for the kinds of lives and education society will come to expect for most of its students” (Ladson-Billings, AERA 2006). There is a need for teachers, especially those teaching children of color to have a deeper understanding of every student’s culture, particularly African American, Latino/as, Native American, and Asian students in order for children of color to achieve academic success (Howard, 2004). Through establishing a community of learners, students become active members of the learning process, thus contributing to their academic success. In the meantime, the culturally aware teacher helps the students consider that they can maintain high standards of excellence without compromising their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

The Need for Multicultural Education

Diversity increasingly characterizes the population of the United States. With the influx of immigrants along with an increasing number of U.S born ethnic minorities, Urban Public education in America will be impacted greatly (Daleiden, 1999). As the number of African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian populations increase, there will be drastic implications for teaching and learning in these classrooms and more importantly, challenges for teachers who are teaching student populations whose culture differs from their own (Howard, 2003).

Considering the demographic environment of today's urban schools, an acknowledgment and understanding of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students as well as a desire to use their cultural experiences to enhance the classroom environment arguably are necessary traits of the effective modern educator. Developing these traits and skills, however, require a basic understanding of urban school demographics, as well as an ability to think critically about possible stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors that may impact their ability to create a culturally tolerant classroom (Gay, 2007). One suggested avenue for improving the academic success of students from diverse backgrounds, in addition to developing democracy in all students, is through multicultural education (Gay, 2007).

According to a few multiculturalists such as Ladson-Billings (1994, 1996, 2004-06), Banks (2004), Gay (2004), Howard (2003), and Nieto (2002), culturally relevant teaching is one response that may have the potential to "narrow" the unequal educational outcomes between white students and often less successful students of diverse ethnic and

cultural heritage. Given the increasing diversity in schools within the U.S., teachers must be able to recognize how race, ethnicity, and culture shape the learning experience for many students (Howard, 2003). More specifically, teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural realities.

Leaders in the field of multicultural education such as Ladson-Billings (1984, 1995), Nieto (2001), Gay, (2000), Howard (2003), and Banks and Banks (2004), have advocated that the underachievement of African Americans and other minority groups, such as Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders, comes as a result of the lack of culturally responsive teaching. Indeed, it has been argued that the key to learning is an understanding of culture. The researchers posit that in order to meet the educational needs of children, educators must first be able to understand the social, cultural and political experiences of the child. In traditional schooling, these experiences are either absent or ignored (Bankston, 2002; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 2002).

Within the last two decades, scholars and researchers in multicultural education have developed a high level of consensus about the nature, aims, goals and scope of multicultural education (Banks, 2004). However, Gay (1992), points out that there is a tremendous divide or gap between theory and practice, particularly in classrooms. To understand this divide or gap, one must understand the main goal of multicultural education as stated by specialists in the field. The main goal of multicultural education is to reform schools and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality as well as have an

equal opportunity to experience educational success and mobility as their white counterparts (Banks, 2003b; Grant & Sleeter, 1991). Researchers have repeatedly confirmed that teachers need to know more about the world of the children with whom they work in order to better offer opportunities for learning success (Graybill, 1997; Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been described by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997). Gay (2000) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them; it teaches to and through strengths of these students”(pp. 28-29). Gay further posits that, “It is culturally validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory” (p. 29). Gay describes culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 29)

Ladson-Billings (1992) stated that teachers who were culturally responsive used “cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 32). Culturally responsive teachers not only realize the importance of academic achievement, but also the maintaining of one's cultural identity and heritage (Gay, 2000).

Culturally responsive teachers are also aware of the critical role that race and culture play in the way that students learn (Howard, 2003). These teachers also know that the key to successful instruction is linking their students' lives to experiences inside and outside of the classroom (Marks, 2005). Not only that, but culturally responsive teachers know that if they cannot connect with students' interests, needs, or experiences, the effective teaching that leads to increased levels of engagement and learning cannot and will not occur (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This is why culturally responsive teaching is needed and vital in multicultural diverse classrooms (1997).

The Need for Multicultural Advocates

Some researchers in the field of multicultural education (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997) have deemed that culturally responsive teaching is one effective way of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students; and that culturally responsive teachers are cognizant of the critical role that race and culture play in the way that students learn (Howard, 2003).

According to Schmidt (2006), for too long cultural differences in the classroom have been ignored and only those of the dominant mainstream culture, European American and middle class populations, have been favored. However, when teachers learn how to effectively address the similarities of various ethnic groups of their students rather than the differences of perspectives, languages, cultures, physical appearances, and so forth, then students are provided an opportunity to expand their inquiry learning, critical thinking, and problem solving skills (Siegler & Alibali, 2005). But how are these teachers identified and how do they become knowledgeable about successful culturally responsive pedagogy that meets the academic needs of students of color?

As an African American female and former public school student that successfully matriculated through the third largest public school system within the nation and later returned as a professional middle school teacher charged with meeting the academic and social needs of a wide range of seventh and eighth graders with limited reading abilities and multiple levels, I wondered how and why I was selected among the many applicants for the job. As a new teacher, I had no experience teaching adolescents or any known effective strategies in teaching literacy across the content areas. However, my principal had faith that I would “someday come to build a repertoire of instructional strategies and practices” once I learned the needs of my students and how best to meet them. In a matter of two to three months, I did! The question of “how” came after I learned how to use my own personal experiences as a middle school student and how I was taught that helped me to make and provide real life connections for my students that they could relate to because of our similar backgrounds. Soon after, I learned that

meeting the needs of my students academically was achievable when I made personal connections and established relationships that I could teach them anything!

Nine years later, I was nominated and selected as one out of 90 participants from 4,766 applicants nationwide to participate in a leadership program that focused on creating a cohort of instructional leaders that would be charged with transforming low performing schools across the nation in urban school districts with 90% or more low income, performance, and minority populations, consisting primarily of African American and Hispanic populations, as the principal. After completing the national program that consisted of a yearlong residency as a “Principal Resident/Intern” in a predominate Hispanic school; a summer institute, and workshops taught by researchers and leaders in the field on leadership such as backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004), building your teaching skills and creating the “skillful teacher” (Platt, Tripp, Ogden & Fraser, 2000), using data to drive instruction (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2004), and discussing the *weekly roundup of important ideas and research in K-12 education* with Kim Marshall (2004) himself, I became a member of this national leadership organization. Months later, I was selected to be a principal within the same school system that I had once known as a student and teacher now charged with transforming the school’s culture and climate with the sole purpose of raising student achievement and increasing parental involvement with bounded autonomy of hiring and selecting teachers that were equipped to meet the needs of my 99% African American student population. I knew that as a former classroom teacher, it was imperative that my students had the best teachers who could meet their academic and social needs on a daily and consistent basis.

I knew that just as I had become knowledgeable about the necessary skills and strategies needed to instruct my students, I also knew that I had to build relationships with the students, parents, school staff and community members as well as address many of my students' social ills that followed them to school from their home, environment and life in order to make connections that bridged and closed the gaps in learning that so many of my students came to school with. I knew that these teachers had to be culturally aware and adept to the ethnic, cultural and social ills of the students we serve. They had to believe that they could make a difference in the lives of our students while thus enhancing the teaching profession and contributing to closing the academic achievement gap based on their effective instructional practices. But did this teacher exist today? During an interview, how would I know that I had selected the "right teacher" for my population based on the questions I asked and the responses solicited by them? What makes the teacher culturally responsive and aware? Seeking the answers to these questions eventually informed my efforts to create the "right questions" to ask when interviewing applicants in order to determine whether or not the applicant was culturally responsive and would be able to meet the academic needs of my students based on their ability, knowledge, teaching style and comfort. As a principal, I firmly do not believe that every certified teacher is capable of effectively teaching African American students nor are they knowledgeable about the specific strategies and skills needed to teach such population. But, I am aware that there are some specific practices and or strategies that have been tested, adapted and implemented by teachers and researchers that if implemented and used properly, will prove successful. For example, Schmidt and Ma

(2006), developed 50 literacy strategies for culturally responsive teaching which centered around six major themes: classroom community; home, community and nation; multicultural literature events; critical medial literacy; global perspectives and literacy development; and inquiry learning and literacy learning. To test their theory of use and implementation, Schmidt and Ma field tested the strategies in numerous elementary and secondary urban, high-poverty classrooms with beginning, intermediate and advanced grade levels in which they observed the application of the strategies by teachers in culturally diverse classrooms. Through their resource, teachers were able to transform their classroom culture to one in which all cultures were valued and literacy became meaningful and engaging to all. For many administrators, ensuring that these practical approaches become transferrable from teacher to teacher, classroom to classroom and eventually from school to school when teachers are provided the resource and supported in the use, could prove challenging. However, there may be other principals serving large populations of students of color that are low performing who might be interested in exploring these practices further.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices and strategies of two teachers in a predominately African American public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement. This study sought to examine the characteristics and practices of culturally responsive teachers and the impact this type of teaching had on the level of student achievement and engagement, particularly of African American students in their classroom settings. This study explored the practices of these two teachers and

their approach to teaching African American students. Furthermore, this study sought to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers and instructional leaders detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and achievement of African American students. Not only that, but this study also investigates how other instructional leaders can begin to create a professional learning community of culturally responsive teachers starting with the interview process when looking to hiring new teachers. Principals must know that there is no particular “check list” to gauge whether or not a teacher is culturally responsive but that there are certain attributes that are common within their pedagogical practices and beliefs. Researching strategies for culturally responsive teaching, specifically in the area of literacy that teachers can use will assist educators in building leaning communities that will not only foster an appreciation of differences, but also promote reading, writing, listening, and speaking through meaningful learning activities (Schmidt, 2006).

Research Questions

The explorations of classroom practices and teacher pedagogy were thoroughly examined and observed to determine which culturally responsive characteristics of teachers were most effective. The research questions that guided this study were:

- (1) How do culturally responsive teaching practices affect student engagement and motivation in the classroom?
- (2) What is the relationship between teacher’s knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and teachers’ practices?

Definitions

Achievement gap - the disparity between the academic performance of white students and other ethnic groups as well as that between English learners and native English speakers; socio-economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students; and students with disabilities as compared with students without disabilities (O'Connell, 2004, p. 40).

Educational debt - the accumulation deficits of resources that should have been used to educate poor students. Also, the historical, moral, socio-political, and economic factors that have disproportionately affected the schooling of African-American, Latina/o, Asian, and other non-white students.

Educational deficit - the amount by which the sum total of schooling fails to exceed the amount of learning that should have been acquired over a period of time.

Effective teaching - "the ability...to produce higher than predicted gains on standardized achievement tests" (Good, 1979, p. 53).

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) - teaching that acknowledges student's cultural background; builds on the student's experiences and affirms his or her cultural identity to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes thereby empowering them intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Williams & Woods, 1997; Zeichner, 2003).

Significance of the Study

According to Irvine and Armento (2001), effective teachers of students of color use the process of reflection to adapt their knowledge and repertoire of strategies gained from the teacher effectiveness research to meet their students' needs, culture, interests, learning preferences, and prior experiences (McKinley, 2004). While evidence is growing that culturally responsive teaching makes schooling more meaningful and relevant for minority students the process of implementation for teachers is challenging (Gay, 2007; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The problem is that many teachers have not been properly prepared to teach diverse student populations in urban schools different from their own (Howard, 2003). The objective of this study was to examine those effective teaching practices that were culturally responsive causing student learning to be both engaging and motivating for African American students. By sharing these practices, teachers may come to a place in which they are able to properly assess the "gaps" or deficits in learning and achievement of their students and then develop culturally responsive and relevant strategies to address these "gaps" continuously (Sleeter, 2001).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the demographic environment of today's urban schools, an acknowledgment and understanding of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students as well as a desire to use and or acknowledge their own cultural experiences to modify or enhance the classroom environment arguably are necessary traits of the effective modern educator. Studies on cultural diversity make the assumption that the academic achievement of students from culturally diverse backgrounds will improve if schools and teachers make an attempt to ensure that the classroom instruction is conducted in a manner that is responsive to the student's home culture (Nawang, 1998). This type of instruction is known in the research literature as culturally responsive (Erickson, 1997), culturally congruent (Au & Kawakami, 1994), culturally compatible (Jordan, 1997), or culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1990).

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), therefore, is designed to give all students an equal chance at academic success (Irvine, 1990; Nieto, 2002; Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Through establishing a community of learners, students become active members of the learning process, thus contributing to their academic success. In the meantime, the culturally aware teacher helps the students consider that they can maintain high standards of excellence without compromising their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive teaching and its significance of use in the classrooms of African American students in urban public schools. Based on the review of literature, categorical themes for this study will be created including: defining culturally responsive teaching and effective practices; teachers' knowledge and beliefs of use and the role as well as the impact that culturally responsive teaching plays in the level of engagement and motivation of students; and the impact culturally responsive teaching has on teacher educator programs or the pre-service experience of new teachers. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework: Activity Theory which will be used to explore culturally responsive teaching as a meditational tool to aid students in achieving academically.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Principles of the Practice

Leaders in the field of multicultural education such as Ladson-Billings (1984, 1995), Nieto (2001), Gay (2000), Howard (2003), and Banks and Banks (2004) have advocated that the underachievement of African Americans, Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders, comes as a result of the lack of culturally responsive teaching. Indeed, it has been argued that a key to learning is an understanding of culture (Banks & Banks, 2004). Howard Gardner (2010) posits that culturally responsive teaching provides instructional scaffolding that encourages students to learn by building on the experiences, knowledge, and skills they bring to the classroom.

Some researchers (Gay, 2000; Kuykendall, 1992; Shade et al., 1997) believe that learning and cognitive styles of African Americans are largely dictated by their culture, but it must be noted that one cannot generalize this belief to every single individual who is African American (Sullivan, 2009). Geneva Gay (2002) posits that culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). To do this effectively, teachers need to be open to learning about the cultural particularities of the ethnic groups within their classrooms and transform that sensitivity into effective classroom practice (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001). The researchers posit that in order to meet the educational needs of children, educators must first be able to understand the social, cultural and political experiences of the child. In traditional schooling, these experiences are either absent or ignored (Bankston, 2002; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 2002). Researchers have repeatedly confirmed that teachers need to know more about the world of the children with whom they work in order to better offer opportunities for learning success (Graybill, 1997; Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003).

One way to overcome the obstacle of underachievement for students is through the use of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2000). CRT facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. Not only that, but CRT requires teachers to create a learning environment where all students feel welcomed, supported, and provided with the best opportunities to learn regardless of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Barnes, 2006).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997), a major pioneer in the field of multicultural education, suggests that teachers of minority students need to be adept at culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1992c) defined culturally relevant or responsive teaching as pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective not merely individual, empowerment. She states that teachers who are culturally responsive use “cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 32). She further stated that culturally responsive teachers develop learning that is intellectual, social, emotional, and political based on three criteria: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2003), and Nieto (2002) used the metaphor of a bridge to describe how teachers connect the students' school culture with their home cultures. They suggested that when teachers increase their cultural awareness about themselves, they become conscious of their own cultural perspectives, and they find ways to connect the students' home culture with the school culture. Culturally responsive teachers use teaching strategies to match the cultural needs of their students in the classrooms (Cummins, 1996; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2002).

In 2008, Sullivan conducted a mixed methodological study in which she examined five teachers' use of culturally responsive pedagogy to teach 25 African American seventh and eighth grade male students. Her study focused primarily on delineating relevant information about the specific culturally responsive instructional and

classroom management strategies that teachers use to support the communication and cognitive styles of African American male adolescent students during instruction.

Sullivan wanted to capture the ways that teachers in this study fostered a culturally relevant instructional environment for their African American male students. Further, she sought to determine the impact that the teachers' practices [teaching] had on their students' attitude toward learning and school in general; as well as the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning that guided their instructional and classroom management practices.

Sullivan (2008) conducted classroom observations; both teacher and student interviews and questionnaires. Questions that addressed the teachers' personal background and teaching experiences, philosophies and beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as specific classroom instructional and management strategies that are employed with their African American male students were asked. A two-part student questionnaire that focused on students' learning experiences as well as their feelings and perceptions about the impact that their teachers' instructional strategies and classroom management practices had on their learning, was also given.

As a result of gathering data over a three month period, the researcher determined that the five teachers who participated in this case study cultivated classroom environments that promoted caring and respectful relationships for their African American adolescent male students. According to Sullivan (2008), all of the participant teachers affirmed and appreciated their students' cultural identities as well as their own; and implemented instructional strategies that helped their male students to attain

academic success. Overall, Sullivan discovered that the teachers' perceptions about their African American adolescent male students not only served as the driving force behind their use of the instructional and classroom management practices that they employed, but also suggested that these teachers embodied a genuine concern for the academic welfare of these students that participated in this study.

The current study is closely related to my proposed study with the exception that Sullivan (2008) focused only on adolescent males. Her research was grounded in the literature that culturally responsive teaching has a positive impact on the academic achievement of African American students. Sullivan's study addressed the culturally responsive instructional practices of her participating teachers and the impact it had on their students' attitude toward learning and school. Although this study only focused on adolescent males, Sullivan's study proved that culturally responsive teaching practices as well as having a genuine concern for the students [males] being taught had a direct effect on their academic achievement. This study's findings, participants and procedures used are closely connected to my study and will definitely serve as a guide for my study.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been described by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997). Culturally responsive pedagogy has the following characteristics that are void of the constraints of knowledge that are dictated by mainstream culture: it has an empowering nature that enables students to believe in themselves and their abilities to succeed; its transformative nature helps students to develop knowledge, skills, and values

essential to becoming social critics capable of participating in important decision-making processes (Au, 1993; Erickson, 1987; Gordon, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them; it teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally “validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and Emancipatory” (p. 29). Hence, when teachers are equipped with the knowledge about the way students construct and process information taught to them, they will be more apt to identify and focus on students’ strengths to further their academic success (Delpit, 1995; Guion, 2005). Additionally, teachers’ knowledge of their students’ learning and cognitive styles and communication skills will also enable them to seek out and incorporate materials and instructional strategies that correspond best to their students’ needs. Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's' cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 29)

Culturally responsive teachers realize the importance of academic achievement, but also the maintaining of one's cultural identity and heritage (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teachers care about their students. They provide choices and are unrelenting in their efforts to make sure their students understand. This is one reason as to why culturally responsive teaching is needed and vital in multicultural diverse classrooms.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Characteristic Roles of Culturally Responsive Teachers

Over the past decade or so, several researchers have attempted to identify characteristics that distinguish those teachers that subscribe to the pedagogy of culturally responsive teaching opposed to those teachers that do not. Bailey and Paisley (2004), Banks and Banks (2004), Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Nieto (1999) define culturally responsive teachers based on the following nine characteristics: they acknowledge students' differences and similarities; they validate students' cultural identity through their classroom practices and the instructional materials they use; they educate their students about the diversity that exists in the world around them; they foster a culture of equity and mutual respect among students; they use valid assessment instruments to make judgments about students' ability and achievement; they promote positive interrelationships among students, their families, the community and school; they

encourage their students to think critically; they challenge students to strive for excellence as defined by their potential; and they help create within their students a sense of political and social consciousness.

Culturally responsive teaching is designed to prepare teachers to “build up and fill in the holes that emerge when students begin to use critical analysis as they attempt to make sense of the curriculum” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 32). Research has shown that teachers who are able to apply culturally responsive pedagogies are able to make a significant difference in the academic achievement of their students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Ladson-Billings, “culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). In identifying the core characteristics of culturally responsive teachers, Ladson-Billings (1995) writes that “culturally responsive teachers have a high degree of sociocultural consciousness, hold affirming views of students of diverse backgrounds, see themselves as agents of change, understand and embrace constructivist views of learning and teaching, and know the students in their classes” (p. 28). Ladson-Billings (2006) found that those teachers who are most successful with African American students are aware of the position of African Americans in a society and how that position affects expectations of students.

To explore the effects of Culturally Responsive Standards Based Instruction (CRSBI) on African American student academic achievement in grades 2 through 8 in

the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics, Jones (2008) conducted a mixed methodological study comparing the results of the California Standards Test CST (2007) of those students in a single, urban California school located in Englewood, California, that received CRSBI to those in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that did not. For the purposes of this study, Culturally Responsive Standards Based Instruction incorporates five aspects that include: caring, communication, curriculum, instruction (Gay, 2000), and a focus on California content standards. Teachers of this CRSBI School infused literature that is reflective of the African American culture across all content areas based on the California content standards. Students or “scribes” as they were referred to, work in collaborative groups or villages. The teachers or “advocates,” conduct classes four days a week in open, caring settings (Jones, 2008). There are no walls that separate or distinguish classrooms. Collegiality among staff and respect from and towards students was apparent to the researcher according to this study. Once a week, teachers received professional development and met to discuss curriculum, strategies, and individual student progress to meet the individualized needs of their students thus promoting high academic achievement. During professional development days for teachers, students participated in self-selected activities/classes of physical education, dance, theater, music, computers, art, and science/social science laboratories.

Longitudinal data from 2004-2007 was used to compare the African American Students’ data in the CRSBI school to the data of African American students in the state. Semi-structured classroom and school wide observations were conducted during one full day for qualitative measures; and a longitudinal time series of quasi-experimental

summative evaluation design format was used for quantitative purposes. Jones' (2008) sample compared 100% of the African American student population from a single school in California to 7.6% or 477,776 of the total African American students in Los Angeles Unified, the state of California and the CRSBI School for the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years who participated in the CST exams.

Results indicated that an African American student at the school which implements CRSBI with integrity as evidenced by the qualitative observations is 53% more likely to pass English Language Arts and 65% more likely to pass Math than an African American student in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Jones, 2008). The data further suggests that this same student is 58% more likely to pass English Language Arts and 72% more likely to be proficient in Math than an African American student in the state of California. Therefore, while the qualitative data proved that effective implementation is a daunting task requiring knowledge, desire, and commitment, CRSBI has an overwhelming positive effect on the academic achievement of African American students.

Ladson-Billings (1995b) also found that culturally responsive teachers encourage students to be academically successful, culturally competent, and thinkers who challenge socio-political beliefs and practices. In an earlier study, Ladson-Billings (1995) employed teacher interviews, classroom observations, and group analysis of video-taped teaching segments to investigate the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Results indicated the following broad perceptions common among teachers: that all students are capable of academic success; that pedagogy is an art and we are always in the process of

learning; that they, as teachers, are members of the community and that teaching is a way to give back to the community; and that knowledge can be pulled out of students.

Culturally responsive teachers create learning communities that resemble and advocate parental and family involvement enriching African American students' learning. According to research, families that are invited to share their "funds of knowledge" with the school community provide teachers with an insightful view of students' prior experiences, knowledge base, educational abilities, and preferred learning experiences (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Thompson, 2004). Likewise, culturally responsive educators cultivate learning communities that foster positive interrelationships among students, their families, peers, teachers, administrators, other school personnel and community members (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 1999).

Civil and Khan (2001) conducted a qualitative study in a large urban Arizona school district with high a high percentage of low income, Latino, English Language Learners to determine how well the students learn and master mathematical concepts of area and perimeter, with the incorporation of culturally responsive instruction. The collaborators used a "garden theme", which the students and families were familiar with, to connect the school's mathematics curriculum of area and perimeter for a class of 38 fourth and fifth graders. By utilizing a "garden theme," the collaborators used the students' and families' prior knowledge of gardening to teach mathematical concepts that all students were required to learn and know as addressed for grades 3-5 listed in NCTM's Principles and Standards for School Mathematics (2000). Civil and Khan

(2001) defined culturally relevant instruction as “instruction that links home and school by building on experiences shared by most students in the class” (p. 400). The students and their families planted geraniums in pots and soil donated by parents of the classroom; and for five months, the students and teacher kept a journal of their observations and measurement of growth. The students' participation in the garden project immediately became personal and meaningful. They nurtured their plants, kept careful garden journals, and brought information and resources from home to share with classmates. As the students developed their gardens, their mathematical knowledge in the areas of measurement, volume, perimeter, area, and related mathematical concepts began to increase. The students learned how to use the observations, classroom assessments, journal records and interviews of both the students and families to facilitate their learning of the concepts.

Civil and Khan (2001) concluded that as a result of this study, the mathematical experiences of the students' arose naturally. The garden connected the children and their families with the school and, in particular, with school mathematics. Civil and Khan further reported that when the teacher, the children, and their families collaborated to develop curriculum that was grounded in their experience and knowledge, culturally relevant instruction was possible and it actually led to a more rigorous mathematics lesson that helped these students advance in their school's mathematics program.

Through participation of the activities described in this project, students were able to build conceptual knowledge of mathematics and relate this acquired knowledge to regular practices in their everyday lives. This study was done to identify ways in which

mathematics could become a natural part of the students' everyday experience. These findings will inform my study as to how teachers can use acquired knowledge learned through projects in school and connect it to students' everyday experiences in life. In Civil and Khan's (2001) study, which informs mine, students worked together in concert with their peers and families as a community of learners in which they shared in the division of labor to acquire a desired outcome? This study supports my theoretical framework of activity theory as to how students will be able to build conceptual knowledge and relate that knowledge to regular practices and experiences in their everyday lives.

In creating a curriculum for teacher education in the area of culturally responsive teaching, Villegas and Lucas (2002) established six salient characteristics that distinguish culturally responsive teachers from their peers: they are (a) socially conscious recognizing that there are various lens through which different individuals perceive reality, and that such perceptions are deeply influenced by culture and environment, (b) hold affirming views about their diverse students, viewing them as an additional resource rather than problems or hindrances to learning, (c) readily assume responsibility as change agents in making schools responsive to all students, (d) possess a thorough understanding of how learners construct knowledge and possess the ability to encourage this process, (e) know about their students' lives including their communities, and (f) incorporate this knowledge into the design and delivery of their instruction and environments (as cited in Sullivan, 2009).

Finally, culturally responsive teachers strive to create caring classroom environments that are both respectful and inclusive of all students, provide opportunities for students to make sense of new ideas as they construct meaning, involve students in learning experiences that have personal meaning for them, set high expectations for all students, and value and respect the parents and communities that students come from (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Effective Practices of Culturally Responsive Teachers

Culturally responsive teachers must establish norms, procedures, and structures in their classrooms (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). When culturally responsive teachers establish norms such as “explicit assumptions, values, and purposes that are espoused by a learning group” (p. 34), they create a learning environment with shared understandings and values of the class. They establish procedures and routines that are used in the classroom. Teachers use the procedures and routines so the students will know what is expected of them in the classroom. The structures of the classroom are the rules of operations and patterns of organization so that the students know how the learning goals will be achieved and assessed. By establishing norms, procedures, and structures in the classroom, students know what their teachers will expect from them in the classroom. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg believed that this helped diffuse the confusions and ambiguities that often exist in the learning environments.

Culturally responsive teachers must have a well-developed knowledge base in order to be effective. Au (2006) argues that culturally responsive instruction promotes success for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who

traditionally experience failure. Beaulieu (2002, as cited in Gunn, 2010) states, “Instructional practices that address issues of culture and language hold the great promise for helping culturally and linguistically diverse learners to become successful readers” (p. 62). Likewise, culturally responsive teachers “employ differentiated instruction and integrate various learning materials which help to make learning more relevant, thereby increasing student success” (Irvine & Armento, 2001, p. 4).

Walker (2009) explored the impact of culturally relevant teaching practices and learning strategies of mathematics during a six-week summer enrichment program with 55, third-fifth grade students across Memphis, Tennessee, that had been deemed as “at-risk” due to their low mathematics performance in school and on the state wide assessment. Fifty-one (93%) of the students were African American; and four (7%) were Hispanic. McWhirter et al. (2007) defined “at-risk” based on an incorporation of commonalities of risk across contexts of the medical profession, educators, government officials and psychologist as,

A set of presumed cause-effect dynamics that place an individual adolescent or child in danger of future negative outcomes. “At-risk” designates a situation that is not necessarily current...but that can be anticipated in the absence of intervention. (p. 6)

Through this quantitative study, Walker (2009) randomly assigned selected participants to one of two groups – either an experimental (i.e., ethnocentric pedagogy) or control (traditional pedagogy). Participants in the ethnocentric group were exposed to culturally relevant classroom experiences through the use of mathematics in their daily

lives. Participants discussed the beginnings of mathematics in both the African American and indigenous Hispanic cultures, learned of the accomplishments of famous African Americans and Hispanics in mathematics; used hands-on math, life skills training, games and an on-line tutorial. Homework and class assignments were tailored made to the participants' interests. The participants learned as a community and worked together through cooperation rather than competition. Participants in Walker's (2009) traditional group were subjected to individualized learning and competition as characterized by the mainstream culture. Participants used textbooks to learn of the importance of mathematics in their daily lives; discussed famous European mathematicians and their accomplishments as well as the benefit of working on mathematics. Homework and class assignments followed traditional methods of skill and drill to reinforce application and knowledge of concepts. Student participants in this group were encouraged to celebrate their individual accomplishments, achievement and work independently (Walker, 2009).

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire; were assessed using *ALEKS* (Assessment Learning in Knowledge Spaces) an on-line, web-based individualized mathematics tutorial program that helps students learn a number of concepts and subjects in mathematics by identifying what the learner already knows and what the learner is ready to learn (Johnson, 2006). Two Likert scales were also given to the participants. *OTAS*, On-line Tutoring Attitude Scale is a 50-item scale that measures students' attitudes towards computers and on-line learning of mathematics based on four dimensions (Graff, 2003). Participant responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree with on-line learning. The other, a 6-item

cultural identity scale, *CBIS (Children's Black Identity Scale)*, assesses the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of identity of the participants (Belgrave et al., 1994).

A series of independent sample *t-tests* were performed to measure differences between the groups in returning homework assignments, completing homework accurately (i.e., scores) and the performance on *ALEKS* (i.e., the number of topics covered and mastered). Results revealed that participants in the ethnocentric group returned their homework assignments more often than participants in the traditional group, $t(47) = 3.34, p = 0.002$ and they [ethnocentric] scored significantly higher on homework assignments than traditional participants, $t(53) = 2.33, p = 0.024$ (Walker, 2009). The data also showed that there was no significant difference between the groups' performance on *ALEKS*-mathematics topics covered: $t(52) = -0.823, p = 0.414$ and mathematics topics mastered: $t(52) = -0.147, p = 0.884$. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction of group-by-gender which showed that females in the ethnocentric group returned their homework assignments more often than males in the same group ($F(1, 50) = 5.17, p < 0.05$). Based on these results, Walker (2009) concluded that there was a significant difference in the quality and amount of homework submitted by students in the ethnocentric group; but no significant difference in their performance scores on the *ALEKS* assessment.

Culturally responsive teachers use ongoing reflective practices in order to examine their procedures, interactions, instructional objectives, strategies and resources in relation to students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles (Irvine & Armento,

2001). In 2009, Johal (2010) conducted a qualitative case study in order to gain a better understanding of the thoughts, practices, beliefs and actions of teachers, who do in fact, embrace a multicultural perspective on science teaching and learning; and how they have facilitated such an approach. Johal interviewed and observed four teachers: two elementary school teachers in which one taught fifth grade in a rural community school and the other who taught a fifth/sixth grade science class in an urban elementary school. Both schools have large populations of students from different cultural backgrounds. The other two teachers taught science in urban high schools with large multicultural student populations in Alberta, Canada.

For three months, the researcher visited each teachers' classroom at least once a week on eight different occasions to observe and note: (1) the ways in which teachers interacted with their students; (2) evidence of multicultural themes in their science teaching if any; (3) how the teachers provided group work and engaged their students in group discussions; (4) how the teachers taught science to their diverse student populations; (5) the nature of resources and documents used to support the teachers' multicultural work; (6) the support given to the teachers from administration; and (7) the obstacles, if any, the teachers faced when implementing a multicultural approach in their teaching of science (Johal, 2010).

As a result of this study, Johal (2010) concluded that all four teachers agreed and believed that students from different cultures of the world bring with them distinct life experiences, a range of beliefs and values, and many ways of learning. It is the teacher that needs to be aware of the cultural diversity that exists in their classrooms so that they

can have a better sense of who their students are and how to facilitate their learning especially in the area of science (Johal, 2010). Based on the teacher interviews and discussions, all agreed that the contributions made by all cultures in science need to be more fully recognized because students benefit by being made aware that all cultures (Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Aboriginal, etc.) have contributed to the theoretical and practical applications in science.

According to the teachers' experiences and beliefs, it is not until science is taught from a multicultural perspective and different cultural groups are acknowledged for their contributions that ethnic-minority students see this diversity reflected in the curriculum. Furthermore, his data supported the claim that teachers need more well-written multicultural curriculum and resources in science education that are created by teachers and that better meet the needs of teachers and students (Johal, 2010).

By welcoming the challenge to understand themselves and know their students, culturally responsive teachers "...work toward a more equitable learning environment, provide classrooms that are more accessible, comprehensible, comfortable and successful places for learning for all students...no one loses and everyone gains" (Pransky & Bailey, 2003, p. 383). Kopkowski (2006) offers the following perception concerning culturally responsive pedagogy:

Culturally responsive teaching is not about one lesson on Martin Luther King, Jr. during Black History Month. It is not serving tacos in the cafeteria on Cinco de Mayo. Beyond heroes and holidays, it is about understanding students' home life, their language, music, dress, behavior,

jokes, ideas about success, the role of religion and community in their lives, and more. It is bringing the experiences of their 24-hour day into the seven hour school day to give them information in a familiar context. (p. 2)

Effective Culturally Responsive Practices in Literacy Instruction

Scholars of multicultural education and equity pedagogy (Au, 2006; Banks, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have continuously probed the notable divergence between the literacy achievement profiles of African American and Caucasian students across all grade levels (Reid-Agren, 2010). Au (2007) believes that literacy instruction for culturally diverse students should include a balanced approach that incorporates cognitive and emotive facets, critical thinking skills and lower level skill instruction such as phonics.

Alfred Tatum (2005) asserts that, “African Americans have had few positive encounters with education and literacy” (p. 48). Tatum believes that teachers must focus on approaches and strategies that mimic a balanced approach in teaching literacy, but they also must eradicate disempowering curriculum orientations in order to move beyond standardized test instruments. Tatum has suggested that teachers engage students with discussions about real issues, and provide meaningful literacy activities that address specific literacy strategies (i.e., guided reading and texts of self-interest that will motivate and engage students). Tatum attested that this type of engagement will not only influence good reading behaviors but will also increase high-stakes test scores.

In 2004, Tatum conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of an eighth grade African American male, in which he sought to identify texts and textual characteristics he found effective in assisting adolescent males to become better readers thus shaping their own identity (Tatum, 2008). For ten months, Tatum provided texts (i.e., poems, essays, speeches, books, and news clippings) written by him and other African American authors; and met with “Quincy,” the 16-year old eighth grade participant. Twenty 90-minute audio-taped discussions that took place every other Saturday at a bookstore or library were recorded. Quincy was required to record his reflections in a journal during the last ten minutes of each discussion. In 10-week intervals, the researcher conducted four 30-minute interviews to reflect on the discussions with the participant.

Discussion and interview transcripts were analyzed and coded. Three major themes emerged from the study: perceived supports, meaningful engagement with texts, and self-organizing processes (Tatum, 2008). Based on the results from this study, Tatum concluded that the support Quincy perceived from his teachers was lacking. Quincy assessed this lack of support as a “form of rejection stemming from his teachers’ perceptions regarding African American students as worthless” (p. 170). Quincy further contended that text he found to be meaningful outside of school was less valued within school. Tatum asserts that in Quincy’s school, “such texts would be mediated in ways that pay attention to the vital signs of reading (e.g., school based writing assignments) but ignore the vital signs of readers and reading instruction – namely, shaping classroom contexts to pay attention to students’ lived experiences and providing opportunities for meaningful engagement with texts” (p. 171). By the sixteenth week of this case study,

Quincy's engagement with texts and the level of questioning and reflections about texts had increased (Tatum, 2008). By the end of the study, Quincy had slowly become more convinced about the power of texts.

Tatum (2005) concluded that multicultural literature allows educators to engage students in literacy experiences they find meaningful and motivating" (p. 97). According to the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems or NCCRESt (2008), using multicultural literature that is authentic will ultimately increase literacy achievement and motivation among culturally diverse students. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2003) offer the following perspective:

Literature is a powerful medium. Through it, children construct messages about their cultures and roles in society. Literature offers them personal stories, a view of their cultural surroundings, and insight on themselves. When children read books that are interesting and meaningful to them, they can find support for the process of defining themselves as individuals and understanding their developing roles within their families and communities. (p. 203)

Tatum (2006) contends that "neither effective reading strategies nor comprehensive literacy reform effects will close the achievement gap in a race- and-class-based society unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum" (p. 48).

The Role of Culture in Culturally Responsive Instruction

Gay (2002) asserts that a student's culture may offer a sound influential factor on the outlook, principles, and demeanor that both teachers and students bring to the educational arena. Culture, according to Gay has the potential to be a critical component of resolution regarding underachievement of minority students. "Expanding culture to include not only that of the school, but also of the children's homes and of other groups in society, helps children to develop an understanding of life as holistic-not bifurcated, splitting their school and home lives" (Monkman, MacGillivray, & Leyva, 2003, p. 256).

In 2006, Delgado-Gaitan completed an ethnographic study in a California school in which she wanted to understand how culture actually played out in the daily life of classroom learning by incorporating the critical cultural perspectives of parents, teachers, students and family members of the students. In this study, Delgado-Gaitan outlined how the teachers' practices led to culturally responsive learning environments. Data was gathered from the participants by completing observations of the students in their classrooms and homes, conducting interviews of the teachers and parents, and making audio and video recordings of the students. She wanted to address the conditions of inequity in the classroom by looking at the context and content of the school. She organized the data by observing the context of the classrooms, which included classroom management, discipline, and the special needs of the students. She observed the content of the classrooms, school/classroom policies, curriculum, and literacy instruction within the classrooms. The context of the classrooms involved understanding how children live in and out of their homes. Teachers understood the cooperative, competitive, and

collaborative play that the children did in their own homes. They organized their classrooms so that the learning structures in schools reflected the students' home structures.

Delgado-Gaitan (2006) observed how teaching and learning were linked to the students' cultures. In order to support the cultural complexities of their students and families while establishing practices, school policies and curriculum that respected the culturally diverse groups, the teachers did the following five things: (a) focused the curriculum on the cultural diversity, human justice, and equal treatment of all students; (b) incorporated literacy skills for their students by using their heritage languages; (c) created learning environments that stressed the importance of learning English; (d) created equity in math and science for both boys and girls; and (e) created an interdisciplinary curriculum that built on the realities and complexities of the students' lives. By doing so, the teachers were able to make the curriculum relevant to the students in their classrooms. They were also able to expand their cultural perspectives by studying the lives of students of diverse cultures.

In 2003-2004, Johnnie McKinley conducted a study in which she identified successful culturally responsive strategies used by 29 teachers in an urban school district consisting of 2,175 elementary and middle school teachers and over 47,500 elementary and middle-school students. Teacher selection was solely based on whether or not at least five or more of that teacher's African American students had achieved at or above state and district standards on both the 2001 Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Qualitative data was collected via

surveys, telephone interviews, and structured in-person interviews and observations of teachers' classroom practices. Observed classroom strategies were compared with teachers' and principals' reports about the effectiveness of 121 strategies and contextual variations drawn from reviews by researchers (Banks et al., 2000; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995c; Shade et al., 1997).

From this study, McKinley (2004, 2010) formulated a framework that consisted of 42 common strategies or themes and contextual features that teachers of African American students use to enhance their pedagogy in order to meet the needs of their students. As a result, McKinley (2004) found that teachers shaped their student-teacher interactions through cultural congruence by providing relevant curriculum and materials; using constructivist approaches; providing meaningful and challenging curriculum; responding to students' traits and needs; using cooperative group instruction strategies; setting and maintaining high standards and clear mastery expectations; scaffolding instruction using prior learning, contextual features, and the environment; and building positive social relationships with and caring for students beyond the classroom. McKinley pointed out that the success of the teachers' responses were not necessarily due to their attention to the race/ethnicity of the students, but rather to providing equitable learning opportunities regardless of students' traits, academic gaps, or needs.

Engagement and Motivation

Student engagement has been increasingly defined as an indicator of successful classroom instruction according to a number of researchers (Chapman, 2003; Kenny, Kenny & Dumont, 1995; Schlecty, 1994; Willms, 2003). However, the concept and

construct of student engagement continues to evolve in the research literature. Despite efforts by researchers to define specific and discrete indicators of engagement, the body of research found which is often complex and sometimes conflicting; best supports a “multifaceted” definition according to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004). But, from the studies reviewed, engagement was defined by three categories: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Appleton et al., 2008; Harris, 2008; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008). Briefly defined:

- *Behavioral engagement* is participation in, or resistance toward, the learning environment;
- *Emotional engagement* relates to a student’s attitude, or receptiveness toward school; and,
- *Cognitive engagement* refers to the intellectual effort that students devote to accomplishing educational tasks (Ladd & Dinella, 2009). According to the research, cognitive engagement appears to be the most strongly linked to learning, although emotional and behavioral engagement may aid cognitive engagement (Harris, 2008).

Indicators such as assignment completion, success rates, extracurricular participation, attendance, and behavioral violations monitor emotional and behavioral engagement (Reschly et al., 2008). Engagement has increasingly become valued as an outcome of school improvement activities. In fact, numerous studies have shown that student engagement in school drops considerably as students get older (Anderman & Midgley, 1998). By the time students reach middle school, lack of interest in schoolwork

becomes increasingly apparent in more and more students (Lumsden, 1994). There are many factors that contribute to students' interest and level of engagement in learning, and teachers have little control over many of those factors (Lumsden, 1994). However, research has shown that teachers can influence student motivation utilizing certain practices that do work; and that there are ways to make assigned work more engaging and more effective for students at all levels (Anderman & Midgley, 1998; Dev, 1997; Skinner & Belmont, 1991).

In an effort to improve both the academic performance of 134,706 students and the teaching and learning environment of 104 schools from 30 different states spanning across the United States, Yazzie-Mintz (2009), Director of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) created a report highlighting the key findings from data collected from a student engagement survey with the purpose of recommending strategies for strengthening student engagement for effective school (classroom) improvement (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). The central component of the study was the survey instrument which took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The student survey investigated the levels and dimensions of student engagement in the life and work of high schools, providing rich and valuable data on students' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors regarding engagement in the educational process. For two consecutive years, Spring of 2007 and 2008, Yazzie-Mintz administered the HSSSE survey to 104 schools with the average (mean) number of students enrolled of 937 in 2007 to 119 schools with an average student enrollment of 1,047 students in 2008.

Results from the two surveys pointed out that engaging instruction is critical to effective teaching and learning (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). Four out of five students reported that they are bored in class. Students reported that the source of their boredom was mostly due to the material not being interesting. One out of three students reported that they were bored in class mainly because they had no interaction with their teacher. Students were asked to rate the degree to which various types of instructional methods excite/engage them. Students rated those methods that involved working and learning with their peers as “Most highly.” While “Discussion and Debate” was rated as to “Some degree” or “Very much exciting/engaging” by approximately three out five students (61% in 2007, 60% in 2008), while only 16% of respondents in 2007 and 17% in 2008 rated this instructional method as “Not at all exciting/engaging.” “Group Projects” were rated similarly. For each year, 60% of respondents rated this instructional method as to “Some degree” or “Very much exciting/engaging”, while only 16% in rated it as “Not at all exciting/engaging.” Results further revealed that students were excited/engaged by instructional methods which included them as active participants. Nearly half of the respondents (44% in 2007; 43% in 2008) were engaged/excited to “Some degree” or “Very much” when asked about “Presentations.” Students reported being least excited/engaged about instructional methods which did not permit them to play an active role in the method of delivery such as that of, “Teacher Lecture.” This method was rated as to “Some degree” or “Very much exciting/engaging” by no more than one out of four students (24% in 2007, 25% in 2008), while 46% of the respondents in 2007 and 48% in

2008 rated this instructional method as “Not at all exciting/engaging” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009).

From these results, the researcher noted and supports the body of research that has been devoted to establishing the existence of an achievement gap in schools in the United States with the greatest focus being on the racial achievement gap between the scores on standardized assessments of students of different races (Ferguson, 2003, 2005).

However, Yazzie-Mintz (2009) further purports that the data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) suggests the existence of another gap: *the engagement gap*. Findings from his 2007 and 2008 study reveal that: (1) girls reported higher levels of engagement than boys; and (2) White and Asian students reported higher levels of engagement than students of other races/ethnicities.

Students are said to be engaged when they are attracted to their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and demonstrate a willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process. Simply put, student engagement defines a student’s attitude towards school (Bomia et al., 1997).

Considerable research endeavors have focused on student learning as a result of engagement and motivation (Graham, 1994). Engagement and motivation are essential for effective learning, but it has not always been easy to demonstrate how they influence learning and achievement (Ainley, 2004). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) defined motivation in reading as “the individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, process, and outcomes of reading” (p. 405). In other words, motivation is a concept distinct from attitude and interest. According to Cunningham and Cunningham

(1992), engagement is the most commonly used term when referring to the relationship between motivation and learning. Motivation is about *energy* and *direction*, the reasons for behavior, why we do what we do. Engagement describes energy in action; the connection between person and activity (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005). Engaged learners work in a motivated way. That is, they employ the skills and strategies they have with effort, persistence and an expectation of success (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992). One of the most important aspects of motivation is self-confidence also known as self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). From a review of literature on self-efficacy, much research has been done on the effects and impact of it. However, for the purposes of this literature review, a brief definition has been provided to connect the thought as to how motivation is driven by self-efficacy.

“Self-efficacy refers to beliefs a person has about his or her capabilities to learn or perform behaviors at designated levels” (Schunk & Zimmerman 1997, p. 34). Bandura (1986), a socio-cognitive theorist, claims that self-efficacy is the beliefs that help determine how much effort a person will put forth, how long a person will persevere through obstacles, and how resilient a person will be in the face of adversity. Bandura further posits that self-efficacy is not simply a matter of how capable one is, but how capable one believes oneself to be. In other words, the beliefs that one holds about themselves and their ability to perform at a certain level, motivates them to perform.

Beliefs, Perceptions and Knowledge Base of Culturally Responsive Teachers

In order to improve and understand the instructional practices and decisions that teachers make on a daily basis, their values and beliefs have to be studied (Fang, 1996). Examining the values and beliefs that teachers hold about what works and what does not work opens an avenue for teachers to share their knowledge and insight about teaching (Schubert & Ayers, 1999). When teachers know about the cognitive, learning, and communication styles that are inherent among individuals of a particular culture, they can plan more effective instruction that incorporates this knowledge as a means of helping their diverse students to achieve academic success (Perez, 2004).

Effective teachers must ensure that their teaching strategies are congruent with the cultural makeup of the classroom population (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). Researchers agree that teaching and learning experiences that ignore student cultural diversity impede students' ability to reach their fullest potential (Au, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Stoicovy, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Studies by researchers (Banks, 1996; Howard, 1999, 2007; Nieto, 1999) reveal that when teachers understand that their students' ways of thinking, behaving, and being are intricately intertwined with factors like race, culture, ethnicity, social class, and language, they are more capable of navigating the sociocultural barriers that separate them from students (Sullivan, 2009). Jackson (2003) averred that in many schools nationwide, many African American students who possess high intellectual capacity are underachievers simply because they are robbed of opportunities that can "elicit their attention, creativity, and potential." Moreover, she

added, because of their teachers' misperceptions about race and lack of knowledge about how to teach them to reach expectations beyond what society has set for them, these students' skills and potentials "atrophy to the point of low performance."

Research examining self-reflection and self-knowledge about one's own experiences and practices has included race reflective journaling (Milner, 2003), autobiographical writing, dialogue journals, and field experiences (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004). According to Sleeter (2005), examining how teachers make teaching decisions is important because it guides what teachers do.

The ideologies and preconceived notions that people develop come from their own life experiences; and are influenced by family history, traditions, everyday life, media, and school curricula (Sleeter, 2005). Unfortunately, teachers often find that they are unable to connect with students and effectively guide their learning when they are from a different culture. This may be, in part, because teachers remain unaware of their own beliefs and spend little time examining their own particular cultural beliefs and biases (Irving, 2006).

In 2008, Toney conducted a qualitative study exploring how four elementary school teachers' beliefs were shaped by their personal backgrounds and experiences using culturally responsive instructional practices for African American students. Data was collected through individualized interviews, classroom observations and focus group sessions with each of the four teachers. Three common themes surfaced among the participants in the study. Each teacher demonstrated: (a) Cultural sensitivity that fostered student centered instruction; (b) that "Failure is not an option"-high expectations are the

standard; and (c) self-reflection of one's own background and experiences has an influence on current practices. The results of the study revealed that, all of the teachers shared a common goal when developing and implementing their instructional practices which was for their students to have meaningful educational experiences that would build on a body of existing knowledge. The teachers' instructional practices sustained student engagement in the learning process, increased opportunities for success, and limited the students' chances for failure and academic underachievement. Based on these findings, Toney concluded that the teachers' personal beliefs and experiences did shape their instructional practices and strategies within the classroom which led to improved teaching and student achievement.

In 2004, Honaker designed a qualitative study to investigate the personal experiences, beliefs, and instructional practices of two effective Title 1 White teachers, as defined by the International Reading Association's (2000) criteria of excellent reading teachers, who worked primarily with African American students. Title 1 is the largest federally funded educational program, authorized by Congress, within the United States. This program provides additional supplemental funding to both public and private schools to meet the educational needs and goals of K-12 students that are considered to be economically disadvantaged due to poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Two in-depth case studies that included non-participant observations, interviews, and collection of student artifacts, over a two month period of the two teachers were conducted in two different schools and settings within the Ohio Public Schools (Honaker, 2004). Honaker observed both teachers twice a week for one hour each during their

literacy instruction with Title 1 students in grades 1 and 2. She wrote rich descriptive detailed accounts of her observations including strategies and resources used. Based on the International Reading Association's (2000) effective criteria for teaching reading and Honaker's data, she found that both teachers: (1) had a belief system that was supported by their daily practices that "all children could learn to read and write" (p. 108); (2) Used continuous assessments and related the readings, mainly non-fiction texts, to the students' prior experiences; (3) Were knowledgeable about a variety of ways and strategies to teach reading to their diverse populations and when to use certain methods and or strategies to make the lesson/reading more interesting; (4) Offered a variety of reading materials and texts based on authors and stories that looked like the students in front of them; (5) Used flexible grouping and tailored the instruction to meet the individual needs of children; (6) Motivated and encouraged their students that they were "good" readers.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) summed up the complexities and interconnected understandings and skills that are involved in culturally responsive teaching as...

Being a culturally responsive teacher is not simply a matter of applying instructional techniques, nor is it primarily a matter of tailoring instruction to incorporate assumed traits or customs of particular cultural groups... culturally responsive teachers have a high degree of sociocultural consciousness, hold affirming views of students of diverse backgrounds, see themselves as agents of change, understand and embrace constructivist views of learning and teaching, and know the students in their classes. It is

the combination of all these dispositions, knowledge, and skills that enables them to design instruction that facilitates student learning. (p. 27)

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Pre-Service Programs

As the bar for educational standards rises for academic performance of students in the U.S., schools and school districts, the demographics of America's P-12 schools also changes. More school districts, such as those in Illinois and New York City Public schools are using performance management measures to closely analyze student assessment data, student work samples, instructional strategies, and school programming in an effort to close the achievement gap between student subpopulations and the dominant culture (Finch, 2008).

In general, multicultural researchers have concluded that teachers who understand diverse student populations and their educational needs are critical to student success in the classroom (Haycock, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The changing demographics of U.S. P-12 schools coupled with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have intensified the necessity for teachers to be culturally responsive to their diverse student populations. Higher education institutions responsible for educating preservice (initial candidates) and in-service (advanced candidates) teachers must, be responsive to this growing need as well (Sleeter, 2001). However, according to Carl Grant (1994), the subject matter, content, and nature of the experiences offered in preservice courses have undergone little change, especially in comparison to the clearly unmet needs of urban students and students of color. Although the research on teacher preparation programs that specifically address urban preparation or multicultural education is very limited

(Grant, 1994), scholars in the field of teaching and learning responsible for educating teachers, must be committed to conducting and advancing research that will result in curriculum that advances both preservice and in-service teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions to close the academic achievement gap between the dominant culture and diverse student sub populations (Brown, 2004; Finch 2008; Laframboise & Griffith, 1997).

The failure of teacher education programs to prepare teachers for urban schools is contributing to the national, social, educational, economic, and political crises we are facing today (Grant, 1994). Zeichner (1993) suggested that the United States is in an educational crisis because student teachers need to be prepared to teach in culturally diverse settings and have the competence to be able to meet the academic needs of all students. By reviewing research studies on teacher preparation programs, Sleeter (2001) found that university faculty members in many programs have been preparing preservice teachers who are White to teach in culturally diverse and urban settings. Sleeter posits that there is a significant mismatch between who chooses to go into teacher education and who is in the public schools. A large proportion of White, middle-class teacher candidates bring attitudes, beliefs, experiences and knowledge bases that do not equip them to teach well in culturally diverse classrooms (p. 238). Brown (2007) argues that teacher education programs should continue to build on the current knowledge bases that contain the special knowledge, skills, processes, and experiences essential for preparing teachers to be successful when teaching students from diverse backgrounds and to use that knowledge to prepare teachers for today's classrooms.

According to Ladson-Billings (2001), “White teachers have no idea what it feels like to be a minority in the classroom. The pervasiveness of Whiteness makes the experience of most teachers an accepted norm” (p. 81). Cultural competence, as defined by Ladson-Billings refers to “the ability of students to gain an understanding and respect for their own cultures” (p.78). Rarely do prospective teachers, particularly White teachers, examine education through this lens. Ladson-Billings further posits that teachers themselves must be aware of their own culture and its role in their lives. Teachers must be able to recognize their own cultural perspectives and biases, thus taking on the full responsibility and accountability for learning about their students’ culture and community thereby using that knowledge as a basis for teaching. For many preservice teachers and teachers alike, “thinking about race becomes an emotional experience resulting in resistance, misunderstanding, rage, and/or feelings of inefficacy” (Rosenberg, 2004, p. 257). According to Howard (2006), “this personal transformation of thinking about one’s own race has been the missing piece in the preparation of White teachers” (p. 6).

Often, educators in teacher preparation programs have failed to focus on preparing teachers to teach in culturally diverse settings. Sleeter (2001) said, “The [multicultural] programs themselves provided disjointed multicultural content, dependent on the interests of individual professors” (p. 95). Student teachers often take the classes while they are preparing to be teachers in the classrooms. The classes do not become relevant until the student teachers actually become the teacher in their own classrooms. Then, they are concerned with surviving in the classroom and managing student behavior,

rather than teaching the content that they learned in a multicultural education class (Mitchell, 2007). Therefore, prospective teachers must have numerous opportunities for guided assistance in concrete, real-life experiences (Birmingham, 2003; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

In a qualitative study (Cross, 2003) that investigated the transference of pre-service teacher learning about racism to classroom practice, the researcher noted that 90 % of more than 1,200 teacher education programs in the United States follow a traditional teacher education curriculum. This particular study, concerned with the cultural mismatch between White teachers and students of diverse backgrounds, found that even though pre-service teachers learned some essential culturally responsive literacy practices, their implementation of these in their field experiences was superficial.

For instance, pre-service teachers in this study received information and held discussions about how to respect children's language and use that language as a bridge for teaching children English, but the pre-service teachers in this study were not able to connect children's primary language to English in a meaningful way. Their implementation was mainly in the form of avoiding public labeling of the children.

Prospective teachers in Cross' (2003) study also used multicultural literature with the children, but they did not engage themselves or the children in examining the texts from a critical perspective, questioning the perspectives and issues of equality, race, culture, and language. While the pre-service teachers recognized the diversity among the children they taught, they were only able to develop activities at a contributions approach level (Banks, 2004). Finally, the findings of the study indicated that the teacher

candidates held deficit views regarding the knowledge and experience of the children and were not able to use children's background knowledge as a way to improve teaching.

Cross (2003) found that the shift from observation to interaction did not occur and that the pre-service teachers were not working with children in culturally responsive ways. In considering what may have contributed to this lack of transference, the researcher posited that the prospective teachers did not have to engage in any personal or relational (Milner, 2003) reflective thinking regarding their status or positions in society related to culturally diverse groups. Cross (2003) writes "that "learning about race needs to go beyond being a personal benefit to White teachers to competence in teaching in multiracial contexts" (p. 207).

Researchers Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) indicate that some of the widespread reforms in multicultural teacher education reform, such as adding a multicultural course to the curriculum and having field experiences take place in more diverse settings, have been more rhetorical than real, piecemeal and optional... (p. 932). Cochran-Smith et al. further examined studies regarding multicultural teacher education programs chronologically. With the increasing diversity among school populations beginning in the 1980s, many colleges and universities were required to revise their teacher education programs to include multicultural education. In the 1990s, a growing awareness of the discontinuity between the teaching force and student diversity surfaced. In fact, Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) note that, in that same decade, Ladson-Billings called for a "fundamental, paradigmatic change in teacher education for diversity" (p. 94). Cochran-

Smith et al. concluded that this needed change which has been well documented in the literature for the last 25 years, has yet to occur.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is based on Activity Theory (AT), which was created by Lev Vygotsky, A. N. Leont'ev and Alexander Luria between the 1920's and 30's in the Soviet Union (USSR) (Vygotsky, 1978). Activity theory provides a socio-cultural and historical lens through which human activity can be holistically analyzed. Activity theory, which allows a variety of ways to analyze phenomena, provides a framework of community based learning where learners can work together, establishing shared knowledge (David & Victor, 2002). However, as a conceptual framework, Activity theory can be used to investigate the effective practices of culturally responsive teaching and the effects of its practices on engagement and motivation of students within a classroom.

According to the socioculturalistic view, cognitive development (or learning) is a socially mediated activity (Johnson, 2006). Thus, the way that our consciousness develops depends on the specific social activities in which we engage, and the symbolic and physical artifacts with which we interact (Johnson, 2006). According to Engeström (1987), Activity Theory can be used to understand the process of transformation within a system (such as a classroom) as well as illustrate how different systems interact with, and transform each other overtime (1987). Activity Theory enables one to understand learning as a complex result of tool mediated interactions. Activity theory analyzes how members or *subjects* (teachers/students) of a specific *community* (school/classroom/

ethnic) utilize the *tools* (instructional practices, strategies, or materials) within the community and the *rules* (classroom/school) that govern the use of the tools, based on their *division of labor* (*teacher-teaches; students-learn*) to yield or achieve a particular *outcome* (Engeström, 1990).

In activity theory, the concept “activity” takes on a different meaning than its more common definition. First, it is the minimal unit of analysis to understand human cognitive development; and second, it encompasses dynamic human practices in the world and defines them in cultural and historical terms (Sawchuk, Duarte, & Elhammoumi, 2006). Activity theory conceptualizes learning as an activity and the activity as learning (Engeström, 1999). According to Engeström (2001), any theory of learning must answer at least four questions: (1) Who are the subjects of learning, how are they defined and located?; (2) Why do they learn, what makes them make the effort?; (3) What do they learn, what are the contents and outcomes of learning?; and (4) How do they learn, what are they key actions or processes of learning?

Activity theory is an appropriate choice for this study because it attempts to weave together individual development and the social-conditions of everyday life (Thorne, 2004). Activity theory incorporates six basic elements of an activity: *subject, object, tools, community, rules and division of labor* (Engeström, 1987; Kutti, 1991; Kuttii, 1996). The elements of activity systems are depicted in Figure 1 below.

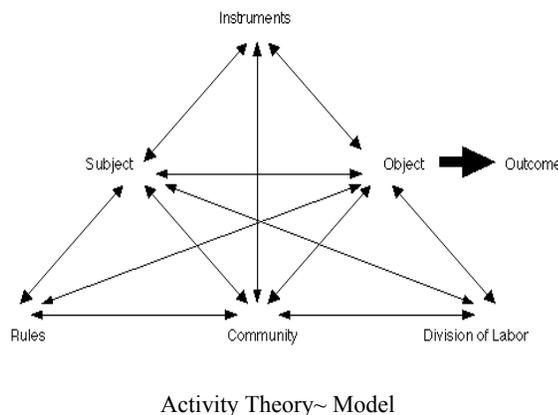


Figure 1. Activity Theory

The elements in the model represent specific, transactional aspects of human activity (Engeström, 1987; Kutti, 1991; Kuttii, 1996). In human contexts, the activity is *mediated* meaning that the action comes indirectly through the use of culturally established *instruments or tools*, such as language, artifacts, and or established procedures (Ryder, 1995). Subjects are participants in an activity, motivated toward a purpose or attainment of the object (Engeström, 1987; Kutti, 1991; Kuttii, 1996). The term “object” has often been referred to as the goal of an activity, the subject’s motives for participating in an activity, and the material products that subjects gain through an activity. Tools are socially shared cognitive and or material resources that subjects can use to attain the object. Informal or formal rules regulate the subject’s participation while engaging in an activity. The community is the group or organization to which subjects belong. The division of labor is the shared participation responsibilities in the activity determined by the community (Kaptelinin, 2005). Finally, the outcome is the consequences that the subject faces because of their actions driven by the object. These

outcomes can encourage or hinder the subject's participation in future activities. Simply stated, the focus of an activity system is how subjects transform objects, and how the various system components mediate this transformation.

However, for the purposes of this study, Activity theory was used to analyze how members or *subjects* (teachers/students) of a specific *community* (school/classroom/ethnic) utilized the *tools* (instructional practices, strategies, or materials) within the community and the *rules* (classroom/school) that governed the use of the tools, based on their *division of labor* (*teacher-teaches; students-learn*) to yield or achieve a particular *outcome* (Engeström, 1990). See Figure 2 for details regarding the diagram of Activity theory as used in this study.

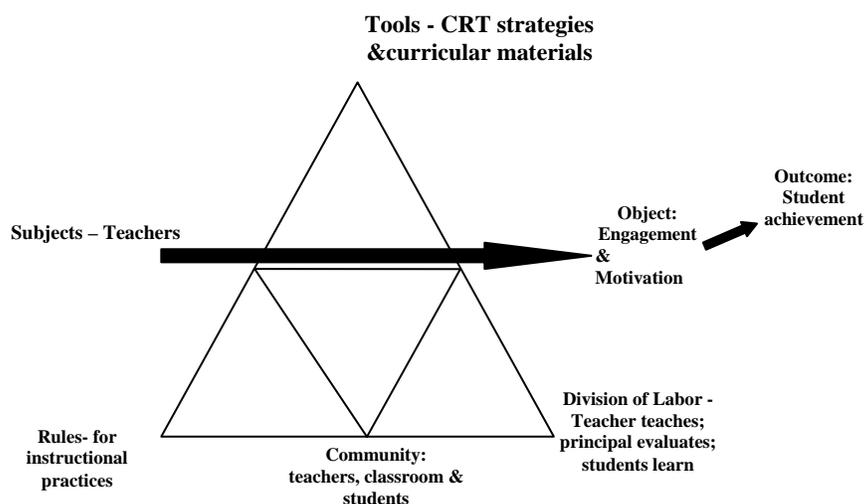


Figure 2. Activity Theory Diagram Aligned to this Study

The researcher observed the instructional teaching strategies and practices (*activity*) utilized by two eighth grade teachers during literacy instruction for their effectiveness with African American students. The *subjects* (teachers) used *tools* i.e.

culturally responsive teaching strategies and curricular materials within the classroom setting during instruction. The *object* or goal of the activity was to increase student engagement and motivation resulting in the ultimate *outcome* of student achievement. As the teachers and students engaged in the teaching and learning process respectively within the classroom, student engagement and motivation was observed of the students through individualized and within cooperative group settings. As a *community* of learners, the students in collaboration with their teachers produced products of student work based on what was taught, learned and expected from the lessons through instruction.

The community was governed by a set of *rules* (classroom/school). According to Engeström (1996) rules, community, and division of labor provide means for analyzing characteristics of a classroom. Rules are created for different and distinct purposes within a classroom and school. In classrooms, rules are often attached to participation structures (Cazden, 2001) that guide behavior and activities as well as discourse within groupings. Nicolopoulou and Cole (1993) explain that rules are inherent in the structure of the activity and are necessary in order to carry out the activity. Teachers and students create classroom rules regarding behavior and consequences. Teachers may create rules or “norms” as to how student work time and or discussions are to be honored. The principal may create rules as to how lesson plans and learning foci should be implemented; management of a classroom and expectations for teaching and student learning. Students may create rules as to how group tasks are to be organized and

completed. However, knowing who does what (*division of labor*) within a task or activity is just as important.

Subjects

Activity Theory defines the *subject* as a participant or as a group of participants involved in an activity (Ryder, 2008). In this study, the teachers were the *subjects* that used instructional practices and strategies to instruct the students within their classrooms. The teachers focused on building comprehension skills, word study through vocabulary, using prior knowledge and experiences and making literal connections for the purposes of writing through self, text and world. Other literary resources such as poems, novels and short stories were used to assist in the facilitation of teaching certain concepts and skills.

Tools

Based on Engeström's (1987) work, Activity theory highlights the importance of using tools as a means of achieving a common goal. In this study, teachers used culturally responsive materials, and teaching strategies and practices as a means to increase student motivation and engagement through teaching (Putnam & Borko, 2000). As a component of Activity theory and according to Scanlon (2005), tools or in this context, the curriculum materials selected, are practical tools in which the teachers engage their teaching practices. The teaching practices and strategies employed by the teachers were also seen as tools within this study.

Culturally Historical Activity Theory or CHAT can serve as a useful tool to study teachers, teacher learning, and teaching (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally responsive teaching is good teaching; however, good teaching is not necessarily culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching not only includes all that is considered good teaching, but also acknowledges the student's cultural background, builds on the student's experiences, and affirms the student's cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Williams & Woods, 1997; Zeichner, 2003). When teachers do not value or meet the cultural needs of their students or demonstrate cultural competence, their knowledge and practices or lack thereof may hinder students' academic and social progress (Nieto, 1992).

Teaching involves two kinds of processes: the planning and setting up of learning activities that are intended to engage the minds of students in ways that produce learning, and the management of student engagement in those activities. Management of student engagement requires teachers to be continuously involved in making moment by moment decisions in a constantly changing context.

Classrooms are complex social settings in which teachers must process a great deal of information rapidly, deal with several agendas simultaneously, and make quick decisions throughout the day (Brophy & Good, 1986, p. 370).

In this sense, teaching is always a spontaneous and creative activity in which the teacher is responding to whatever signs are available that indicate how students are engaged by the activities that make up the intended curriculum (Clark & Peterson, 1986). This intended curriculum serves as a tool within the human mediated activity system.

Division of Labor

Conversely, when teachers are effectively teaching and engaging students in the learning process, a relationship between student learning and participation in classroom activities exists (Nuthall, 2000). It is during this time, that teachers pay close attention to the structure of classroom activities and how they manage student participation during these activities. According to the research on Activity Theory as it relates to *division of labor*, the teacher controls the pace, sequencing and selection of the instructional activity or lesson (Cazden, 1986).

Community

Within Activity Theory, community members divide the labor in collaboratively working toward the object (Ryder, 2008). The classrooms served as the official learning site of the community. Each student contributed to the learning and engagement process by offering their “goods” to the community of learners within the classroom which included the teachers. The classroom has been viewed as a learning community in which students acquire expertise in managing their own learning (Brown, 1994; Brown & Campione, 1994). The teachers introduced a curricular tool to the community and based on their knowledge and instructional practices, the tools engaged a community of learners as they completed assigned tasks effectively. The students were engaged in the curricular activities of the lesson based on the tool of choice. Activity Theory research states that tools are used most effectively in communities when all of the members of the community adopt the use of the tool with the motivation to achieve a common outcome (Engeström, 2004).

Rules

According to Activity Theory, rules establish the norms in the learning community for behaviors of its members (Ryder, 2008). The principal created and established the teaching and learning expectations for the teachers. Teachers are presented the standards for teaching what students should know and be able to do in every core subject area at every grade level. As a rule that has been established by the state and school district, every teacher's instructional practices and delivery as well as pedagogical and content knowledge has to be evaluated as well. Although the principal was charged with carrying out the District's rule of evaluating the teachers within her building, there were no established rules or guidelines governing how teachers were to implement or model instructional strategies and practices or what materials to use during the implementation. However, teachers were given total autonomy and accountability for their instructional practices, curricular materials, and managing their classrooms based on rules they have established within the classroom.

Summary of the Literature Review

In this literature review, research related to culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive practices, teacher attitudes, beliefs, disposition and knowledge regarding multicultural education were examined. A section of this chapter reviewed the seminal work of women like Geneva Gay (2000) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) regarding culturally responsive theory and pedagogy while examining the theories that led to its development and how it is implemented in classrooms. Research reviewed in this chapter demonstrated the benefits that African American students gain through culturally responsive instruction and practices. Those strategies that were highlighted

from the research have proven to be valuable in shaping the successful learning experiences for minority students (Toney, 2008). Because a sociocultural approach to human development is the underpinning framework that could guide the development of sound educational practices for teacher education, activity theory was used as the theoretical tool for this study.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine culturally responsive teaching practices and its effects in predominately African American classrooms. By conducting this study, the researcher identified and examined the effective practices of two culturally responsive teachers in an urban public school that had positive effects on African American students' level of engagement and experiences in the classroom. To give focus and direction to this study, the exploratory questions that guided this comparative study were:

- (1) How do culturally responsive teaching practices affect student engagement and motivation in the classroom?
- (2) What is the relationship between teacher's knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and teachers' practices?

This chapter outlined the methods, instrumentation and procedures used in this study. The chapter outlined the: (a) research design, (b) participants, (c) selection, (d) setting, (e) instrumentation, (f) data collection procedures, and (g) data analysis procedures.

Research Design

To answer the research questions for this study, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis that included observations, interviews, a survey and two student focus groups. Qualitative methodology was used because of its subjectivity that guides everything from the choice of a topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, selecting a methodology, and interpreting data (Ratner, 2002). According to Hays (2004), interviews are one of the richest sources of data in case studies; hence, semi-structured interviews employing focus questions were used in this study to uncover the facts and meanings employed by the two teacher participants in this study. The items for the protocol were gleaned from a list of questions created by my classroom teachers who serve on our school's leadership team. These teachers participate in the interviewing and selection process of potential teaching candidates for our school. Also, the researcher included questions from *The Skillful Leader-Confronting Mediocre Teaching* (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000) and *Strategies that Work-Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) to get at the "heart" of the teacher to determine their knowledge and insight on teaching students of color. It was through these open-ended interview questions that led to conversations and fact finding sessions that the researcher was able to determine patterns and similarities that define culturally responsive teachers. Qualitative research methods are designed to "help researchers understand the attitudes and behaviors of people within their natural, social and cultural contexts" (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005, as cited in Valdez-Noel, 2006, p. 72; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Whereas quantitative methods are used to rate the effectiveness of a tool or instrument imposed upon the subjects studied.

The researcher compared the effective practices of two highly effective and engaging teachers as described by their colleagues, principal and students. The researcher observed and described those practices that distinguish, if any, a culturally responsive teacher from simply what some may consider in the educational field, a “good teacher.” Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) describes a “good teacher” as one that uses pedagogical excellence that goes beyond some “magic bullet”, intricate formula or steps for instruction that addresses the individual academic needs of students, particularly African Americans, through culturally relevant teaching (pp.160-161). Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning thus valuing the students’ skills and abilities academically (p. 161). Therefore, “good teaching” according to Ladson-Billings rests in the pedagogical theory of culturally relevant teaching which rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To investigate the teachers’ understanding of culturally responsive teaching, the researcher began the data collecting process by obtaining demographic information from both teachers regarding their teaching backgrounds, trainings and experiences through a questionnaire. Based on these responses, the researcher conducted a total of seven site based face-to-face interviews (one with the principal; 2-pre, during and post- with each

classroom teacher) using an interview protocol to determine (a) How does their use of culturally relevant teaching practices affect the experiences, if any, of the students in their classroom? (b) What knowledge and beliefs they hold about their teaching practices that are culturally relevant? (c) Which practices they deem are most effective, engaging and motivating? And; (d) what pre-service experience(s), they had prior to teaching that impacted their beliefs about effective, culturally responsive pedagogy? During the interview process, the teachers were also asked to describe the diversity of their students; how they see themselves in relationship to their students, and describe curriculum and instructive changes they make to culturally respond to their students' needs. The aforementioned questions were not conclusive of the interview questions, but inclusive. The researcher conducted a total of 20 (10 per teacher) site based observations during the literacy block in which both teachers utilized a balanced approach (guided reading, reading/writing workshop) of teaching reading (see Appendix B for Teacher Interview Protocol).

This study included focus group data from students which gained insight as to their viewpoints and perceptions that in their opinion made each of the teachers responsive to their academic needs. The researcher observed and learned what and how [students] were kept engaged in lessons or activities that were culturally relevant to them when presented. According to Howard (2001), these viewpoints and perceptions from the students are rarely revealed in the research about teaching culturally diverse students. During this study, the researcher remained a non-participant in order to maintain

objectivity about what was observed and heard; and what the participants revealed verbally to the researcher.

Selection

Two eighth grade teachers were recommended by the principal of this school in which the study was conducted in. Based on their grade level planning, reflection, teaching practices and collaboration, the principal suggested that I approach them for this study. Although both teachers reportedly have different approaches, styles and methods in teaching the same material, their teaching philosophies are similar in that they are guided by their beliefs that “all children can learn.”

Participants

Teachers

The participants for this study consisted of two eighth grade teachers that were highly recommended by the building principal based on their teaching effectiveness, grade level planning and collaboration and student test results from the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) in Reading and Math. According to the standards of teaching and No Child Left Behind criteria from the Illinois State Board of Education, both teachers are highly qualified and certified to teach middle school students in Language Arts and one of the two teachers has a second endorsement in Social Sciences. Both teachers have successfully obtained at least a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited university or college in Education with a Type 03 Certification (General Elementary). However, one has completed a Master level program and the other is currently enrolled.

For the purposes of this study and anonymity of the participating teachers, pseudonyms will be used.

Ms. Baker is a first year, 25 year old African American teacher. In her senior year of high school, she was selected as a Golden Apple Scholar through a rigorous selection process that selects the brightest and most talented individuals slated to become a successful urban educator. Ms. Baker completed four summer institutes and an internship through Golden Apple. She earned her college degree in African Studies and a Middle School teaching certificate with endorsements in both Language Arts and Social Science. Ms. Baker completed her student teaching experience in an urban public school where she taught both African American and Latino children. Prior to teaching at this school, Ms. Baker taught Language Arts in an urban middle school located in an Eastern Metropolitan area located within the United States. The school was racially mixed serving 55% Hispanics, 15% immigrant families and 30% African Americans in an underserved low performing area of the city with over 98% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. Ms. Baker has received numerous awards and accolades in teaching; and is a second generation teacher following the footsteps of her grandmother.

The other eighth grade teacher, who will be referred to as *Ms. Belle*, is a European American with over 25 years of teaching experience in which 22 of those years have been in the Chicago Public Schools. Prior to becoming an urban school teacher, Ms. Belle worked for a non-profit organization and shared that she “kind of fell into teaching after substituting and discovered she actually liked it” (Interview, September 28, 2011). Ms. Belle matriculated through the traditional ranks of teaching by completing her

undergraduate degree in the college of education at a major university in elementary education with a concentration in language arts. After completing her degree, she obtained a teaching position in a low performing, 99% low income school. It was here that *Ms. Belle* became challenged with the issues that plague so many low performing, no parental support, lack of resources schools within the city that are still required to meet AYP and *leave no child behind*. Because of her steadfastness and resiliency to make a difference in the lives of the children served by her, Ms. Belle became a teacher leader that led the charge of organizing and chairing a professional learning community within her building among her colleagues; providing professional development in the area of literacy based on student performance data; and researched based interventions and strategies to creating an *early bird* tutoring program that she conducted five days a week before school for one hour, for her split class of 37 fourth and fifth graders in addition to the regularly scheduled school day which consisted of 5+ hours for instruction. After obtaining tenure within the school district, Ms. Belle, acquired a teaching position at a magnet school on the city's South side serving a diverse student population made up of 93% African American, 4% Latino, 2% Caucasian, 1% other; and 63% receiving free and reduced lunch. It was here where Ms. Belle has been recognized and received numerous awards and accommodations from the district office, her colleagues and building administrator(s) for her excellence in service and teaching. According to the building principal, Ms. Belle is very "reflective and conscious of her practice. She endeavors to make a "positive difference in her student's academic, social and emotional well being. She is regarded as a lead teacher in the school and often called upon to model her

teaching practices for her colleagues, particularly new teachers to the building” (conversation with Principal, 2011).

Students

There are 44 students, 22 in each classroom that make up the eighth grade class. A total of 24 eighth grade students (14 girls and 10 boys), 12 from each class, were randomly selected to participate in this study based on their overall performance as a result of their scores on benchmark assessments, class work assignments, projects and ISAT test results from the previous year. Those students that have obtained parental consent were then grouped into three categories: high, medium and low, based on their performance levels as determined by classroom performance. This way, the researcher was able to work with a sampling of students representing different performance levels from each class so that representation from the voices of every performance group was represented and data not biased based on one particular performance group.

The students’ composite scores in both reading and mathematics (ISAT test scores) for the 2009 and 2010 school years respectively, was 87.3% and 89.6%. It should be noted that although the students’ ISAT test scores were considered for categorical purposes for grouping children, they [scores] were not used to disqualify any potential student candidate from the focus group. The number of students that met and exceeded the State of Illinois Standards as determined by the ISAT Test superseded the city’s (80.1% in 2009 and 82.9% in 2010) overall composite scores for both years (CPS- Department of Research, Evaluation & Accountability, 2010). The State of Illinois and

the Chicago Public Schools use this information as a major indicator of achievement and consideration of application for the selective enrollment high schools within the district.³

Setting

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the third largest urban school district in the nation that services approximately 404,151, pre-school through high school students. According to the Chicago Public Schools' demographic data provided by the Office of Research, Evaluation and Accountability (REA), 41.6% percent of the total students enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools including Charter Schools that fall under CPS' jurisdiction are African Americans (CPS-REA, 2011-2012). The Latino population is 44.1%; 3.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander; 0.4% are Native American with 8.8% being White. REA also posits that 1.7% are Multi-racial. There are a total of 474 elementary and middle schools serving 290,278 students in grades Pre-school, Kindergarten and first through eighth grades (2011-2012). In addition to the diversity of race represented among the student populations of CPS, there are 21,320 teachers employed in the district in which 49.7% of the teachers are White; 29.7% are African American, 16.1% are Latino, 3.6% are Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.9% are Native American (CPS at a Glance, 2011-2012).

³ The Chicago Public Schools offers selective enrollment in certain high schools which was designed to meet the needs of Chicago's most academically advanced students. The schools offer a rigorous curriculum with mainly honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. An entrance exam is required. Eligibility to take the entrance examination is based on the student's 7th grade standardized test scores in reading and mathematics. A minimum stanine score of 5, in both reading and math, on the student's most recent nationally normed standardized test is required for testing eligibility (CPS-REA, 2012).

School

The participating school in this study is located on the South Side of Chicago in an affluent and historical neighborhood. The school is nestled in an area that has been gentrified attracting mixed incomes and races to the area. The school services approximately 276 students, in which 94.9% are African American, 2.9% are Hispanic, 1.1% are Asian and 1.1% are White. Approximately 16.3% of the students have a disability (Learning or Autism) and 72.8% of the students receive free or reduced lunch (CPS-REA 2011).

The teaching staff is comprised of 69% Caucasian, 19% African American, 6% Asian and 6% Middle Eastern with one to 26 years of teaching experience among its staff members. The school has produced three D.R.I.V.E (Delivering Results through Innovative and Visionary Excellence) Award recipients, five Golden Apple Scholars, Two Golden Apple Foundation recipients: one Teacher of Distinction and one Golden Apple winner. Several teachers in this school have been Chicago Foundation for Education (CFE) grant recipients.

According to the reported Illinois Standard Achievement Test Scores for this school in 2011, the overall percentage of students that met or exceeded the state standards in Reading were 78.6% (n=266) in which the eighth grade scores for African Americans was 82% (n=50). In mathematics, the school's overall score was 80.1% (n=266) in which the eighth grade scores for African Americans (n=50) was 78% (CPS-REA, 2011). In 2010, the overall percentage of students that met or exceeded the state standards in Reading were 83.4% (n=259) in which the eighth grade scores for African Americans

was 78.0% (n=55). In mathematics, the school's overall score was 83.4% (n=259) in which the eighth grade scores for African Americans (n=55) was 68.3% (CPS-REA, 2010). According to the report, there were no Hispanics, Asian, or White students in eighth grade during the 2010 or 2011 school years.

Instrumentation

As described in the research design, the researcher conducted seven site based face-to-face interviews (pre, during, and post - with each classroom teacher and 1 with the school's administrator); and a total of 20 (10 per teacher) observations, one a week, within a ten week marking period during the designated literacy block of 90 minutes (45 minutes each), in both classrooms. During this block of instruction, the researcher sought to observe the following:

- the ways in which teachers interacted with their students;
- evidence of multicultural themes in their literacy teaching (based on planning & preparation);
- group work – how was it assigned? Activities? Student arrangement
- how literacy was taught to this African American population;
- nature of resources, tools and documents used to support culturally responsive work;
- obstacles, if any, these teachers faced when implementing a culturally responsive approach during literacy instruction; and

- motivation and engagement of students during discussions (teacher to student and student to student); group work; individual assignments and outcomes based on product.

The school's administrator touts both teachers' effective literacy instruction using a balanced approach which includes guided reading and writing. According to Tatum (2005), literacy is the fundamental component for school achievement. Therefore, the researcher created and used an observational guide to denote the instructional strategies and practices of both teachers during the curricular block to note those practices, strategies and teaching style of the teachers that were culturally responsive, engaging and motivating for students of color within these classrooms. The researcher rotated the days of observations during the 10 week period, i.e., during week one, the researcher observed on a Monday; week two on a Tuesday. The observations were conducted on different days of the week for the purpose of capturing descriptive phenomena that occurred on the different days of week based on the different schedules, learning objectives, continuation of lessons, projects and discussions.

The researcher also conducted two focus group sessions lasting no more than 40 minutes each with both groups of 12 eighth graders from each classroom. Students from Classroom A met with the researcher after school and students from Classroom B met during the literacy period after all observations had been conducted. The researcher heard from the students' perspective how their teachers' teaching practices motivated and engaged them during the learning as well as how they [teachers] helped them to understand the instructional materials and or concepts that were presented to them during

literacy. Gaining an understanding from the students' point of view or reference was important for the purposes of data collection and describing those practices that helped to make them successful, academically.

At the conclusion of the fifth and tenth week of observations, the researcher met with the eighth grade students that had been selected for the focus group. One session was conducted after school and another session during the regular school day in the school's library/media center during the literacy block for 40 minutes. The researcher had developed a list of open-ended student friendly questions. The students were not asked to rate their teachers' teaching performance but what specific strategies or characteristics that their teachers' used or possessed that made learning engaging and easier to understand (see Appendix E).

At the conclusion of the tenth classroom observation and prior to the final interview, the teachers were asked to complete the *Assessment of Effective and Culturally Responsive Strategies (AECRS)*, a survey instrument created by Johnnie McKinley (2001 & 2010). The *AECRS* survey was administered to determine each teacher's and the principal's perceptions and beliefs regarding culturally responsive practices and strategies. The survey was implemented to gain insight and gather data about the strategies of effective teaching that Johnnie McKinley (2001) gleaned from six comprehensive literature reviews on culturally responsive approaches (McKinley, 2003, pp. 123-124). For the purposes of this study, the researcher included 52 of McKinley's (2001 & 2010) 121 variables or relative strategies of effective teaching and six of the 11

resulting framework categories and subcategories of the AECRS survey. Selected items of the survey represented the focus of this study and include:

- Instructional Variables
 - **Category 1: Curriculum and Instructional Design**
- Classroom Variables
 - **Category 2: Classroom Climate**
- Contextual Features of Culturally Responsive Instruction Variables
 - **Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials**
 - **Category 4: Multicultural Approaches to Instruction**
 - **Category 5: Cultural Congruence in Instruction**
 - Student-teacher interactions-academic/social variables
 - **Category 6: Cultural Competence**
 - Teacher knowledge/validation

To gain insight into the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching, the two teachers were asked to rate the frequency or how often they used the strategies, variables, or dimensions listed of effective teaching practices overall. This data determined which dimensions of culturally responsive teaching practices were most important for teaching in a diverse urban setting based on the following: lesson planning, classroom environment, culturally relevant curriculum and materials, multicultural approaches to instruction, cultural congruence in instruction and cultural competence (McKinley, 2001 & 2010). Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine if a relationship existed between the teacher's knowledge and the practices they engaged in were actually

effective in teaching the African American students in their classrooms (see Appendix D).

Prior to the start, and during the fifth and tenth week of observations both teachers were interviewed and engaged in a discussion of reflection on their individual practices which were audio taped. The purpose of the interviews was to provide both teachers the opportunity to expound on their teaching practices and for the researcher to gain insights as to what practices and characteristics of effective teachers were prevalent in culturally responsive teachers. The researcher then used the teachers' responses to facilitate the categorization of the interview questions into themes using the framework of activity theory as a background.

This study applied research methods and procedures that are consistent with case study methodology. Data was triangulated using primary data completed through the utilization and analysis of protocol based on:

- Data collected through interviews with the individual teachers participating in the study. Pre, during and post interviews were conducted before, at the fifth and tenth week of the classroom observations.
- The principal and both teachers completed the AECRS survey denoting how often they used the proposed teaching strategies with their African American students.
- Data from field notes, interviews and classroom observations were also referenced.

- Focus group interviews (24 eighth graders, 12 from each group) with the students selected to participate.

An interpretive content analysis of the interview transcripts was employed to reveal themes of effective practices of culturally responsive teachers. As noted by Mathison (1988), the data produced through this type of triangulation can be used “holistically to construct plausible explanations about the phenomena being studied” (p. 17). The theoretical framework of activity theory guided the methodology for this study including the research questions and data collection procedures. The research questions were directly related to revealing how the tools or instruments used during literacy instruction mediated the labor of activities which are utilized by a culturally responsive teacher and how such practices impact a community of learners in diverse urban school classrooms. The second question determined whether or not the use of culturally relevant teaching practices affect experiences in the classroom thus yielding another way to analyze phenomena, which provides a framework of community based learning where learners can co-work together, establishing shared knowledge (David & Victor, 2002).

Procedure for Collecting Data

Data was collected over four months and included both a quantitative survey instrument and qualitative methodologies. The qualitative data collected for this research project was derived from direct observations by the researcher using the classroom observation guide (see Appendix C). It was through these classroom observations that the researcher gathered rich descriptions of detailed actions, interactions and perspectives of effective culturally responsive teachers. Qualitative data included three interviews with

each teacher (pre, during, and post), one interview with the principal about the teaching practices of both eighth grade teachers and two focus group sessions with 12 students from each teacher's classroom. A total of 20, 45 minute classroom observations of literacy instruction-ten in each teachers' classroom were conducted on alternating days of the week to capture descriptive phenomena that occurred on the different days of week based on that days schedule, learning objectives, continuation of a lesson, project and discussion. Observations focused on the practices of both teachers and field notes which represent "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 107) were recorded and noted.

All 44 eighth grade students received a cover letter addressed to their parents about the study being conducted in their school and classrooms. Both the parent and student consent forms were distributed to all interested eighth graders. Only those consent forms that were returned with parental and student consent were selected to participate in the focus group interviews. There were 24 students (12 from each class): 14 females and 10 males selected for the focus group. The students were asked open-ended questions from the focus group protocol (see Appendix F for Focus Group Protocol).

Data Analysis

The researcher used a case study design to explicitly detail the in-depth descriptions of practice(s), context, and teaching characteristics of the teachers. Descriptive statistics, including the frequency of observed strategies comparing each rater

were tabulated for each strategy using SPSS 19. SPSS 19 is ideal for analyzing data in experimental studies, quasi-experimental studies and field studies.

Using the two research questions as a guide, the researcher analyzed and transcribed the interview data obtained from the teacher interviews and student focus groups; looked for relationships across the data and created categories or nodes for themes. The researcher created themes or categories for the data as a result of the responses of the participants and from the review of literature on: teacher beliefs, caring, attitudes and perceptions (disposition), culturally responsive teaching practices in urban African American classrooms, and the level of engagement that culturally responsive teaching has in African American classrooms. The themes that emerged from these in-depth exchanges in dialogue and interactions among the teachers and students were observed and recorded to provide a detailed account and “recipe” for success for educators working with African American students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE

The purpose of this study was to examine the teaching practices and strategies of two eighth grade teachers in a predominate African American public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement. The researcher sought to identify and examine culturally responsive practices and strategies and the frequency of use of these practices within the classrooms that impacted student engagement and motivation. The research sought to discover how culturally responsive teaching practices affect student engagement and motivation in the classroom; and the relationship between a teacher's knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching compared to his or her practices.

Data collection procedures included interviews, a survey, classroom observations, student focus groups and artifacts and field notes. This chapter will present the data gathered from the *Assessment of Effective and Culturally Responsive Strategies (AECRS) Survey* (McKinley, 2001 & 2010). The teachers were asked to self-rate their frequency of use by providing a general "average number of times" and the effectiveness of the strategies using a Likert-type scale, when teaching African American students. The principal as well, was asked to provide an overall gauge as to the number of times she has observed each strategy during her formal and informal classroom observations. However, the researcher noted the frequency of use of the strategies during the ten

classroom observations with each teacher. Comparative results of the frequency of use and effectiveness of each strategy presented and used by the participant raters are presented in this chapter.

Quantitative Survey Data

On the survey, both teachers were asked to assess the number of times a particular strategy was used during the literacy period of instruction on an ordinal scale of 1 being the lowest to 10 being the highest and the degree to which they agreed with the effectiveness of each strategy when teaching African American students. For the purposes of collecting this data, the teachers only provided a summative gauge of their use of the strategies and practices overall; and the principal provided an average for the number of times she has observed the strategies as well during formal and informal observations.

The researcher assessed the number of times each strategy was used or observed during each of the twenty classroom observations, ten in each teacher's classroom. The teachers and principal were also asked to rate the effectiveness of each teaching strategy. An excerpt of the survey has been provided below. A complete survey can be found in Appendix E.

Excerpt from Teacher-Principal Survey; Researcher Observation Guide

Category 1: Curriculum & Instructional Design (Lesson Planning)							
Frequency (1-10) How often I use/observe this strategy 1 – Lowest 10 - Highest	Strategy or teaching variable	Effectiveness* How much I agree that this strategy works with African American students (Teacher & Principal) *Column is blank for Researcher to denote evidence of use.					
	Using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction, such as using encoding principles and maintaining an upbeat climate	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>SA</i></td> <td><i>A</i></td> <td><i>UN</i></td> <td><i>D</i></td> <td><i>SD</i></td> </tr> </table>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>			
	Structuring environments for cooperative learning and group activities	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>SA</i></td> <td><i>A</i></td> <td><i>UN</i></td> <td><i>D</i></td> <td><i>SD</i></td> </tr> </table>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>			

Results of the frequency ratings by each rater - the teachers, principal and researcher were compared to determine which strategies were used most often during classroom observations when teaching the African American students in this study.

Teacher Self-Rating

Within each category of curriculum and instructional elements, there were at least 5 to 14 strategies and or practices listed totaling 52 in all. Both teachers rated themselves on the frequency of use (overall) on the strategies or practices used within their classrooms. Of the 14 variables presented in Category 1: Curriculum and Instructional Design (develop clear goals and standards; designing instruction aligned to curriculum content and authentic assessment methods; aligning assessments to the content, format and complexity or level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities; carefully planning and clearly structuring day and lesson content and active engagement;

structuring lessons to include review of mastered material; having and stating specific and explicit activity objectives; helping arouse student curiosity by helping students understand the purpose of learning content; plan activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students; structuring environments for cooperative learning and group activities; structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise; structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members; ensuring group goals are attainable and using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction). Ms. Belle rated her frequency of use on these strategies with at least an “8” or higher. Ms. Baker, on the other hand, rated her use of the strategies’ frequency with a “5 to 7” on 7 out of 14 (50%) of the strategies listed within this category. Ms. Baker gave herself a “5” on “...planning activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students” and “6” on all four variables pertaining to “Structuring group environments conducive for tasks, activities, and goals needed for cooperative group learning.” Ms. Baker “Agreed” that all 14 of the strategies listed within Category 1 were effective with African American students. However, she indicated that she did not use the strategies on a consistent basis when it came to cooperative groups when asked during the mid-study interview (Interview November 3, 2011) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency of Use Ratings by Rater ~ Category 1: Curriculum and Instructional Elements

<i>Category 1: Curriculum & Instructional Elements</i>	Rater – Self & Observer					
	Teacher – Ms. Belle			Teacher – Ms. Baker		
	Teacher A	Principal PTA	Researcher RTA	Teacher B	Principal PTB	Researcher RTB
Develop clear goals and standards	10	10	8	9	8	8
Designing instruction aligned to curriculum content and authentic assessment methods	9	10	8	8	8	8
Aligning assessments to the content, format, and complexity or level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities	9	8	8	8	0	8
Carefully planning and clearly structuring day and lesson content	9	10	10	8	8	9
Structuring lessons to include review of mastered material	9	10	10	7	8	7
Using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction, such as using encoding principles and maintaining an upbeat climate	9	9	8	8	0	8
Carefully planning the day and lessons to include active engagement	10	10	10	6	8	8
Having and stating specific and explicit activity objectives	9	10	10	9	8	7
Helping arouse student curiosity by helping students understand the purpose of learning content	9	8	9	8	8	6
Planning activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students	9	10	10	5	10	6
Structuring environments for cooperative learning and group activities	9	10	10	6	9	5
Structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise	9	10	9	6	6	6
Structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members	8	8	8	6	9	6
Ensuring group goals are attainable	9	10	10	6	10	6

Rater: Teacher A= Ms. Belle, Teacher B=Ms. Baker, RTA=Researcher on Teacher A, RTB=Researcher on Teacher B, PTA=Principal on Teacher A, PTB=Principal on Teacher B

For Category 2 (Classroom Climate), both teachers “Strongly Agreed” that all 11 strategies (promoting a group-centered, collaborative approach to learning; promoting a positive, familial classroom climate; identifying and counteracting stereotypes by teaching students about universal traits and values; creating positive relationships and collaborating meaningfully with parents and community members to further the educational development of students; establishing and maintaining a physically inviting and safe classroom) were effective strategies for working with African American students. Again, for three variables that pertained to “...grouping and collaboration among students”, Ms. Baker rated her frequency of use of the strategies as a “7”. Ms. Belle, on the other hand, gave herself a frequency rating of “5” on “Grouping students according to shared traits to stimulate enjoyment.” Ms. Baker’s rating is similar with her ratings on the variable in Category 1 that addressed “grouping and collaboration of students within the groups.”

Categories 3 and 4 incorporate strategies that pertain to culturally relevant curriculum and materials and multicultural approaches to instruction respectively. Of the 10 strategies in Category 3 (Culturally Relevant C & M), Ms. Baker rated the frequency of use of each strategy as an “8” or higher. Surprisingly, Ms. Belle’s frequency of use ranged from a score of “2 to 6” on 5 or 50% of the strategies in Category 3. Captions of the ratings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Ratings by Rater Based on AECRS ~ Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials

<i>Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum & Materials</i>	Rater – Self & Observer					
	Teacher - Ms. Belle			Teacher – Ms. Baker		
	Teacher A	PTA	RTA	Teacher B	PTB	RTB
Selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from and containing all cultural groups	8	0	3	9	0	2
Selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards	8	10	3	8	7	2
Recognizing culturally relevant events	9	8	0	9	0	0
Understanding/use speech and expressions familiar to students	2	8	6	9	6	6
Using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representations of concepts	4	8	5	8	0	5
Using curriculum materials that describe historical, economic, social, political events from a wide variety of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language perspectives	6	10	7	8	5	5
Providing factual information to refute misconceptions and prejudices about ethnic group members	6	7	6	9	0	6
Understanding and using information about students' families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities	6	10	8	9	0	6
Encouraging mutual sharing of personal and expressive stories related to content	9	8	8	8	3	7
Helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	8	8	7	10	0	6

Rater: Teacher A= Ms. Belle, Teacher B=Ms. Baker, RTA=Researcher on Teacher A, RTB=Researcher on Teacher B, PTA=Principal on Teacher A, PTB=Principal on Teacher B

As the data indicates, Ms. Belle rated herself low in “Understanding/use of speech and expressions familiar to the students (2),” “Using manipulatives, models...(4),” “Understanding and using information about students’ families...(6),” “Using curriculum

materials that describe historical...(6),” and “Providing factual information to refute misconceptions...(6)” which are consistent with her self-reported ratings in the other categories of Multicultural Approaches to Instruction, Cultural Congruence in Instruction and Cultural Competence.

Within *Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials*, the researcher observed the following five strategies minimally 6 out of 10 or 60% of the time during the classroom observations in both classrooms: (1) Encouraging mutual sharing of personal and expressive stories related to content, (2) Helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge, (3) Understanding and using information about students’ families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities, (4) Providing factual information to refute misconceptions and prejudices about ethnic groups members, and (5) Understanding/use of speech and expressions familiar to students. When asked why these five strategies from the *Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials* category were important and used most often, Ms. Belle indicated:

...this is a representative of what I try to do as much as possible which is just start with what’s relevant, what’s interesting to them, but then also bring in the known and the familiar and hopefully something which is important to them, they connect to. (Mid-study interview with Ms. Belle, November 3, 2011)

With regards to Category 5 (Cultural Congruence in Instruction) and Category 6 (Cultural Competence) both teachers “Strongly Agreed” that each of the 12 strategies

(Engaging all students using meaningful, relevant, and challenging curriculum, content, and instructional activities; engaging in real-life, project-based contextual and vocational activities; helping students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge; showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity; showing teacher knowledge of aspects of own culture that facilitate/hinder communication with own/other cultural groups; and communicating validation and acceptance of cultural and gender differences to students), six in each category are effective in teaching African American students. However, the frequency of use varied greatly between the teachers with Ms. Baker rating herself with a score of “8” or higher on 10 out of 12 (83%) of the strategies and “7” on two (providing scaffolding to match or link curriculum, materials, lesson content and format, and instructional methods to students’ home culture, interests, experiences, and prior learning; and matching instructional strategies to students traits, abilities, and learning style preferences) of the strategies. Ms. Belle rated herself as low as a “2” in “engaging students in real-life, project-based activities,” “providing materials and learning centers for varied styles and modalities (4),” “providing scaffolding to match or link curriculum, materials, etc (5),” “showing teacher knowledge of diversity and aspects of own culture (6),” and “helping students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they construct knowledge (6).”

Based on the ratings for frequency and effectiveness provided for by both teachers, each of them “strongly agreed” that 47 out of the 52 strategies or 90% were effective in the teaching of African American students. Whereas, they disagreed greatly

on the frequency of and effective uses of five strategies used with African American students (see Table 3).

Table 3
Difference of Frequency Use and Effectiveness by Teacher Raters

Strategy	Ms. Belle		Ms. Baker	
	Frequency	Effectiveness	Frequency	Effectiveness
<i>Plan activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students</i>	9	SA	5	A
<i>Structuring environments for cooperative learning</i>	9	SA	6	A
<i>Structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise</i>	9	SA	6	A
<i>Structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members</i>	8	SA	6	A
<i>Ensuring group goals are attainable</i>	9	SA	6	A

Principal Rater of Ms. Belle

To gain a better insight as to the instructional practices and strategies implemented by the teachers, the principal was asked to provide an overall summation or “on average” the frequency of strategies used based on her classroom observations (informal/formal) of both teachers. The principal indicated that she conducted “daily walkthroughs” throughout the building and classrooms. Therefore, she was aware of the teachers’ instructional practices- both weaknesses and strengths. She attends the grade level meetings of every grade level weekly. However, she stated that she keeps a laser like focus on the eighth grade classrooms because “there is so much at stake-grades, conduct/behavior, peer pressure, minuscule parental support, high school selection and testing; and graduation activities” (Interview with Principal, October 14, 2011). Because

the teachers and principal provided ratings based on their own judgment and not due to a frequency count, the self-reported frequency ratings were compared to that of the principal's.

The principal rated each teacher on the number of times the 52 strategies had been observed in both teachers' classroom as well as their effectiveness in teaching literacy to African American students. The principal's ratings indicated frequency of use varied greatly between that reported by the teachers. For the first three categories, the principal's rating and teacher ratings were identical on most strategies with the exception of two strategies in which Ms. Belle rated herself a "5" and the principal rated her a "10". The strategies were "grouping students according to shared traits" and "creating positive relationships with parents." The principal also rated Ms. Belle higher on the strategies in Category 3 with scores ranging from "7 to 10". Interestingly, the principal reported no observed use of the strategies listed under Category 4 (Multicultural Approaches in Instruction) for either teacher although both teachers recorded a rating of at least "5" or higher for the five strategies listed. Of the 12 strategies listed in Categories 5 and 6, the principal reported that she had only observed eight of the strategies in Ms. Belle's classroom.

Principal Rater of Ms. Baker

According to the observed frequency of use of the 52 strategies, the principal only observed 37 or 71% of the strategies during literacy instruction in Ms. Baker's classroom. For 14 or 27% of the strategies, the principal noted a "—" indicating that a particular strategy was not observed. Those strategies were: "aligning assessments to the content,

format, and complexity level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities,” “using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction,” “identifying and counteracting stereotypes by teaching students about universal traits and values”, “selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from all cultural groups”, “using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representation of concepts,” “providing factual information to refute misconceptions about ethnic group members,” “understanding and using information about families, cultures, and communities to connect learning activities,” “helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge,” “using integrated, interdisciplinary lessons,” “developing clear goals,” “connecting new learning to students’ prior knowledge using cultural metaphors...,” “using strategies such as call and response, storytelling,” “teaching a continuum of basic to higher-order literacy skills...,” and “providing materials and learning centers for varied styles and modalities.” Ms. Baker’s observations only yielded scores ranging in average to an “8”. For those categories that addressed strategies pertaining to “Culturally relevant curriculum and materials,” “Multicultural Approaches in Instruction” and “Cultural Competence” the principal rated the frequency of use no higher than a “7” on: “selecting culturally relevant materials from all cultural groups,” “using manipulatives, artifacts...,” “providing factual information to refute misconceptions...,” “understanding and using information about students’ families, cultures...,” “helping each student understand how personal experiences influence how they construct knowledge.” For strategies “showing teacher knowledge of diversity, aspects of own culture,” “understanding how race...influence behavior, performance and

climate,” “communicating validation and acceptance of cultural/gender differences of students,” the principal gave a “3”. The principal also recorded no observation of strategies with a “—“ for all five strategies listed in Category 4 (Multicultural Approaches in Instruction) (see the *AECRS* in Appendix E).

Noticeable differences were evident between the teachers’ ratings of use of strategies compared to that of the principal’s ratings. Both teachers “strongly agreed” that 47 out of the 52 strategies or 90% were effective with African American students. Whereas, they disagreed greatly on the frequency of and effective uses of the following five strategies: “Plan activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students,” “structuring environments for cooperative learning,” “structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise,” “structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members,” and “ensuring group goals are attainable.” Interestingly, the Principal agreed that these five strategies were effective in the instruction of African American students. However, the frequency with which the Principal observed these practices between the two teachers differed greatly from the teachers’ ratings they self-reported with the exception of Ms. Belle.

According to the survey, there were a total of seven strategies in which teachers agreed 100% were effective in the teaching of African American students. The teachers agreed that, “having and stating specific and explicit activity objectives,” “establishing a physically inviting classroom,” “selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards,” “recognizing culturally relevant events,” “developing clear goals and standards,” showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity,” and

understanding how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, history, and cultural experiences influence behavior, performance, and climate,” were most effective. However, when compared to the principal’s responses on effectiveness, the principal and Ms. Belle only agreed on five of the strategies with the principal’s observation differing by as much as 7 on the strategy of “showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity.” Ms. Belle rated herself very high (10) on this particular strategy while the principal noted a score of 3. However, the Principal agreed with Ms. Baker that this same strategy was effective with African American children but differed on the frequency of use (10 by the teacher) and observed (8 by the Principal). In several instances, the teachers and Principal differed greatly on the frequency of strategies used compared to what their Principal observed. This difference in frequency could be due to the number of times each teacher was observed compared to the number of times each teacher used a particular strategy in the absence of their principal’s observation.

On the other hand, the Principal differed greatly from the teachers on the effectiveness of 12 strategies that work with and relate to African American children. Those strategies were: “aligning assessments to the content, format and complexity or level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities,” “using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction, such as using encoding principles...,” “selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from and containing all cultural groups,” “recognizing culturally relevant events,” “understanding and using information about students’ families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities,” “helping each

student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge,” “using integrated, interdisciplinary lesson,” “developing clear goals and standards,” “connecting new learning to students’ prior knowledge using cultural metaphors, personal and relevant examples...,” “using strategies such as call and response, inside-outside discussion circle, visual imagery, and storytelling,” “teaching a continuum of basic to higher order literacy skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking to help students derive and convey meaning from text to speech, solve problems, achieve goals, develop individual knowledge and potential, and participate in society,” “showing teacher knowledge of aspects of own culture that facilitate/hinder communication with own/other cultural groups,” and “providing materials and learning centers for varied styles and modalities.”

Researcher and Principal as Raters

To determine the reliability of the data obtained from the classroom observations of the teachers’ instructional practices and frequency of use of the strategies from the AECRS survey, I compared the frequency ratings I observed from my ten classroom observations to that of an overall account of the same provided by the Principal. By comparing my observations to that of the principal’s overall summation of the teachers’ practices and frequency of use of the instructional strategies represented in the AECRS, an interrater reliability of data revealed that our ratings were very close to one another’s.

Based on the observations and reported frequencies of use of the strategies recorded for Ms. Belle, the Principal and I gave or agreed on the same frequency ratings for 21 out of 52 (40%) strategies. On 16 or 31% of the strategies, we differed by a one

point margin or rating. However, the largest discrepancy of our ratings came from Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials and Category 6: Cultural Competence in which we differed on the following seven strategies which are shown below in Table 4.

Table 4
Differential Ratings of Observed CRT Strategies between Principal and Researcher

<i>Categorical description of strategies from categories 3 & 7</i>	<i>Principal Rating</i>	<i>Researcher Rating</i>
Selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from and containing all cultural groups	0	3
Selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards	10	3
Recognizing culturally relevant events	8	0
Using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representation of concepts	8	5
Helping students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	0	4
Showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity	3	7

From the 10 observations conducted by me compared to an overall or “general count” for approximately six to seven weeks of observations (formal/informal) provided by the Principal, the researcher’s ratings were higher than that of the Principal. In some instances, the Principal indicated no observation or presence of a particular strategy where the researcher indicated a presence.

Based on the observations and reported frequencies of use of the strategies recorded for Ms. Baker, the Principal and I gave or agreed on the same frequency ratings for 17 out of 52 (33%) strategies. On 10 or 19% of the strategies, we differed by a one point margin or rating. Interestingly, the largest discrepancy or difference in our ratings came from Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials and Category 4:

Multicultural Approaches to Instruction in which we differed in our frequency of use ratings on the following eight strategies as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Differential Ratings of Observed CRT Strategies between Principal and Researcher

<i>Categorical description of strategy from Categories 3 & 4</i>	<i>Principal Rating</i>	<i>Researcher Rating</i>
Selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards	7	2
Using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representation of concepts	0	5
Providing factual information to refute misconceptions and prejudices about ethnic groups members	0	6
Understanding and using information about students' families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities	0	6
Encouraging mutual sharing of personal and expressive stories related to content	3	7
Helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	0	6
Connecting new learning to students' prior knowledge using cultural metaphors, personal and relevant examples, multiple concrete representations, and explanations and models	0	5
Teaching a continuum of basic to higher-order literacy skills, knowledge and ways of thinking to help students derive and convey meaning from text and speech, solve problems, achieve goals, develop individual knowledge and potential, and participate in society	0	5

The descriptive data presented in this chapter provided details as to how each rater reported the frequency of use and effectiveness of each of the 52 used and/or observed strategies implemented during literacy instruction. Although the ratings of use differed based on the accounts self-reported by the teachers compared to that of the Principal's and researchers, all agreed that the strategies were effective in the teaching of African American students. Again, the teachers and Principal provided an overall, on average, or general number of times they used and observed a particular strategy being

used during the course of schooling within the first seven weeks of school. The researcher provided an actual count as to how many times during the weekly observations a particular strategy was used during the course of the observation on that particular day. The following chapter will provide additional data results based on qualitative methods gathered from the interviews of the teachers and focus group of the students.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS: QUALITATIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teaching practices and use of culturally responsive strategies with their African American students. The objective for conducting the research was to identify effective practices as well as the frequency of use of the strategies incorporated within the instructional practices of the teachers during literacy instruction. Additionally, the research aimed to gain a better understanding of the teachers' knowledge and beliefs of teaching African American students that made them successful. The researcher sought to discover how culturally responsive teaching practices affect student engagement and motivation in the classroom. The study also investigated the relationship between teacher beliefs and culturally responsive teaching.

Qualitative data was gathered through classroom observations, three teacher interviews (pre, mid & post observations) with each teacher, a principal interview and a focus group session with the teachers' eighth grade student participants. Pre-observation interviews were followed by classroom observations of each eighth grade teacher during their literacy block of instruction. After five weeks of observations, the teachers were interviewed individually regarding their curricular decisions, selections of texts used, student work, as well as instructional strategies and practices employed. This chapter will explore the following themes that emerged as a result of the classroom observations and interviews such as: relational trust, self-identity, and motivation.

The sections that follows provides an overview of the: (1) classroom description, (2) classroom environment, (3) instructional practices which includes but is not limited to teacher-student and student-student interactions as observed during classroom observations and interviews, and (4) beliefs regarding the instruction for African American students. In addition, two focus group sessions were conducted to provide the students' account of their teachers' teaching practices. Student data further supported the significance of the strategies used particularly in regards to these African American students.

Observations

An observation guide, created by the researcher in conjunction with the AECRS was used to document teacher-student and student-student interactions during instructional practices (see Appendix C). Observational data gathered by the researcher noted the use of, *The Outsiders*, in addition to companion literary works used such as poetry, mythology and other novels; questions asked, number of times males and females were called upon to answer questions and the strategies used most often during literacy instruction. The researcher also noted the types of questions asked: inferential, clarifying, right there, literal, etc. and comments that were asked by the students and or teacher. Any time scaffolding was conducted before, during or after instruction in regards to vocabulary and comprehension development the researcher noted it on her observation guide. When connections were made to another text, the student and or world, the researcher also noted it. Guided reading did not occur during any of the observations. Samples of student work were collected at the conclusion of each lesson during the fifth

and tenth week of observations (during/mid and post) and were discussed with the teachers.

During the fall quarter when observations took place, the students were reading and analyzing S.E. Hinton's novel, *The Outsiders*, during the literacy period. Ms. Belle created lessons using the novel to connect the students' prior knowledge to new learning opportunities using their own personal and relevant examples to help the students' thinking in the way that they derived and conveyed meaning from the text. For example, the students had to select a character from the book in which they felt they could closely identify with and create a chart comparing the character's internal and external conflicts as written from the time of the 1950s to their own internal and external challenges posed in their life in 2011.

...For the past three days, we have been talking about internal/external conflict. First of all, who can give me an example of external conflict? (A male student raises his hand and answers). Great! Now, who can give me an example of internal? (Hands go up, teacher calls on another male student). Awesome! So this morning in your groups, you're going to identify one character from the book and as a group, list the internal and external conflicts that character had, citing the pages of your examples. Then, as a group, you are to display your character listing the conflicts. I'm giving you 15 minutes and then each group will share out. Tonight, each group member will complete a Venn diagram comparing your own personal internal/external conflicts based on your reflections and

connections to the character. (Classroom A-Observation, October 18, 2011)

Teacher Interviews

Teacher interviews were conducted prior to the start of the classroom observations; after the fifth week of observations and at the conclusion of the tenth week of observations. The researcher met with each teacher individually on three different occasions in their classroom for approximately 45 minutes each. The researcher created and used questions from the Teacher Interview Protocol (see Appendix B) to structure the interviews with the hopes of gleaning insight as to what practices and strategies are most effective in teaching African American students.

Ms. Belle – Eighth Grade Teacher of Classroom A

Classroom Description

The classroom walls are a dull shade of gray covered by scattered sheets of chart paper filled with teacher hand-written posters of “Classroom rules,” “Student work Checklist,” “Our Favorite Books,” “Classroom Library rules,” and famous quotes by African American leaders, such as Dr. Martin L. King, Poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and from current and former students themselves. These quotes are displayed to encourage and remind students to continue their quest for learning, success, and that “failure is not an option”. A row of book covers form a line above the lockers representing the works of African American literature and poetry. The students’ desks are arranged in tables or pods with at least one male at each pod connected to the desks of at least two or more girls. In the center of the classroom, six desks are arranged in a rectangle and three males

and three females sit in them. In front of this pod directly facing the white board on the north end of the room is the focal point where four desks form a table consisting of three males and one female. To the east of this pod, is the teacher's desk. Directly alongside of the teacher's desk, are two pairs of student desks. The first set is comprised of two males and behind them are two girls. The classroom library is located on the south wall in the back of the classroom, and is adjacent to the entrance door of the classroom. There are hundreds of books arranged by genre (fiction and nonfiction) in book bins on the white wooden shelves and on a five-tiered book case that is embedded within the wall next to the student lockers. There are five large bins of books comprised of books which are either authored by an African American or about a(n) African American.

On the west side of the room adjacent to the classroom door, is a row of lockers. Above them is a bulletin board entitled "We Are Family" showcasing 8" x 10" photographs of each student in the classroom. The photographs are arranged by gender, eleven girls followed by the pictures of the ten boys. Written on the dry erase white board in front of the classroom in green letters, is an overview of the day's learning objectives, texts to be used including page numbers and activities or group tasks for the day.

Classroom Environment

Every morning, Ms. Belle stood in her doorway greeting every student as they entered. She said, "Good morning" to every student and referred to them by name. At different times during her morning greeting, Ms. Belle would randomly stop students and comment on their hair style or cut; enquire about a particular episode on a particular TV

show that she and the student enjoyed or had in common, or simply respond to the greeting that she was given by a certain male student that entered and said, “What’s up, Ms. Belle?” The students even greet each other by name as they enter the classroom. Ms. Belle continues to greet every student and as the last student walks through the door, she reminds them to get started with their [cold] breakfast, which is provided to every student during the first ten minutes of the morning through Chicago Public School’s *Morning Max* healthy eating program; and be ready for “Word Wisdom,” a vocabulary challenge, promptly at 8:30 a.m.

Peer to peer relationships are very strong. Forty-three percent (9 out of 21) of the students in Ms. Belle’s classroom have been together since kindergarten. The students have “grown up” together, attended birthday parties, participated on summer sporting leagues together; witnessed the milestones of successes and challenges in learning, celebrated their success on benchmark assessments including the passing of the ISAT tests in both third and sixth grades. Being together for so long has contributed to the students knowing each other’s likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and a sense of *familyship* in whom they can trust and feel safe with; which has helped the students in their learning community. By being together for so many years, a number of students agreed that it was a “good thing” that they had been together as students for a number of years. The familiarity and knowledge about each other’s likes and dislikes, academic strengths and weaknesses were paramount as to why they embraced this family concept.

...I think it’s a good thing that we’ve been together for a long time because we were just talking about all the people we’ve seen since Kindergarten;

people who transferred and left and that's because we know each other. It makes it easier for us to get along and help one another in class. (Focus Group Interview-Student J, lines131-135)

Instructional Practices

The researcher observed the culturally responsive instructional practices and strategies used by the teachers in the teaching of African American students. The AECRS survey (see Appendix E) used in this study required the teachers to rate their frequency of use and the effectiveness of the strategies presented. The strategies used also served as an observations guide for the researcher in order narrow the instructional focus during the classroom observations for this study. Survey results of observed practices and frequency of use by the teachers were observed by the researcher and based on six categories, 5 to 14 variables within each category totaling 52 strategies in all, of effective culturally responsive strategies:

- Curriculum and Instructional Design
- Classroom Climate
- Culturally relevant curriculum and materials
- Multicultural Approaches in Instruction
- Cultural Congruence
- Cultural Competence

Of the 52 strategies listed, the teachers agreed that 47 or 90% of the strategies were effective in the teaching of African American students. However, of those 47 strategies, 25 or 53% pertained to the use of culturally relevant materials and

multicultural approaches in instruction; cultural congruence which according to Zeichner (1995) is the respect and knowledge a teacher must possess for the various cultural traditions and languages of students in the classroom.

Ms. Belle and Ms. Baker meet twice a week during their regularly scheduled grade level meeting to carefully plan and develop clear goals for literacy instruction based on the Common Core State Standards.⁴ Ms. Belle shared that she “begins with the end in mind” – what it is that she wants her students to know and be able to do by the conclusion of a lesson or thematic unit.

I try to find relevant material that engages the kids with preparation for high school. That’s always on the forefront of planning, knowing what’s going to help them be prepared as they step forward for that first year of high school. Trying to find a balance between what they are going to enjoy and connect to and with; and that literature they are going to be needing to be exposed to is important. So, I try to balance those two needs by beginning with the end in mind. (Interview with Ms. Belle, November 3, 2011; lines 26-31)

The learning objectives and student tasks and activities are specifically and explicitly stated in her lesson plans as well as posted on the board daily as observed by the researcher. Ms. Belle’s plans reflect structures for cooperative learning and group

⁴The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) developed a K-12 rigorous college and career readiness standards for K-12 students that are aligned to college and work expectations that build upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards. The standards are evidence and researched based which include a rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills. The document was produced on behalf of 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia.

activities as well as activities to meet individual developmental needs of her students including those with special needs. Class groupings are heterogeneously mixed and vary depending on the assignment or group tasks.

As a part of her instructional practices, Ms. Belle indicated that in order to make the literature alive and meaningful to her students, she strives to incorporate activities and literary works that engages the students in real-life, contextual activities. To accomplish this instructional strategy, Ms. Belle selects and uses culturally relevant books and materials from all cultural groups.

...As we strive to create “global citizens” as our school’s mission implies, it’s important that I expose my students to works representative of other cultures with similar challenges, like *Escaping the Tiger* by Laura Manivong. Students read and discuss the challenges a Laotian family faces as refugees who escaped Communist rule as they try to relocate to the US. The students make connections about what this character endured by trying to survive, stay safe, search for food and knowledge. My students have not endured hardships like Vonlai, but their current situations of surviving in a violent city are as real to them as Vonlai’s quest in Thailand. So they make connections and we have real discussions, real talk about their life compared to Vonlai’s. (Interview with Ms. Belle, lines 242-255).

When asked why this strategy was important and used, Ms. Belle stated:

The Outsiders' is in the category of relevancy to the kids. Although the setting is from the 50s, the kids then had a lot of issues that they dealt with which are still very current to 2011 and ones in which I think the kids can connect to. When students can pull from their own backgrounds and make connections to the literature, that is a powerful strategy, I think, that increases their comprehension and level of understanding and appreciation for literature. (Interview, November 3, 2011; lines 37-42)

By doing this, Ms. Belle was incorporating and using information about the student's families, community, personal experiences and relevant examples to connect their learning and understanding.

Cultural Competence and Congruence

When teachers understand how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, residential status, and cultural experience influence behavior, performance and climate, they become culturally competent (McKinley, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1995) added that cultural competence concerns "the ability to function effectively in one's culture of origin" (p. 465) and to use one's culture to relate to that of others'. When teachers demonstrate respect and knowledge of the cultural background, traditions and languages of students in their classroom, they are implementing the principle of cultural congruence (Zeichner, 1995). Ms. Belle expressed the importance of understanding her own culture and that of her students.

In order to reach or shall I say connect with my students, I had to learn about them. Not just about what they liked or where they lived, but really

know about African Americans and their lives. As a young girl, I did not go to school with African Americans. But when I entered college and the work force, I was befriended by a girl who I am to this day, great friends with. We spent a lot of time together with me asking a lot of questions about her life, background, her hair which when I think back, is crazy now. But once I got to know her, I had to relinquish all the “stuff” I had learned-ignorantly about blacks. I had found that both my friend and I had similar upbringings, values, biases, but once she allowed me the freedom to question her, my beliefs were changed. Sure, we have differences, but I learned early that I had been wrongfully influenced by what society had deemed to be correct. So when I became a teacher of minority students, I had no obstructions or objections as to what they could do and their ability to learn because I learned who I was and in turn, came to appreciate what and who my students are regardless of their backgrounds or makeup.

(Interview with Ms. Belle, September 28, 2011; lines 11-32).

From this interview, Ms. Belle shared her personal experience or rather encounter with an African American girl. After spending time with the young lady, Ms. Belle came to understand her cultural differences thus suspending her beliefs and biases that she once held due to ignorance. For Ms. Belle, this experience was a cultural breakthrough that helped her years later. As a teacher of minority students, she learned the importance of helping her students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge and build upon it which is a strategy greatly used in

her class. Because this school is predominately African American (98%) and Ms. Belle's Language Arts/Literacy class is 99% African American and 1% Asian, she selects curriculum materials she feels are culturally relevant and represent the cultures of her students, such as Alice Childress' - *A Hero Ain't Nothing But A Sandwich*, *Just Like Martin*, by Ossie Davis, *The House of Dies Drear*, by Virginia Hamilton, poetry by authors such as: Arnold Adoff – *I Am the Darker Brother* and Nikki Giovanni's *Ego-tripping and Other Poems for Young People*, just to name a few. Exposing the students to cultural diversity and showing mutual and genuine respect for other cultures is quite evident in Ms. Belle's classroom and literacy instruction. She incorporates readings and quotes from famous orators as a "thought for the day" for students to express the meaning of the words or statements from people such as Gandhi, Dr. M. L. King, Krishna, President Obama, just to name a few that were shared; and important events pertaining to African Americans that occurred and the significance or impact the event had on society, the nation, or their own world.

Ms. Belle expressed that it is equally important to introduce culturally relevant events that pertain to other races too. Ms. Belle shared that she is aware how race, ethnicity, language, history, and cultural experiences influence learning and behavior in her class. "By building relationships with my students and getting to know them, I notice certain traits such as physical appearance or the attention my students such as the girls pay to their hair and nails; and my boys to their gym shoes. There is an ethnic code of dress and social interaction with the language that my students use that I have picked up. By using this information, I'm able to connect or appear to them as being 'cool or down'

as they say and connect to learning outcomes for my students” (Interview with Ms. Belle, September 28, 2011; lines 313-320). That is why, it is important for her students to learn about other races and cultures, just as she, to gain a better understanding as to how certain referents can influence their thinking, validation and acceptance of cultural differences. For example, every year all of the eighth grade students of this school takes part in an interdisciplinary unit of study provided by Facing History and Ourselves, a non for profit organization that seeks to bridge the gap between the past and present using significant events in history. The program was designed to foster a sense of urgency for the students to improve overall school culture and climate by teaching students how to combat racism, anti-Semitism, and prejudice by nurturing democracy through its educational programs (www.facinghistory.org, retrieved January 4, 2012). The program is divided into three to six week modules of study in which the school selects the program of study based on the offerings provided by Facing History and Ourselves.

To introduce the program to this year’s eighth grade class as a means of building excitement about the program and retrieving prior knowledge from a book read by the students the prior year, *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, by Jane Yolen, Ms. Belle read an excerpt from the book with the intention of having the students to recall facts learned about the atrocities of the Holocaust and how their knowledge of the character’s personal and cultural experiences influenced or changed their way of thinking. To push the thinking of the students and to help them derive and convey meaning from text and speech, another strategy used by Ms. Belle, she presents a video clip showcasing one of her former eighth grade students who graduated from this school reciting her speech, “Speaking About

Silence” during Facing History’s End of the Year Recognition Gala to the students. This former student spoke about the time in which her great-grandfather who was an African American World War II soldier broke his silence after he returned home from the war to a segregated south bound by Jim Crow laws. She also spoke about his wife, her Caucasian, Jewish paternal great-grandmother who broke her silence as an adult about the dreadful experience she encountered as a young girl living in a concentration camp under Hitler’s reign. The last lines exhorted by the speaker were posed to the class which the students had to write why the lines were important and what they meant to them. The lines were:

...the lessons I learned from Facing History have also taught me to see the community where I live in a different way. My neighborhood is diverse, but the different groups don’t really know each other or talk to each other. And that’s the silence that I want to break. I have something to talk about- my family, my history, and my community. (Facing History Video, October 20, 2011)

Ms. Belle expressed a desire to help her students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge. In her view, this is more important than selecting culturally relevant materials about one particular race. Ms. Belle strives to incorporate the works of African Americans and that of other races in her reading lessons and novels. She believes that when students are able to pull from their prior knowledge and or background, they can make connections to the literature. This helps them identify with the characters and gain a greater understanding

and respect for the literary works presented to them. When asked, why *The Outsiders* was chosen this quarter, Ms. Belle responded:

The Outsiders falls into that category of relevancy to the kids. Even though the text is set in the 50s, there were a lot of issues that were dealt with which are still very current and ones in which I think the kids can connect to in 2011, 2012. So...that would be the main reason why we've chosen the book. Based on the rich themes and characters- there's a great deal that you can extract from there and just go really deep. The richness of it and it's relevancy to the kids, their lives, experiences-would be the main reason why we chose it. (Interview: lines 39-47)

Ms. Belle knows that if she doesn't present material that will *grasp* the learner or make the reading engaging to her students, she stands in the midst of an uphill battle.

However, when she is able to introduce an unknown work or literary work to her students even though it may not pertain to African Americans or something the children know, she has to make a connection to their background which at times, can be challenging. When asked, what kinds of knowledge or skills should a teacher develop or possess for teaching literacy to African American students?

Ms. Belle noted,

The bottom line is to know the students-whether Hispanic, African American or Asian. Given there are altruisms that pertain to every kid, I don't know for certain if there are black and or white things that must be done with African American students only. But I do know that a

connection has to be made (Interview, September 28, 2011; lines 242-246).

Knowledge of the students' background and socioeconomic status (SES) is critical for effective culturally responsive practices to take place. Research indicates that children from low-SES households and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Also, a student's initial academic skills are correlated with their home environment. Therefore, knowing this information is important. According to Ms. Belle, she realized early in her career that socioeconomic status played a major role as to what pre-literacy skills students would have; and what resources and experiences students would come to school with. She indicated that she had students representing every socioeconomic status that could be represented in her class. There were students who came from upper to middle class, two parents and or single parent in the home and highly educated parents; to a small number of lower class, living in foster care or with an extended family member such as an aunt or grandparent. To her, it was not where they came from or who they lived with although it was important and relative to acknowledge it, but what they could attain and learn before moving on with their educational career beyond her classroom doors (Interview, October 8, 2011, Ms. Belle). Ms. Belle was concerned about her students' needs being met academically and socially. The only way to do that was to bridge the gaps in their learning through their own personal experiences or make connections to normal everyday life for them through the curriculum and materials used (Ms. Belle, lines 78-80). It was through these observed practices and

conversations that I witnessed how the teachers' daily instructional practices and strategies used and conversations with their students aligned closely to their knowledge and exhibited beliefs about the effectiveness of incorporating culturally responsive strategies in their teaching and classrooms.

Ms. Baker – Eighth Grade Teacher of Classroom B

Classroom Description

Across the hall from Ms. Belle's classroom, is Classroom B. An illuminated SMART Board sits as the back drop of this classroom. Student desks are situated side by side arranged in a rectangle. The teacher's desk sits adjacent to the rectangle of desks. Along the wall above the students' lockers are the jacket covers of books written by and about African Americans. In the classroom library, there are six book bins of books by and about African Americans. Hanging from the wall above the computer table are books of poetry written by the students in this class. Famous quotes by African American leaders from the Civil Rights era such as Martin L. King, Ralph Abernathy, and Rosa Parks; Scientist, Dr. Ben Carson and educators such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois are posted throughout the room with images of these notable figures. Posted on the door, on the wall behind the teacher's desk is a sticker written in cursive print that says, "Dream." A bulletin board in front of the classroom displays student work samples of poetry written by the students and seven graded student tests from *The Outsiders*. On the board written with a red marker in large bold letters are the words "DO NOW." Beneath it is written one word in which the students must define and use in sentence. It is the unknown vocabulary word for the day and the students are charged

with using the word throughout the day. Every day, the students are given a new word for the day to complete this activity.

Classroom Environment

As the students file in, carrying their breakfast in the bag, they stop to read the word for the day. A few say the word and others acknowledge their classmates as they laugh, chatter and put their items away in their desks or lockers. Smiling, Ms. Baker stands in front of her desk saying, “Good morning” and “Get started. You know the routine!” Students began writing; three students move to the shelf near the window to retrieve dictionaries and others sort through their breakfast bags pulling out one item to eat. Ms. Baker moves to the homework bin and she sets the timer for five minutes for the bell ringer. When the bell rings, Ms. Baker calls on a student to define the word of the day. Several other students are called on to share their sentence out loud. After the third student, Ms. Baker brings the students’ attention to the etched block of space of the left hand side of the white board that has the “Learning Objectives” for the day posted. She talks about each one indicating what students will learn and do for the day. This routine was observed throughout all observations.

Instructional Practices

Ms. Baker begins her day with a daily “Word of the Day” written on the white board in front of the class. As the students settle into their seats to begin their breakfast, most retrieve a black notebook and dictionary from their desk to define the word, others go their lockers to put away their things. Ms. Baker has a timer displayed on the white board that counts down from ten minutes. It is obvious that the students know and

understand this morning ritual of completing the definition and using the word in a sentence because all of them complete the assignment without assistance or questioning as to what is expected. By the time the timer beeps, the students have discarded the remnants of the items eaten from the breakfast bag; and several students have their hands raised to render their definition and or use of the “Word of the Day” in a sentence without even being cued or prompted by the teacher. Ms. Baker indicated during one of her three interviews that she gives a “Word of the Day,” like a “word genre” to begin building background knowledge around the words that she chooses. For each “Word of the Day,” the students have to research the word, which according to Ms. Baker, is pretty much like doing a lexicon; sentences, synonyms, the concept, that kind of thing and applying what you learn about the word to outside life. She stated that when she and her grade level partner meet over the summer to plan their thematic units and what materials will be used, she purposively pulls words and concepts from the books to teach early on so that when she introduces a particular literary work, students will have some knowledge and background on the work.

Ms. Baker likes to draw from a wide range of literary works. Her selection of novels, poetry, and readings are selected based on the interest and backgrounds of her students. According to Ms. Baker, she likes to select materials based off of ways that the kids can relate personally and morally. She further stated that it’s about the students taking what they have learned in school and applying it outside. For those literary works that may be unfamiliar to the students, she builds background knowledge prior to

introducing the work through vocabulary and similar readings in order for the students to make connections once the literature has been introduced.

Unlike Ms. Belle's organization of group seating, Ms. Baker allows her students to form an open square where the students sit side by side with the center of the square empty. Students work with a partner instead of a group. Ms. Baker introduced this seating arrangement to her students to encourage mutual sharing, a strategy she reveals that works well in her class. Ms. Baker is more about students owning their learning and learning from one another. Much of her assignments involve students writing and speaking about their thinking aloud. Ms. Baker contends that the more she promotes writing, the better her students will become as critical thinkers:

I try to lead them in that direction of becoming thinkers. So, I always try to get them to critically think and not just do oral conversation or just read and memorize certain facts. It's important that my students learn to think about their thinking and then go from there and build on it. I want them to always be thinking about what they read, why it's important or relative and how they can build upon what they learn, talk, write and think about.

(Interview, Nov. 7, 2011, lines 99-104)

Being a first year teacher at this school, Ms. Baker's relationships with her students is very endearing. She feels that as a teacher, she is too nurturing and takes their learning- successes and failures personally. She feels that too often, students enter middle school and schooling becomes more of a "either you get or you don't" instead of that continued "coddling and babying" often found in early elementary that most middle

school teachers wouldn't dare consider." It is her genuine attitude of "caring" that her students have come to realize is real. According to Gay (2000), caring is an essential quality of effective teaching and one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy for ethnically diverse students. Not only does Ms. Baker show that she cares about her students and their educational success and well-being, but her students care for her as well.

During one of the focus group sessions, students were asked to describe their teacher and the contributions, if any, she has made to their learning. The students were candid in their responses that demonstrated their genuine respect and admiration they each had for her. From the responses, the researcher gleaned that a number of the students respected and admired their teachers from student responses such as... "she doesn't think she is better than us like some teachers ...she actually likes us because sometimes she lets us hang out in class with her after school ." Another stated, "I like the fact that she jokes around and plays with us, sometime. Not in a bad way though, but because she can relate us; she's different, cool" (Student Focus group, lines 75-82).

Ms. Baker indicated that as a strategy to connect with her students, she purposively used positive information she had learned about her students and their families and community to connect learning activities in her class.

At the beginning of every year, I give my students a "Student Inventory" worksheet which basically asks general questions about their favorite color(s), hobbies, movies, food, music, etc. Also on the Inventory, I ask them to tell me briefly about fun things they do with their family; if they

have siblings and places they like to visit [in the City]. They describe what their “ideal classroom and neighborhood/community” would be like if they could design it. All of this information helps me to learn more about my students and it helps me when I plan lessons for independent study.

This becomes part of our “connections meeting” like a morning meeting that we have usually every day. (Interview with Ms. Baker; lines 40-50)

She created a thematic poetry unit tied to the theme of “Identity” in which the students had to write a self-themed book of poetry called “ChapBooks.” These personal memoirs were expressive writings about the student’s family, school, fears, triumphs, futuristic goals; and their feelings about life, self, and their community. Curricular activities tied back to the students were common in Ms. Baker’s class. Helping each student understand how their personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge, was far more critical and a necessary strategy needed for students to learn than reading and determining the theme or author’s purpose in a literary work. For example, the students had to create a poem reflecting their “true identity” as to who they were and where they’re from. Students wrote their poem and then shared them with the class. Student A (2011), wrote:

*I am from family gatherings at my grandmother’s house.
I am from blasting music in my room to finish off my day right.
I am from loud parties where we bump loud music and everyone gets up
and dances around the house at the beat of the music.
I am from being the only one with a perm in my family.
I am from having blazing hot oil splat in my eye after cooking a wonderful
meal. I am from dancing until my feet hurt and straining my chest
because I just couldn’t sit down. I am from late nights with my mom
watching John Q. until I fall asleep on the couch.*

*I am from long stories my grandma tells me and my cousins about her life.
I am from a place where we stick together even if we have a problem with
one of our family members.
I am from a family where we stick together and show our love for one
another. Where we celebrate everyone no matter the situation.*

When Student A was asked by the researcher during the focus group session, “*Where did your poem come from? Where did you go mentally or visually to get it?*” Student A responded:

...so during that particular lesson, after we discussed true-identity which we had been doing for a minute, she gave us her example. She didn't really get into it like I thought she wanted to, but from her example, I just thought about some good times with my family and then it just flowed.

(Student A lines 251-256)

For Ms. Baker, it is imperative that the students make a personal connection to home and or the community for every project or culminating activity assigned to them. This was making the learning culturally relevant to the students.

Cultural Competence and Congruence

As a new teacher, Ms. Baker is very reflective of her practices. At the end of each day, she takes time before leaving the school to review her lessons, instructional practices, strategies used, student learning and student work. On one occasion, I stopped by Ms. Baker's classroom after school to return a student's Chapbook and found Ms. Baker playing soft music in the background as she journaled about her day. I asked her what were some of the things she wrote about and privately, she inquired if this information, such as her thoughts regarding how she responded to questions asked by

students, managerial issues she dealt with and how her grading of student essays didn't go over very well with a few students who didn't follow the rubric would be included in my study (Conversation with Ms. Baker October 26, 2011). Self-reflective teachers gain immeasurable benefits from putting the needs of their students first; especially those from diverse backgrounds (Howard, 2003). Ms. Baker likes to keep the needs of her students first when planning and preparing for instruction. Because her students like "to talk a lot," Ms. Baker uses her students' strength of talking as an instructional strategy. She creates learning opportunities that match her students' traits and abilities to their learning style preferences. For example, Ms. Baker had been teaching various prose of poetry. During one particular observation, she introduced the students to the history and art of creating pantoum poems. Ms. Baker began the lesson by providing the students with background information on pantoum poems, the origin and use; then Ms. Baker demonstrated how to create a pantoum by writing about a personal experience she had in elementary school, describing it through a color. The students became more intrigued by Ms. Baker's childhood experience than the poem itself. Ms. Baker entertained a few questions about her early schooling and then redirected the students back to the lesson by asking if anyone had questions on pantoums. She then assigned the students the task of creating their own pantoum using a color to describe themselves. As the students began writing, Ms. Baker circulated around the room providing assistance where needed and then she stopped the class to share what one eighth grade female student had wrote...

Pink
The color of my heart where all my emotions start
Pink is the color of my brain. Where all my knowledge comes from
It is the color of my soul. The way my life goes.
The color of my heart where all my emotions are
Pink makes me feel vibrant and alive...

When Ms. Baker finished reading the last line, she paused as if to allow the words to soak in. She turned to the student, gently touched her shoulder and thanked her for allowing her to share and said, “Great job! Continue with it, I like it!” This strategy of helping students understand how their own personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge was often used by Ms. Baker.

The collaborative and shared nature of the teachers’ knowledge regarding culturally responsive strategies and instruction was highlighted by each of the teachers in this study. Ms. Belle and Ms. Baker each commented on how beneficial it was for them to have common grade level planning time carved into their day to discuss, reflect and think about their teaching practices. The teachers spent a lot of time together after school and even on weekends planning rigorous and relevant lessons in literacy instruction for their students. “There is so much to do and cover in so little time. Therefore, we have to give of our own time-weekends and nights after work, to meet and plan in order for our students to get the best learning experience and be taught the necessary skills and concepts to move them along” (Interview November 3, Ms. Belle, lines 285-290).

As the novice eighth grade teacher, Ms. Baker indicated that she definitely benefitted from the collaboration, expertise, strategies and curricular judgments of her more seasoned and veteran teacher partner, Ms. Belle. However, it was those first hand

experiences that she acquired during her student teaching with culturally diverse students that she increased her knowledge and fueled her beliefs that African American students learned best when the curriculum and learning activities were closely tied or related to the cultural backgrounds of the students in the class (Interview November 8, 2011, Ms. Baker). Ms. Baker introduced novels by and about African Americans, such as Alice Childress' – *A Hero Ain't Nothing But A Sandwich*, *Just Like Martin*, by Ossie Davis, *The House of Dies Drear*, by Virginia Hamilton, *Me, Mop and the Moondance Kid* by Walter Dean Myers, *Road to Memphis* by Mildred D. Taylor; poetry by authors such as: Arnold Adoff – *I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems by African Americans*; Arna Wendell Bontemps – *Golden Slippers: An Anthology of Negro Poetry for Young Readers*; and Nikki Giovanni – *Ego-tripping and Other Poems for Young People*, just to name a few. It was through Ms. Baker's love for rich literature and the belief of what exposing her students to such works as those listed above could do to increase her students' love for literature [reading] and increase their chances of academic success, that she used such practices on a daily basis.

Ms. Baker also believed that “students learn best when they can make a connection or relate” to the literature or concepts of subject matter especially if the content pertains to something they have encountered or can reference from their cultural backgrounds (Interview with Ms. Baker, lines 243-246). Her beliefs about infusing culturally responsive literature was purposively and strategic by nature. Ms. Baker strongly believed that students, particularly African American students, needed to be exposed to or taught about people that looked like them, made contributions to their

history, encountered similar challenges and overcame them, if any, and had a common connection or relation to her students that would make or provide a better understanding about the readings, poems, and work that they were required to do in eighth grade. Ms. Baker's beliefs were further supported by the fact that she did not simply select works to use every day about African Americans only. Ms. Baker exposed and introduced her students to works that pertained to other ethnic and racial groups as well as those that shared the same cultural backgrounds of the students in her class. Ms. Baker's beliefs and knowledge of using culturally responsive literature and works was not that it had to be done every day. "Just because the work is by an African American or about an African American doesn't mean that it should or has to be used on a daily basis. There is literature that I exposed my students to that is about people with a different racial makeup and or life style or background from my students', such as *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros or the film – *Boys Don't Cry* directed by Kimberly Pierce (1999), that is just good material to use because of the richness and content, not because it's by or about African Americans" (Ms. Baker, lines 74-80; 86-90).

From this analysis of observed instructional practices and strategies as well as student to student and teacher to student interactions, three themes emerged that demonstrated the presence and effectiveness of the instructional practices and strategies used by the teachers as well as the learning experiences for the students that resulted from these practices. The three themes that emerged were: (1) Trusting relationships motivate the learner (teacher to student; student to student); (2) Influence of cultural background: self-identity; and (3) Changing the status quo teacher: Knowledge, attitude and beliefs.

This investigation determined that all three themes were prevalent and present in both classrooms.

From the Mouth of Babes: Student Voices

After conducting 20 site based classroom observations of teacher to students and student to student interaction which equates to approximately nine hundred minutes of observation, the researcher was able to gather informative data not only from the teacher's perspective, but more importantly from the student's perspective which gave voice and value to the culturally responsive strategies that proved to be most successful in student motivation and engagement during and within the learning environment of this population of students. According to Doda and Knowles (2008), "bringing student voice front and center can nudge us toward education owned, at least in part, by those it claims to serve" (p. 32). By incorporating the voice of the students from this study, the researcher was able to gather firsthand knowledge from the recipients of this study as well as provide an outlet of opportunity for them to share their thoughts regarding their engagement and motivation within the classrooms of the teachers involved in this study.

Student Engagement

After meeting and candidly discussing with the students their learning experiences, it was evident that the students felt engaged in the educational and learning process and activities that took place within their classrooms. According to the students, they had a lot of choice as well as voice regarding the curricular decisions as well as activities that took place within their classroom. "Our teachers usually provide us with a "menu" of ways we can complete an assignment/project." "Not only that, but most

times, they allow us to choose who we want to work within our groups and what book we want to read or use,” echoed another student. “I love the fact that our teachers schedule conference time with them so that we can work on stuff individually, if we need to.”

According to Cook-Sather (2002), including students, particularly adolescents in decision-making, is one way to keep them engaged in the learning process. Cook-Sather further purports that middle school students desire to be active participants in the learning process. Students need to feel that they are not only a part of the school community, but that they also are competent individuals who are in control of their learning. Cushman and Rogers (2008) added that students are opposed to classes where they are expected to sit still and pay attention for long periods of time while the teacher lectures or talks at them. By giving the students choice as well as a platform for them to talk about their feelings around a certain topic or lesson, the teachers engage the students in the learning process and give them ownership for their learning. Students define engaging teachers as those who do not talk too much and who also allow them [students] to be active participants in class (Cothran & Ennis, 2000). A male student (Student L) shared:

I look forward to having Ms. Belle for literacy every morning. Why? Because I know that she is going to give us a quote or some big word to think or write about. After that, the class is going to get interesting and no doubt fun because somewhere during her talk, she is going to stop, ask us a question – which she says she doesn’t know the answer but I think she does, and then tell us to jot down our thoughts. From there, more than likely, we are going to divide up and work with our small groups to solve some problem or situation, or create something, which I really like doing, depending on who is in my group! She makes reading, really fun!

While some students shared their positive experiences of working in groups, several did not. Those that opposed group work shared that it depended on who was in

their group. Student B stated that, “There are times when I don’t like working in a group because certain ones in the group dominate the conversation even after our teacher has told them not to.” Student N expressed her feelings about group work in the following manner:

I don’t know why it seems like I always get put at the table with the people who really haven’t read the book. Usually, it’s certain boys. So, if we have to draw or create something, they’re the first to volunteer to draw or create something on the computer to show on the Smart Board. But never do they volunteer to represent our group when group presentation time comes.

To engage the responder further, I posed a question to the group inquiring as to whether or not they felt disengaged or less motivated to work if they were placed within a group that they did not want to work with? Student J immediately replied, “No! We have to get it done, regardless. So I just do my part so that I can get my grade!” Student A added, “We just make it work. I tell my people, stop playing and focus!” For the most part, the students indicated that at times working in a group can be challenging. Overall, they preferred working with groups opposed to working as an individual to get a task/assignment complete.

Student Motivation

From the focus group session as well as from the classroom observations, it was evident that students were motivated to learn and participate in the active learning process. During our focus group sessions, students indicated that for the most part, they loved their teachers and wanted to do well because, “I like having a say so in the class,” “I feel I’m valued because my opinion(s) matter,” “I get to share and bounce my thoughts

off of my classmates which helps me with my thinking,” “we have choices in how and who we work with and complete our projects,” “my teacher wants me (us) to do well, so I think a lot of us really try harder.” From the assignments given and the questions asked, students were eager to answer, complete and participate in the class. Motivation came easy for this eighth grade population; perhaps due to the fact that they were very familiar and comfortable with each other.

There were many projects/assignments and opportunities presented to the students that allowed for them to demonstrate the technological, creative and or artistic ability which for most of the students, was very motivating. Students enjoyed drawing and or completing their assignments with the aid of large sheets of chart paper or technology. Students shared that having a choice as to how they present their projects and or final assignments was very motivating to them because they could show case their ability through a performance task rather than always having to type or write a paper about it. Students shared that their class blogs about readings they are required to read in class. When asked, *how effective this was?* Both teachers indicated that it was “actually the best learning tool that they could have possibly allowed, but it was two of their students that suggested it.” To probe this thought further, the students were asked about the use of technology and how motivating this tool was. The level of excitement exploded within the session. As Student D aptly stated, “I like blogging about books we have read with our class. We don’t have to type correct grammar, we just say our thoughts, wait for someone to respond and keep it moving.” Another (Student F) added, “being able to communicate with our cell phones after school by texting about a book, is cool. When

our teachers talk about *author's* purpose it's easy to make a connection and add a comment because the "author" is one of our classmates that wrote something, and we as the reader have to interpret what they mean." See, we're incorporating stuff our teachers are teaching us, even when we're not in class." From their responses, my observational results concur with the research that shows that the integration of technology has also been shown to increase student motivation and prepare students for the global workplace that they will someday enter (Selfe & Selfe, 2008).

Crossing the Hall – Ms. Baker vs. Ms. Belle

To provide an understanding of the relationship within the individual teacher's classroom contexts, practices, beliefs and knowledge centered around culturally responsive strategies and pedagogy, the researcher conducted a cross case comparative analysis to illuminate some of the details that are perhaps difficult to observe in isolation (Lieberson, 1992; Stake, 2006). This study focused on the effective practices of two eighth grade teachers from the same school whose instructional practices were deemed effective by their peers and administrators in the teaching of their African American students. This comparison addresses the second research question, which states: *What is the relationship between teacher's knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and teachers' practices?*

Using this research question as a guide, this section is divided into three main sections: (1) a comparison and discussion of the noted differences of the classroom contexts (organization, routines, and materials), (2) a comparison and discussion of the noted differences of instructional practices based on my observations, and (3) my

reflections of analysis based on these results which allowed me to derive insight regarding the teacher's knowledge and beliefs about culturally responsive teaching that informs their practices ultimately affecting student engagement and motivation within their classroom.

Classroom Context

As detailed in the methodology, the two eighth grade teachers that participated in this study were highly recommended by their building principal based on their teaching effectiveness, grade level planning and collaboration and student test results from the Illinois Standard Test of Achievement (ISAT) in Reading and Math. Although contextual characteristics such as subject(s) and grade level taught, collaboration, class size, and organization were important factors in the selection process, my observations and interviews revealed that the classroom contexts of these two teachers differed in more ways than first expected. Two of the main differences with the teachers' contexts were in the classroom organization and daily routines.

The most obvious difference noted between the two classrooms was classroom organization. Although both teachers followed a similar schedule during the literacy block, the set up was totally different. Ms. Belle's classroom (Classroom A) was organized in tables of four to six students of a mixed gender, which led more to group work and collaboration. Every morning the students would move to their assigned tables and when an assignment was given that required the students to work in their groups, the students would move to a different set of tables adhering to their roles (time keeper, note taker, materials gather, etc.) within the group. The students would read or review the

directions again as a group and then proceed to completing the tasks while discussing and thinking aloud through the assignment. Students worked in groups daily in Ms. Belle's classroom. Rarely, was there a day during my observations in which students were not required to work together. Student presentations were done as a group with one speaking on behalf of the group while the others stood alongside on behind the speaker in support. Students were called upon to assist in the presentation by the group leader and grades were assigned accordingly. Students even "graded" their peers at the end of a project regarding their participation and contribution. According to Ms. Belle, "It's important that students contribute to the learning process not only for themselves, but for the benefit of their peers. They're learning the importance of being a team player and that everyone has something to contribute." Ms. Belle firmly believed that when students know that they too have a role to play and contribute, they make a difference in the classroom by leading and not waiting on her to just "fill their minds." They can help each other.

Across the hall, the students in Classroom B were arranged in a square with students sitting side by side and one chair seated in the center of the square. That chair was for Ms. Baker or whoever was "leading the discussion or presentation." Students appeared to actually be seated next to a classmate they chose to sit by rather than by teacher assignment. There were three to four girls seated side by side and then two or three boys and then another section of girls. Only at one section of the square was there two boys seated next to one girl. When asked how this particular configuration came about? Ms. Baker indicated,

I give the students the opportunity to choose who they want to sit by rather than me assign a seat. They know that if it becomes a problem (excessive talking, disruptions, etc.) they will be moved. I think they're old enough to make that decision-they are considered to be in Jr. High. And as far as me sitting in the center, I want all eyes on me which I think is a great way for me to see the entire class, direct the discussions, give participation points, especially when we're doing things like Socratic seminar.

After speaking with both teachers regarding their seating arrangements, it was clear that both implemented utilized a style or configuration that was more suited to their taste.

Ms. Baker indicated that her seating arrangement lent itself more towards her being able to move from desk to desk to speak with students individually. Not only that, but she felt that having students sit in groups was also "primaryish." Whereas, Ms. Belle believed that by having the students to sit in cooperative learning groups, they were more prone to collaborate and almost forced to work together. She further stated that while students worked in groups, she could "pull a seat alongside and listen in" to the conversation and speak with students individually. If she needed to confer with a student, she would invite them to her desk or a place comfortable to the student, such as the cozy chair in the library or on the rug to provide additional support, if needed. From my observation, it was clear that students were more prone to collaborate because of their seating as opposed to simply talking with their elbow partner on a daily basis. Research literature suggests that the use of peers in a cooperative learning setting (to solve academic tasks and to prepare reports) has been shown to increase student achievement more than in a teacher directed setting (Berns, 1993). Although cooperative-learning strategies may work for some students, it may be ineffective for others. Therefore, educators should use a balance of teaching methods such as lecture, discussion, inquiry, learning centers,

cooperative groups, individualized instruction, computerized instruction, and the like (Boutte, 1999).

However, when the students were asked their preference, most indicated that they preferred the group seating depending on who was in their group. For the students in Classroom B, Language Arts and Science were the only two classes in which they sat side by side or in a pair. All of their other subject areas and classrooms were taught in group settings.

Materials/Resources

As stated earlier, both teachers were selected for this study because of their effective instructional practices, student achievement and collaborative spirit. These teachers met weekly for grade level planning in which they created engaging lessons, projects and activities. Much thought was given towards lesson planning and curricular learning expectations. On several occasions, I observed Ms. Baker carrying and holding her lesson plans during instruction. She would often refer to her plans and check off those items covered. During her collaborative periods with Ms. Belle, they would discuss student work, next learning objectives and materials needed. Much of their planning occurred during the summer prior to the start of the school year. However, both teachers indicated that although they had a plan in place, they would “tweak” their plans as they went along.

According to Ms. Baker, Ms. Belle was really the lead teacher on the lesson objectives and instructional material that needed to be covered. Ms. Baker indicated that although she contributed to the planning process, she deferred a lot to Ms. Belle. By her

[Belle] having taught eighth grade for over six years, she respected her leading but also recognized that her contribution was important as well. Ms. Belle would solicit her ideas and require Ms. Baker to provide her input. The beginning of the year novel was suggested by Ms. Belle. However, the projects and activities required by students to complete were derived from both teachers' contribution. But, it was Ms. Belle that suggested what additional supports and strategies that could be used to assist students who struggled with concepts. During our initial interview, it was Ms. Belle that indicated that she doesn't know exactly what specific things she does that pertain to teaching African American students, she just does "what makes sense and what is effective for any student." But she also indicated that bridging home and school for students makes learning easier for them because they use what they know to make connections to the things they read about. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers need to be prepared to teach children who are not white by providing them with an equitable and effective pedagogy. By doing so, teachers must use the language and understandings that children bring to school to bridge the gap between what students know and what they need to learn.

Instructional Practices

From my observations, it was clear that both teachers spent a great deal of time collaborating on learning objectives and preparing for their lessons. The same identical teaching foci for literacy and writing were posted daily on the white board in both teachers' classrooms. Although the learning objectives were posted, students from Ms. Belle's class received a daily overview with an opportunity to ask questions for clarity

regarding the objectives. Ms. Belle reviewed the objectives with her students every morning during the time students were engaged in breakfast or bell ringer [Word of the day] in what she termed, “morning messaging.” Ms. Baker, on the other hand, indicated that she did not carve out a special time during her morning routines to review the daily learning objectives with her students, but she did require the students to read and know what the objectives for learning would be for the day. Ms. Baker stated that she was preparing her students for high school. She further stated that,

I’m making them accountable. They need to know what’s on the board and make sure I give them what they are supposed to get. This is our checks and balances-students make me accountable to teach and cover the material; and I make them accountable for learning it.

Also, from our conversation, I was able to deduce that this was Ms. Baker’s way of “loosening the ties or hand holding” that so many middle school teachers strive to break prior to the students entering high school.

On five different occasions, I observed both teachers incorporating their own personal memoirs of schooling and growing up in different parts of a major metropolitan city. Ms. Belle, who is very reflective and thoughtful about her instructional practices, shared her personal schooling experiences with her students. From the onset, students appeared to enjoy hearing about her life and the things she experienced when she attended elementary school. She talked about her favorite teacher and subjects; and how her teacher encouraged her to learn and do her best just as she was doing for them. Although she was raised in a predominately White neighborhood and attended a predominately white school, she shared how the expectations for excelling and achieving

were the same. She told her students on many occasions, “There is no room for excuses in learning, only room for improvement!”

Ms. Belle held high expectations for her students and required that they do their best work. Not only that, but it was apparent from my observations that her interactions with her students were positive which created a safe environment for learning and teaching. Every morning, she would greet her students by name, smile and hold brief conversations with her students about something they obviously were knowledgeable about. She would do constant check-ins with her students about how things [life] were going with them at home, school, friends, etc. She shared and suggested books for reading and with two of her male students; she enjoyed talking about their favorite television show, *CSI*. Ladson-Billings (1994) indicated that teachers have the responsibility for creating a positive learning environment in their classes. In the hectic day-to-day routine, it is easy for teachers to forget the tremendous influence they have on their students. Even when they carry out seemingly non-instructional actions, such as smiling at students or showing disapproval, they are engaged in pedagogy.

Ms. Baker held high expectations for her students as well. She would constantly say to her students, “This is important; you’re going to need to know this!” Instruction and work in this classroom was “business as usual.” Rarely, did I observe Ms. Baker having a personable moment or conversation outside of school with any of her students. However, during her lessons, she would share her schooling experiences and how much she enjoyed reading and writing. It was apparent that she did, because she would have her students journal daily before dismissal about their school day. Not only did her

students journal about their day, but after school, Ms. Baker would journal and reflect about her teaching and how her lessons went. Ms. Baker was reluctant to share her personal journal with me for this study. But she did indicate that she would make a point at the end of every day to reflect on her practices so that she could note those areas that need improvement particularly when she would meet with her grade level partner and or principal to discuss her instructional practices.

A teacher-directed approach to instruction was mostly observed in Ms. Baker's classroom. Again, students sat side by side in a square formation with Ms. Baker's chair stationed in the center of the square. The majority of the instruction occurred from the center of the square with an occasional turn to the Interactive White Board where a lesson, notes, text excerpt or poem was projected. Ms. Baker expressed that she didn't believe in putting eighth graders in tables for groups. Unlike her grade level partner, Ms. Baker rarely created "group projects" for assignments. Her students did a lot of individualized work/assignments, shared with their elbow partner and presented as an individual from the center of the square their writings and or reflections. The tasks provided to her students offered little choice which resulted in students showing minimal initiative or motivation towards their own learning. From my observations, the "hum" of this classroom, was not as appealing and interesting as the "hum" across the hall.

Reflections of the Researcher

Comparing these two teachers' methodologies of contexts, pedagogy and instructional practices furthered my understanding of their personal beliefs and knowledge around their practices in multiple ways. From my observations, I came to

understand that both teachers set high expectations for their students and believed in making connections to the students' lived experiences as a strategy of their instructional practices. Both teachers were reflective and collaborative in their planning but differed in the ideas and beliefs around routines, management, and student to student interactions and or engagement. Even though their teaching objectives were similar, their implementation of strategies and practices used differed greatly. From our discussions, it was apparent that the more veteran teacher was well versed and exemplary in creating lessons that were culturally responsive to the needs of her students' academic strengths and weaknesses, but caring to form relationships with them to address their social and emotional strengths and weaknesses.

From the lessons, discussions and activities that were presented, the students appeared to be motivated in completing and participating in the learning process. In both classrooms, students were engaged in the learning and contributed at different levels. In Ms. Belle's classroom, students were highly motivated and encouraged to work collaboratively. Student choice motivated students the most to do their best even when faced with obstacles or challenges within the groups. However, in Ms. Baker's classroom, student motivation was not as high due to the limitation of student choice and perhaps limited access to cooperative learning groups and collaboration. Again, collaboration was done with a peer partner rather than a group. Much of the recent research on student motivation has focused on the classroom, where the majority of learning takes place and where students are most likely to acquire a strong desire or motivation to gain new knowledge. Making the classroom a place that naturally

motivates students to learn is much easier when students and teachers function in an atmosphere where academic success and the motivation to learn are expected and rewarded. Such an atmosphere, especially when motivation to learn evolves into academic achievement, is a chief characteristic of an effective school (Renchler, 1992).

Overall, students indicated that they really liked their teachers, especially Ms. Baker because she was “younger and could relate to them” although she never expressed her age. The students also felt that both of their teachers cared about them and wanted them to succeed, but students in Classroom A felt a deeper connection to their teacher because of the daily affirmations and personable conversations she would have with them regarding their life. This drive toward interpersonal involvement is pervasive in all of our lives.

From the 20 classroom observations, student focus group sessions and teacher interviews, the basis of my claims that the teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about the effectiveness of using culturally responsive teaching and its effectiveness, was more so evident in Ms. Belle’s classroom than Ms. Baker’s. Ms. Belle’s beliefs, knowledge and perhaps teaching experiences afforded her narrow lens to focus instruction based on the population of students in front of her. Her reflective nature caused her to be more didactic in her approach to teaching and finding those strategies that best suited the needs of her students.

Ms. Belle on the other hand, had a very different approach to teaching and learning and her beliefs regarding effective culturally responsive strategies was illuminated in her pedagogical practices at limited knowledge thereof. Her use of

culturally responsive materials and resources was limited in her teaching practices. Limited connections were made to text resembling students of color as was illuminated earlier. Ms. Baker indicated that, “There are a lot of good materials out there that doesn’t require me to only speak to one group, all the time.” True to her beliefs, proven in her practices, from my observations she was somewhat reluctant to structure her practices around the effective culturally responsive strategies that were presented to her. Based upon the data yielded from her survey, Ms. Baker was not as competent as her grade level partner in her use or lack thereof in multicultural approaches and cultural congruence in instruction.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the instructional practices and strategies of two effective teachers of African American students as viewed through the eyes of the researcher and articulated by the voices of the students. Through rich, descriptive, details, the participants in this study gave voice to practices and characteristics of culturally responsive teachers as described by the research on culturally responsive teaching. The teacher participants shared very similar beliefs and perceptions about strategies used even though their instructional practices varied. The instructional practices of both teachers were posited in their beliefs that utilizing culturally responsive strategies with their students increases the overall level of student engagement, participation and motivation. From the observations of teacher to student interactions, it was apparent that the teachers had a genuine concern for each student academically, emotionally, and socially. Constant check-ins was observed with students as well as a valuing of their opinions

regarding the curricular choices. As the students were engaged and motivated to learn, so were the teachers also engaged and motivated to teach. Both teachers shared a passion for teaching and learning coupled with a caring attitude towards their students and their academic success. Regardless of their own cultural backgrounds, the teachers shared a genuine respect for cultural diversity among their students and through the curricular materials used within their individual classrooms.

By incorporating elements from the students' families, cultures and home into the curriculum, the teachers were able to arouse student curiosity and a thirst for learning through engaging and meaningful activities. This knowledge supported the teachers' beliefs about the importance of using or not using culturally relevant and responsive strategies within their daily instructional practices. These combined elements as well as the strategies used by these self-reflective teachers helped to foster effective teaching and learning with improved student outcomes and motivation. Chapter VI will present an analysis of the data through a discussion and conclusions, followed by theoretical and practical implications for further research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As diversity continues to characterize the population of 21st century classrooms throughout the United States, the need to identify teachers that are able to deliver effective, instructional practices grounded in pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive also increases (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006). Due to the rapid change of demographics, it is imperative that schools employ and retain qualified, caring, and understanding teachers who will deliver a sound educational foundation needed in the development of culturally diverse students.

Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). These teachers must create a classroom culture where all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided the best opportunity to learn. Successes in these classrooms are hinged upon the ability of the teachers within them to bridge the gap or disconnect between the home and school (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

Perhaps the best way to learn how teachers bridge the gaps and disconnects in learning between the home and school is to study and observe the instructional practices and strategies of the teachers used within their classrooms, particularly those populated with a majority of African American students. To offer insights and potentially seek

better methods to facilitate and cultivate classroom communities of collaboration, motivation and engagement of its students, this mixed method study was undertaken using two primary research questions.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- (1) How do culturally responsive teaching practices affect student engagement and motivation in the classroom?
- (2) What is the relationship between teacher's knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and teachers' practices?

Overview

Two eighth grade teachers, deemed to be “effective” based on the culturally responsive practices and instructional strategies used within their classroom while teaching African American students, were selected for this study based on a recommendation by their building principal and colleagues. According to their principal, both teachers employ engaging and motivating lessons and strategies during their classroom practices that have increased students' active participation within the classroom thus leading to increased academic achievement.

A mixed methodological study was used to gather data to answer the research questions resulting from interviews, a survey, classroom observations, student work and focus groups. It was through these rich discussions, compilation of the survey results from the teachers, researcher and principal as well as through classroom observations, student work and student focus group sessions, that the researcher sought to capture which culturally responsive instructional practices and strategies used by the teachers in

this study yielded observable levels of engagement and motivation among their students during literacy instruction, with the aim of ultimately resulting in high academic achievement.

Discussion

Trusting Relationships That Motivate Learners

Formulating positive and supportive relationships within the classroom is important to a student's social skills. Not only that, but as the review of literature has revealed in this study, a great deal of research has shown that positive, supportive relationships between a teacher and student has a positive effect on the student's motivation to learn as well as on the student's academic outcomes such as good grades. In response to the research question that refers to motivation, this study showed that both teachers created engaging lessons that motivated the students to participate in the learning process and do their best. During the majority of the classroom observations, students worked in collaborative groups or pairs. When a new concept or skill was introduced for the day's learning objective, both teachers began with an overview of what the students would do and learn followed by a mini-lesson of instruction. Students were always provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions to gain greater understanding of the requested task(s).

Based on the researcher's observations, students in Classroom B did more individualized work and shared at the end of each lesson as a whole group. However, students in Classroom A, did more group or collaborative work. When instructed to break into groups, the students in Classroom A would quickly move to their group tables

with their designated partners and begin the task at hand. A “hum” of excitement would permeate the room. The “healthy hum” in the classroom can be defined as focused conversation among students (Schmidt, 2001). This “hum” of active engagement seemed to motivate the groups to complete the tasks. The students talked among its members with one student always taking the lead to get started and asking who wanted to do what job within the group. Positional designees such as a spokesperson, recorder/time keeper, resource/materials gatherer and group leader would be selected and or chosen by the members in each group. The students talked about what they needed to do, how they should go about completing the task and more importantly they listened to one another and valued each other’s ideas/opinions, even if a suggestion was not used for the group’s projects/assignment. This form of trust and safe place to express ideas was part of the culture within both classrooms. Working within the groups motivated the students to contribute and complete the necessary tasks. When students have opportunities to practice without fear, they are learning in ways that free the mind for deeper levels of thinking and engagement (Schmidt & Pailliotet, 2001).

Both teachers held high expectations for their students. Even though the objective was for the students to make a personal connection to the character of the book, the final product would look similar across both classrooms. The teachers planned and created engaging activities using meaningful, relevant, real-life and challenging curriculum according to the best instructional level that would motivate and engage their students to do their best work. According to the literature reviewed and practices observed,

culturally responsive teachers use teaching strategies that match the cultural needs of the students in their classrooms (Cummins, 1996; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2002).

When teachers give students the responsibility to learn in paired or group settings, the teachers are implicitly telling the students they are capable of doing the work and that the lesson objectives will be met (Ainley, 2004). “Active engagement leads to great motivation and creation within the classroom” according to both Ms. Belle and Ms. Baker (Conversation, November 3, 2011). The students were motivated to complete the assigned tasks, not only because it was assigned, but because they enjoyed working together, the task was meaningful to them that they could relate to or identify with and it appeared that they enjoyed pleasing their teacher based on the genuine respect each showed towards one another. As the students became more engaged in the subject matter and learning process that was relevant to their lives, they became more confident in their ability to learn (Toney, 2009). The students were able to use their own cultural backgrounds and personal experiences as referents to many of the lessons prescribed to the students. The researcher noted that the students in Classroom B class were limited by discussions, ideas and contributions of their peers due to limited opportunities of group work among the students. However, students in Classroom A had more opportunities for group work, discussions and collaboration prior to the start and during many of their classroom activities.

High expectations require active involvement, engagement and trust (Dale, 2005; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). Students learn more from teachers who hold not just high expectations for them, but more importantly, “reasonable expectations for them” (Blair,

Rupley, & Nichols, 2007, p. 436). In other words, challenges that students can reasonably achieve with teacher support and resources motivate them more. Both teachers facilitated a learning community which promoted not only motivation to achieve but trust among the students and teacher. Trust, that as individuals, the teachers believed that the students could do the work and if needed, the teacher was available to help those who needed special attention. The students trusted one another mainly due to two reasons: (1) the majority of the eighth graders had been together throughout their elementary years of schooling-some as long as pre-school and or kindergarten and (2) because they valued the ideas and opinions of one another within their learning community. The students were motivated to complete the task more as a group rather than as individuals. The teacher carefully planned and scaffolded the lesson according to the learning style of her students. Not only that, but the teachers believed and trusted that their students would share and discuss information gained and completed in the assigned task. According to Gardner (2003), teachers obtain the best overall results in the classroom when they interact with their students, understand the importance of culture, use hands-on materials, scaffold learning experiences, and provide challenging tasks that the teacher and student can discuss.

As mentioned from the student focus group sessions, trust was not only evident among the students, but also with their teachers. The contribution of the students' voices in this study was powerful. The students indicated that they felt like their teachers wanted them to succeed and be prepared [for high school]. Teachers at this school held high expectations and provided challenging yet connected lessons for students to learn

necessary curriculum and skills. The teachers created lessons and activities and selected materials that would be of interest to the students and related in some way to their cultural background, experiences or state of being as a teen-ager. One-on-one conferences were more than discussing a student's writing piece or providing individualized instruction for a student that didn't understand a particular concept/skill or literary text. The teachers made the conferences more "personal" by incorporating known experiences or familial background of that student into the conference in order to help the student make a connection. Being able to infuse personal experiences of the student into a lesson took trust on the part of the student and from the teacher. The student had to trust that the information was to help them and not be used in a discouraging, embarrassing or negative way. To help students from diverse backgrounds build bridges between home and school, teachers need to know about the lives of the specific children they teach (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices – Knowledge and Beliefs

The second question for this study was, "*What is the relationship between teacher's knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and teachers' practices?*" In order to improve the instructional practices and decisions that a teacher makes on a daily basis, the values and beliefs of that teacher have to be studied (Fang, 1996). From my pre-observation conversations with both teachers, each indicated that most of their instructional practices were crafted or modeled after their own former teachers. From the literature, teachers bring their own biases, perceptions, and beliefs to the classroom that often have to be suspended when they encounter students from

culturally diverse backgrounds different from theirs. But effective teachers ensure that their teaching strategies are congruent with the cultural makeup of the classroom population (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). Both teachers employed this strategy on a daily basis evidenced through their observed practices and lesson plans. The teachers created lessons that connected the students' home culture and background within the classroom to their instructional practices to facilitate teaching and learning that best meet the needs of their students. According to Ladson-Billings (2005), teachers that employ these types of practices and strategies are known as culturally responsive teachers. When teachers increase their cultural awareness about themselves and others whose culture is different from theirs, they find ways to connect the students' home culture with the school culture, thus suspending the status quo of teaching the mainstream culture.

The knowledge that teachers need to have and or acquire about culturally diversity and instruction goes well beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and recognition of the fact that there are different values indicative of ethnic groups. Culturally responsive teaching requires a developed knowledge base about the cultural particularities of specific groups that is needed to make schooling more interesting and stimulating for culturally diverse student populations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

With the increase of diversity within U.S. classrooms and the ever changing standards for teaching and learning, a case for improving school success for African American students and other ethnically diverse student populations is needed. Researchers agree that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived

experiences and frames of reference of students' cultural backgrounds and not just in a prescribed set number of strategies per day or lesson, learning is more meaningful and engaging; and students have a greater interest in learning and the skills are more easily taught (Gay, 2000). According to research on culturally responsive teaching, there is no validated check list that teachers must use in order to be culturally responsive. But, many researchers and educators alike have created resources that may encourage teachers in using culturally responsive strategies and or materials to address the literary as well as other academic areas of instruction for the diverse population of students in their classrooms. From these supports, teachers may come to appreciate the understanding of the theoretical foundations for particular strategies, so that they are better prepared to implement them (Schmidt, 2006). In other words, teachers must develop a theoretical and practical connection between cultural relevance and the academic success of culturally diverse students. Teachers who are culturally responsive develop a cultural consciousness that encompasses an understanding of their students' ways of thinking, acting, and overall being. These characteristics are fundamentally shaped by such factors as their race/ethnicity, social class, language and gender (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Not only that but learning can increase by teachers demonstrating care for their students as individuals and by structuring opportunities for students to interact with not just them but with their peers/classmates around real-world problems, especially those that are culturally relevant to them.

Classrooms of the U.S. are becoming more and more racially, ethnically and culturally diverse. As the number of culturally diverse classrooms continues to increase,

the challenges for many practicing teachers will also increase. Therefore, school districts should anticipate this diverse change and begin preparing their teachers, communities, and district for it. Teachers will have to acquire a different subset of skills outside of the realm of theory that is currently taught at a minimum or absent in most pre-service programs and move towards a more practical understanding of teaching in diverse classrooms. Perhaps these skills will come through first hand experiences of being in the classroom, but will this prove more problematic than expected? Those strategies that have been deemed culturally responsive will have an impact on teaching and learning in diverse classrooms only if they are implemented correctly and embraced by both teachers and administrators. Essentially, instruction that is culturally responsive in nature increases the number of learning opportunities for students. Teachers become familiar with the knowledge base of the students represented in their classrooms and then transform this knowledge into effective instructional practices (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Although many universities and colleges of education are embracing multicultural education, questions remain as to how students pursuing a career in urban education are being educated on teaching in urban diverse populations. There is a need for incorporating this teaching within the field, but where to incorporate it within the curriculum and through what type of experience still remains unanswered. So often, teachers enter the field of education ill-equipped or ill-prepared to manage and instruct students from racial or ethnically diverse backgrounds different from that of the teacher. Accountability measures and standards are higher for teachers of today than yesterday.

With high stakes testing and meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind, teachers are required to differentiate and scaffold lessons more in order to meet the individual academic needs of their students.

However, through culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers can use proven strategies that teach to and through racial divides, empower students, and incorporate their lived experiences within the curriculum to differentiate, support, channel and incorporate student interest and cultural backgrounds to guide their thinking and learning.

Practical Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered when employing culturally responsive pedagogy for diverse populations of students:

- Prior to interviewing potential teaching applicants, create a team comprised of teachers and students that will create a list of questions that get to the “heart” of the candidate about their cultural responsiveness.
- Create questions that can determine whether or not the teacher is *coachable*. Will this candidate be willing to learn how to become culturally responsive and use relevant materials with his/her students.
- Use and provide professional texts for teachers who need support in using culturally responsive teaching strategies.
- Provide time for exemplar teachers of the practice to model the strategies as novice teachers observe. In order to build continuity and consistency across classrooms, grade levels and school, the practice has to be modeled with instructional support and follow up.

- Establish a professional learning community of administrators to read, review, and discuss professional literature surrounding culturally responsive teaching and practices for students in color in K-12.
- Provide students with opportunities to choose and read engaging and meaningful texts in which they can understand, enjoy as well as motivate them intrinsically because of their reading ability. Teachers create a level of engagement when they provide prominent goals, real-world or relevant connections to the reading as well as texts that are interesting, vivid, and familiar to the reader.
- Teachers can work together to create a professional learning team that meets to plan and select culturally relevant curriculum materials; i.e., relevant books and events to enhance the school's instructional practices and programs.

Conclusion

The 52 culturally responsive practices and strategies employed by the teachers in this study fostered effective teaching and created a culture that motivated the African American students in this study to actively engage in the learning process. The components of the 52 strategies and practices as well as the preparation of culturally responsive teaching examined in this study, is not inclusive. However, of the 52 strategies observed by the researcher and executed by the teachers, it was those strategies where the teachers collectively developed and established clear goals and standards through planning of the lessons/activities and day; selected and used culturally relevant curriculum and materials that recognized people, events, traditions and cultural aspects of

the students in their classroom; connected students' learning to prior knowledge; and engaged students in real-life, project-based, meaningful, challenging and relevant curriculum that were most effective in the instruction of the African American students that comprised the eighth grade. As seen from the analysis of the surveys, it was through these fifty-two strategies that the teachers demonstrated their knowledge and beliefs of the impact that culturally responsive teaching has on student outcomes. Based on the teachers' knowledge and beliefs surrounding culturally responsive teaching and the impact its strategies have on student outcomes, the teachers demonstrated the capacity to support the students' needs as demonstrated through their observed instructional practices.

The research also discovered that through the acknowledgement, experiences and acceptance of the cultural backgrounds represented within the classrooms by the teachers, relational trust among both teachers and peers existed and was seemingly beneficial in the teaching and learning processes for the students. A review of the literature supports the fact that teachers who establish relationships with African American students have a positive influence on their academic achievement when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Foster, 1995; Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Learning about students' lived experiences, home and community culture, and about their world inside and outside of school helps teachers build relationships and incorporate these experiences in the context of teaching and learning (Kea, Campbell, Whatley, & Richards, 2005). The teachers in this study recognized the cultural differences and experiences these students lived outside of the

school and infused these differences into their instruction and curricular lessons to close gaps in learning and engage the students in the process that they could be successful in school.

Although different in their approaches, both teachers embodied the effective instructional practices of a culturally responsive teacher. Both teachers acknowledged during their interviews that it was imperative to build trusting relationships early with their students. The teachers had invested numerous hours during the summer months pre-planning lessons, selecting novels, poems, and other literary works that would be of interest to the students, tap into prior knowledge and or build; and works that students could make personal connections to in order to gain greater understanding of the concepts and skills being taught. It was vital to the success of the teachers that they created and fostered positive relationships in which the students saw as genuine concern and care not only regarding their academic state, but for their social, emotional, and physical welfare as well. Because many of the students had been together as far back as pre-school and kindergarten, the teachers realized that many of them shared the same values, views, and opinions about school, interests, their communities and family. Therefore, the data collected from the classroom and student to student interactions supports the fact that bridging these elements and helping the students to make connections within them, the teachers' success in providing an effective and culturally responsive and relevant learning experience for the students under their tutelage proved successful.

This study used Activity Theory (see Figure 1) to understand how culturally responsive teaching strategies and the frequency of their use impact student engagement

and motivation within the classroom. Within this study, teachers interacted with their students within the classroom community using culturally responsive teaching strategies as a tool with the intent of increasing student motivation and engagement with the ultimate hope of increasing student academic achievement. These interactions or expectations for effective teaching were governed by guidelines or rules set forth in the school by the principal and in the classroom by the teacher.

Limitations of the Study

Among the limitations of this study, several are prominent. First, only two teachers in which one was considered a veteran teacher and the other a novice formed the primary data for this study. Case studies are situated to provide depth and rich descriptions; however the results are merely suggestive. Therefore, it would be somewhat premature to suggest that the strategies and skills used by the teachers in this study would solely increase student motivation, engagement and achievement with a larger population of teachers if implemented in the same manner. Secondly, the school was a higher performing school with the Chicago Public Schools that was situated within a very affluent neighborhood within the city. Students are selected through a random city-wide lottery with the majority of enrollees living within this neighborhood. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other schools in other geographic locations. Thirdly, this school was comprised of a professional learning community among its staff members that worked collaboratively, made their practice public and shared a bond with their principal that was more camaraderie than adversarial. The

majority of the teachers contributed and shared in the proposal writing with the principal in creating the school prior to its inception.

Another potential limitation was that this study consisted of only one grade level and two teachers, in which the majority of the students that comprised this grade level had been together since Kindergarten. The students knew the learning styles of one another which possibly made it rather *convenient* to work or not work together in groups. For the most part, the students enjoyed working together because they knew one another. However, outsiders had to succumb to the group dynamics which could pose limiting contributions if they were enrollees during this grade.

Another limitation was that student interviews were recorded, potentially limiting the freedom of expression or hesitation to candidly respond about the school, their teachers and or principal. Although each student was advised that their contribution to the study would pose no academic or behavioral impact, students were still hesitant about openly responding in the presence of their peers. Perhaps, students would have answered more candidly had they been provided a written questionnaire with anonymity instead of a focus group interview.

Analysis of the data which included frequency counts of observed phenomena, strategies implemented by the teachers, principal, teacher and student conversations and questions, could have introduced researcher bias as an observer and evaluator. Often times, the researcher had to role switch and separate her own profession as an administrator and simply observe as an outsider to capture what was actually observed without drawing conclusions prior to analyzing the collected data. As an educator who

personally conducted the teacher interviews and classroom observations, and then repeatedly replayed the recordings, major themes may have been omitted or not accurately identified or coded. Missed themes could have led to missed concepts and or questioning opportunities on the part of the researcher.

Finally, the conceptual framework used in this study to investigate the effective practices of culturally responsive teaching and the effects of its practices on student engagement and motivation within the classroom was Activity Theory. Activity theory was used to understand learning as a complex result of tool mediated interactions. Though complex in its application, Activity theory could have been substituted by a more simplistic theoretical framework such as that proposed by constructivist thinkers. But the researcher sought to demonstrate engagement and motivation through a more systematic concept in which Activity theory shows.

Future Work Warranted

The components of the 52 strategies and practices as well as the preparation of culturally responsive teaching examined in this study, is not inclusive. There is much more to learn and study. Classrooms of the U.S. are becoming more and more racially, ethnically and culturally diverse. As the number of culturally diverse classrooms continues to increase, the challenges for many practicing teachers will also increase. Teachers will have to acquire a different subset of skills outside of the realm of theory that is currently taught at a minimum or absent in most preservice programs and move towards a more practical understanding of teaching in diverse classrooms. Perhaps these skills will come through first hand experiences of being in the classroom. Those

strategies that have been deemed culturally responsive will have an impact on teaching and learning in diverse classrooms only if they are implemented correctly and embraced by both teachers and administrators. Essentially, instruction that is culturally responsive in nature increases the number of learning opportunities for students. Teachers become familiar with the knowledge base of the students represented in their classrooms and then transform this knowledge into effective instructional practices (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Although many universities and colleges of education are embracing multicultural education, questions remain as to how students pursuing a career in urban education are being educated on teaching in urban diverse populations. There is a need for incorporating this teaching within the field, but where to incorporate it within the curriculum and through what type of experience still remains unanswered. So often, teachers enter the field of education ill-equipped or ill-prepared to manage and instruct students from racial or ethnically diverse backgrounds different from that of the teacher. Accountability measures and standards are higher for teachers of today than yesterday. With high stakes testing and meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind, teachers are required to differentiate and scaffold lessons more in order to meet the individual academic needs of their students.

Nevertheless, this issue is not settled. There is no one “quick-fix” or “bullet proof” strategy that could be used that would change the practices and strategies used by teachers of African American students or students of color that would *magically* improve academic achievement, motivation and engagement within the classroom.

However, as educators we must continue to think critically as we move forward as to how teachers can use culturally responsive pedagogy and proven strategies to shape their practices of African American students. Without a process or knowledge of asking the “right” questions of applicants who come to our schools as potential teachers of instructing our diverse student populations, we as administrators and educators will never fully be able to address or acknowledge how we work with teachers or provide the necessary supports for them to effectively teach students of color regardless of the racial divide thereby empowering them to empower our students to close these gaps in instruction. But as learned from this study, when teachers incorporate the cultural backgrounds and interest of the students as well as their lived experiences within the curriculum, teachers are better able to motivate, engage, and differentiate instruction for their students that will guide their thinking and learning and ultimately increase their academic achievement.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title: Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Investigation of Effective Practices For African American Learners

Researcher: Antonia L. Hill

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough

Introduction:

As an eighth grade teacher, you are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Antonia L. Hill for a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been deemed as a highly effective teacher by your principal. According to your principal, you are a professional, reflective, effective practitioner that endeavors to meet the needs of all students within your classroom. Not only that, but you were also considered for this study, because you are currently teaching at one of the most consistently higher academically performing (achieving) schools within the Chicago Public Schools based on your school's Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results.

Please read this form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate in this study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the successful characteristics, practices and strategies of two eighth grade teachers in a predominately African American public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement within their classroom settings. This study will explore the effective practices of the two teachers and their approach to teaching African American students. Furthermore, this study will seek to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and achievement of African American students.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in three (3) one-on-one interviews (pre, during, post) lasting between 20-45 minutes. You will be asked to answer demographic questions relating to demographic and pre-service experiences. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire in which you rate the frequency and effectiveness of your practices within the classroom.

For approximately ten (10) weeks, the researcher will observe your instructional practices and strategies used; and your student interactions during your literacy instructional period for approximately 65-80 minutes, once a week. The researcher will use an Observational Guide to observe your teaching. The researcher will not rate your teaching practices nor share the guide with anyone other than you. This guide is simply being used to note the effective practices and strategies that you use with your students.

Again, the researcher is the only person who will have access to this information. This information will be kept in a password-protected computer file and locked file cabinet. After completion of the study, collected data and information obtained during the study will be destroyed.

Risk/Benefits:

There is a small possibility that you may experience discomfort of being observed once a week for approximately ten weeks. However, the risks are minimal. Federal regulations define “minimal risk” as follows: “the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.” Observing teaching and learning within the classroom environment can provide rich data and information that may reveal the characteristics and strategies that should possibly be used by all teachers serving predominate African American population of students in urban educational settings. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the results from this research will help other educators learn more about culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices that ultimately will increase academic achievement of African American students.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participation in this study. However, a book set (12 copies) will be donated to the teachers’ classroom library.

Confidentiality:

In the event that a case of child abuse is revealed, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used in any aggregated written material generated as a result of this research. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Your identity will be protected by the use of a code name or number. Recorded notes will be stored at the researcher’s home in a locked cabinet. After completing the doctoral degree, the researcher will destroy the information/notes from the observations, surveys, and interviews.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate, please check the box on the next page that says, “I give consent to participate.” Even if you give consent to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Choosing not to give your consent or to withdraw consent will **not** impact your position or summative evaluation in any way.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Antonia L. Hill at ahill8@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Ruanda Garth McCullough, at (312) 915-6918. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Please check the box if you consent to participate:

I agree to participate in this study.

I do not wish to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. If you would like to participate in this study and have signed this form, please place this form in the attached envelope that has been provided, seal it, and place in a United States Postal Box.

Teacher's name

Teacher Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project Title: Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Investigation of Effective Practices For African American Learners

Researcher: Antonia L. Hill

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough

Introduction:

As a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews (pre, during, and post) lasting approximately 25-40 minutes in length, in which you will be asked a series of questions related to your teaching background, experience(s) and teaching style. The questions are open-ended and may lead to further questions. At any time, you may request to stop. The interview sessions are totally voluntary and all information given or shared will be kept confidentially.

Please know that you are being asked to participate in this study because you have been deemed as a highly effective teacher by your principal. According to your principal, you are a professional, reflective, effective practitioner that endeavors to meet the needs of all students within your classroom. Not only that, but you were also considered for this study, because you are currently teaching at one of the most consistently higher academically performing (achieving) schools within the Chicago Public Schools based on your school's Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results.

Pre & Background info

1. Please describe your journey to becoming a teacher. Was this your original career choice? What motivated you to become a teacher?
2. How and why did you choose to teach in an urban setting?
3. How many years have you taught? Briefly describe your teaching experience(s).
4. What is your philosophy of teaching?
5. Have you had interactions with other races or individuals from different racial backgrounds other than your own? If so, how often, and to what extent?
6. How does your race and or cultural background differ from the students that you teach? In your opinion, does it *really* matter?
7. Did you receive any diversity or multicultural training in your pre-service teaching program? If so, please describe the experience(s).

During/Instructional Practice

8. How are instructional materials selected for your classroom? How much input or autonomy do you have in curriculum choice- what gets taught? When? How?
9. What beliefs, if any do you hold about your students that guide your instructional practices?
10. Explain how you plan a lesson for your students?
11. What are concepts or skills you feel are vital for the academic success of your students? Why are these so important?
12. What are/were some literary works or texts that you have assigned for your students to read during the school year? How much choice were students given, if any?
13. How do you incorporate instructional strategies that promote students' ownership of literacy?
14. How do you build upon students' prior knowledge, experiences and or cultural backgrounds in your teaching?
15. Please describe the *culture* of your classroom environment? How much of it is your influence? Students? Administration?
16. Please describe parental support of the students' in your class. How open are parents to your recommended suggestions?
17. What kinds of knowledge or skills should a teacher develop or possess for teaching [literacy] to African American students?

Post/Beliefs & Attitudes

18. What are some things that you *really* like about teaching? What do you dislike?
19. How do you describe yourself as a teacher?
20. How do you describe your teaching practices?
21. I'm sure your students have learned a lot from you thus far. But what knowledge, if any, have you gained from teaching them ?

22. What professional development, classes or training did you receive to help you teach/work with urban African American students? Please describe.
23. How do you address issues/concerns of your immediate and greater African American community in your classroom? Please explain how you do this.
24. Do you feel any special responsibilities/obligations to the African American community because of your career choice? If so, why?
25. What challenges, if any, have you faced in working with African American students? Parents and or families?
26. How do you motivate your students to learn and or achieve?
27. When creating a lesson or project, how much of it is influenced by student interest? Engagement? Rigor?

APPENDIX C
TEACHER OBSERVATION GUIDE

Observation Guide for Effective Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

Teacher:	Date of Observation:	Length of Observation: Start: __: __ End: __: __ :	Total # of Students Present Girls _____ Boys _____ SPED _____ ELL _____
Lesson: Objective, Focus, materials:			
Classroom Environment Description: Library, grouping, desk arrangements, work samples, etc.			
Read Aloud (Before Reading) Text/Book:	Observed/Not observed; description:		
Scaffolding (Before, During, After Reading)	Observed/Not observed; description:		
Connections (Before, During, & After Reading)	Observed/Not observed; description:		
Guided Reading Small group instruction with Instructional level text (Before, during, after reading)	Observed/Not observed; description:		
Writing (Before, During, After)	Observed/Not observed; description:		
Other Observations:			

Engagement: ___ Less than 1/4 ___ 1/4 to 1/2 ___ 1/2 to 3/4 ___ more than 3/4	Questions by students: Boys: Girls: Teacher:	<i>Interruptions/Managerial Challenges</i>	Other:
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Category 1: Curriculum & Instructional Design (Lesson Planning)		
Frequency		Description
How often was this strategy observed?		What do you see? Provide rich details.
	Developing clear goals and standards	
	Designing instruction aligned to curriculum content and authentic assessment methods	
	Aligning assessments to the content, format, and complexity or level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities	
	Carefully planning and clearly structuring day and lesson content	

	Structuring lessons to include review of mastered material	
	Using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction, such as using encoding principles and maintaining an upbeat climate	
	Carefully planning the day and lessons to include active engagement	
	Having and stating specific and explicit activity objectives	
	Helping arouse student curiosity by helping students understand the purpose of learning content	
	Plan activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students	
	Structuring environments for cooperative learning and group activities	
	Structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise	
	Structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members	
	Ensuring group goals are attainable	
<i>Category 2: Classroom Climate</i>		
Frequency		
	Promoting a group-centered, collaborative approach to learning	
	Promoting a positive, familial classroom climate	
	Grouping students according to shared traits to stimulate enjoyment and cohesiveness	
	Identifying and counteracting stereotypes by teaching students about universal traits and values	
	Understanding that classroom instruction reflects elements of both the community and school	
	Creating positive relationships and collaborating meaningfully with parents and community members to further the educational development of students	
	Arousing student curiosity and explaining the purpose and practical application of content	
	Promoting student interest in what goes on in class	
	Establishing a physically inviting classroom	
	Maintaining a safe and orderly classroom	
	Understanding that the classroom climate reflects elements of both the community and school	
<i>Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum & Materials</i>		
Frequency		
	Selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from and containing all cultural groups	

	Selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards	
	Recognizing culturally relevant events	
	Understanding/use speech and expressions familiar to students	
	Using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representations of concepts	
	Using curriculum materials that describe historical, economic, social, political events from a wide variety of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language perspectives	
	Providing factual information to refute misconceptions and prejudices about ethnic group members	
	Understanding and using information about students' families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities	
	Encouraging mutual sharing of personal and expressive stories related to content	
	Helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	
Category 4: Multicultural Approaches to Instruction		
	Using integrated, interdisciplinary lessons	
	Developing clear goals and standards	
	Connecting new learning to students' prior knowledge using cultural metaphors, personal and relevant examples, multiple concrete representations, and explanations and models	
	Using strategies such as call and response, inside-outside discussion circle, visual imagery, and storytelling	
	Teaching a continuum of basic to higher-order literacy skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking to help students derive and convey meaning from text and speech, solve problems, achieve goals, develop individual knowledge and potential, and participate in society	
Category 5: Instructional Strategies		
	Engaging all students using meaningful, relevant, and challenging curriculum, content, and instructional activities	
	Engaging students in real-life, project-based contextual and vocational activities	
	Providing large amounts of time reading a great variety of texts	
	Providing scaffolding to match or link curriculum, materials, lesson content and format, and instructional methods to students' home culture, interests, experiences, and prior learning	
	Matching instructional strategies to student traits,	

	abilities, and learning style preferences	
	Providing materials and learning centers for varied styles and modalities	
	Helping students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	
	Showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity	
	Showing teacher knowledge of diversity of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and gender groups in classroom	
	Showing teacher knowledge of aspects of own culture that facilitate/hinder communication with own/other cultural groups	
	Understanding how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, history, residential status, and cultural experience influence behavior, performance, and climate	
	Communicating validation and acceptance of cultural and gender differences to students	

APPENDIX D
ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
STRATEGIES (AECRS) FORM

ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES
(AECRS) FORM

Copyright 2010 by Johnnie McKinley

According to Johnnie McKinley (2001 and 2010), the strategies listed below are considered to be important to student learning and within the educators' control. For the first section, you are to individually rate the frequency of use of each strategy within each category on a scale of **1 (lowest frequency) to 10 (highest frequency)**. For the second section, you are to place a check within the box indicating whether you *Strongly Agree (SA)*, *Agree (A)*, *Undecided (UN)*, *Disagree (D)*, or *Strongly Disagree (SD)* with those strategies that most accurately describes **how effective you believe the following strategies are for teaching African American students**. Your responses will denote how much you agree, based on your experience with those strategies that have a positive impact on the academic achievement of African American students.

Category 1: Curriculum & Instructional Design (Lesson Planning)						
Frequency (1 – 10) How often I use this strategy 1 – Lowest 10 - Highest		Effectiveness How much I agree that this strategy works with African American students				
	Developing clear goals and standards	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Designing instruction aligned to curriculum content and authentic assessment methods	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Aligning assessments to the content, format, and complexity or level of difficulty of teaching and learning activities	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Carefully planning and clearly structuring day and lesson content	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Structuring lessons to include review of mastered material	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Using varied systematic strategies for direct reading instruction, such as using encoding principles and maintaining an upbeat climate	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Carefully planning the day and lessons to include active engagement	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Having and stating specific and explicit activity objectives	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Helping arouse student curiosity by helping students understand the purpose of learning content	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Plan activities to meet individual developmental needs of diverse students	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Structuring environments for cooperative learning and group activities	SA	A	UN	D	SD

	Structuring group tasks to ensure that students share important roles and develop expertise	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Structuring group composition to balance familiar/unfamiliar group members	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Ensuring group goals are attainable	SA	A	UN	D	SD
Category 2: Classroom Climate						
Frequency (1-10)		Effectiveness				
	Promoting a group-centered, collaborative approach to learning	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Promoting a positive, familial classroom climate	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Grouping students according to shared traits to stimulate enjoyment and cohesiveness	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Identifying and counteracting stereotypes by teaching students about universal traits and values	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Understanding that classroom instruction reflects elements of both the community and school	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Creating positive relationships and collaborating meaningfully with parents and community members to further the educational development of students	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Arousing student curiosity and explaining the purpose and practical application of content	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Promoting student interest in what goes on in class	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Establishing a physically inviting classroom	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Maintaining a safe and orderly classroom	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Understanding that the classroom climate reflects elements of both the community and school	SA	A	UN	D	SD
Category 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum & Materials						
Frequency (1-10)		Effectiveness				
	Selecting culturally relevant curriculum materials from and containing all cultural groups	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Selecting and using culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin boards	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Recognizing culturally relevant events	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Understanding/use speech and expressions familiar to students	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Using manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representations of concepts	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Using curriculum materials that describe historical, economic, social, political events from a wide variety of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language perspectives	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	Providing factual information to refute misconceptions and prejudices about ethnic	SA	A	UN	D	SD

	group members	
	Understanding and using information about students' families, cultures, and communities to connect to learning activities	SA A UN D SD
	Encouraging mutual sharing of personal and expressive stories related to content	SA A UN D SD
	Helping each student understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	SA A UN D SD
Category 4: Multicultural Approaches to Instruction		
	Using integrated, interdisciplinary lessons	SA A UN D SD
	Developing clear goals and standards	SA A UN D SD
	Connecting new learning to students' prior knowledge using cultural metaphors, personal and relevant examples, multiple concrete representations, and explanations and models	SA A UN D SD
	Using strategies such as call and response, inside-outside discussion circle, visual imagery, and storytelling	SA A UN D SD
	Teaching a continuum of basic to higher-order literacy skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking to help students derive and convey meaning from text and speech, solve problems, achieve goals, develop individual knowledge and potential, and participate in society	SA A UN D SD
Category 5: Cultural Congruence in Instruction		
	Engaging all students using meaningful, relevant, and challenging curriculum, content, and instructional activities	SA A UN D SD
	Engaging students in real-life, project-based contextual and vocational activities	SA A UN D SD
	Providing large amounts of time reading a great variety of texts	SA A UN D SD
	Providing scaffolding to match or link curriculum, materials, lesson content and format, and instructional methods to students' home culture, interests, experiences, and prior learning	SA A UN D SD
	Matching instructional strategies to student traits, abilities, and learning style preferences	SA A UN D SD
	Providing materials and learning centers for varied styles and modalities	SA A UN D SD
Category 6: Cultural Competence		
	Helping students understand how personal and cultural experiences influence how they and others construct knowledge	SA A UN D SD
	Showing mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity	SA A UN D SD
	Showing teacher knowledge of diversity of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and gender groups in	SA A UN D SD

	classroom	
	Showing teacher knowledge of aspects of own culture that facilitate/hinder communication with own/other cultural groups	SA A UN D SD
	Understanding how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, history, residential status, and cultural experience influence behavior, performance, and climate	SA A UN D SD
	Communicating validation and acceptance of cultural and gender differences to students	SA A UN D SD

APPENDIX E
STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. How long have you attended this school?
2. What was your best learning experience? What was your worst?
3. Please describe your classroom environment. Take me on a virtual tour through your eyes. What does it look like? If I were to visit your classroom, what would I see? What would students be doing? Your Teacher?
4. If you could be taught one subject or about one particular concept, person, literary work, etc. for one day, what would it be and why?
5. How often do you read stories, books, texts, etc. about or by African Americans?
6. In your classroom library, are there books by and about African Americans? If so, what is your favorite? If not, is there a particular novel, series, etc. that you would you like to see included in your class library?
7. If you were struggling with a particular concept or skill, describe what you would do. How would your teacher assist you? Are there particular *rules* within your classroom for seeking assistance from the teacher or your peers?
8. How often do you participate in Guided Reading? How was your group selected? What was it based on?

APPENDIX F
LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that a research study is being conducted at your child's school as part of a doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to examine the successful characteristics, practices and strategies of two eighth grade teachers to determine their impact on student learning and engagement within their classroom settings. This study will explore the effective practices of the two teachers and their approach to teaching African American students. Furthermore, this study will seek to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and achievement of African American students.

To gather data regarding the effective strategies and practices used by the teachers, student participants will participate in a 45-50 minute group discussion, with approximately 11-12 students, in which they will be asked to describe those practices/strategies implemented by their teacher that they deem as successful or helpful to them in their classrooms. Students will not be asked to rate their teacher's effectiveness, but describe in detail what specific strategies, tools, materials, or resources their teacher uses that help them achieve academically.

Your child may experience "minimal risk" due to participation. Federal regulations define "minimal risk" as follows: "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests". There is a small possibility that some students may experience discomfort or frustration while speaking in a large group setting as they describe their personal experiences and feelings about their teacher. However, students are free to stop their participation at any time. Participation is solely voluntary. To thank the students for their participation, each selected participant will receive a \$5 Scholastic gift coupon to be used towards a book purchase in the school's annual Book Fair.

Students at this age may sign their own assent form. However, if you agree to allow your child to participate in the study, please sign the consent form, place it in the envelope provided, and return it to your child's teacher. If you do not consent to allow your child to participate, you do not need to return the form. There is no penalty for not participating in the study and your child's grades or standing within the school will not be impacted.

If you have read this letter and feel that you need more information or if you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Antonia Hill, the research investigator, at (773) 534-9786 or my research advisor, Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough at rmccul@luc.edu.

Respectfully,

Antonia Hill
Researcher

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Investigation of Effective Practices
For African American Learners

Researcher: Antonia L. Hill

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough

Introduction:

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Antonia L. Hill for a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is an African American that is currently attending a consistently higher academically performing school based on the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) within the Chicago Public Schools. Only eighth grade students are being asked to participate in this study.

Please read this form carefully before deciding whether to permit your child to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the successful characteristics, practices and strategies of two eighth grade teachers in a predominately African American public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement within their classroom settings. This study will explore the effective practices of the two teachers and their approach to teaching African American students. Furthermore, this study will seek to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and achievement of African American students.

Procedures:

If you permit your child to participate in this study, your child will be asked to participate in a focus group interview consisting of twenty-four students; twelve participants at a time. The focus group participants will also be included in the classroom observations which will include: teacher-student/student-student talk, group engagement, direct instruction, student interaction with peers and teacher, on/off task, book talks, literature reviews, etc. This selected group of students will be asked questions about their teacher and asked to describe the teaching practices, types of questions, and activities that their teacher does that are effective for them.

The focus group interview will last approximately 45-50 minutes during the students' reading block. Additionally, I am requesting permission to obtain your child's standardized test scores, grades and work samples from his/her teacher and the Principal. This information is only needed to select students for the focus group.

The researcher is the only person who will have access to this information. This information will be kept in a locked file and on a password-protected computer file which will be destroyed after completion of this study. Your child's principal will, however, have a list of names of the students that will be participating in the study. The principal has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that she will not disclose this information or use it for any other purpose.

Risk/Benefits:

Risks for participation are "minimal. Federal regulations define "minimal risk" as: "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests". There is a small possibility that some students may experience discomfort as they reflect on their teacher's practices within the classroom setting. Understanding the students' perceptions of teaching and learning within the classroom environment can provide rich data and information that may reveal the characteristics and strategies that should be used by all teachers serving predominate African American population of students in urban educational settings. There are no direct benefits to your child from participation, but the results from this research will help other educators learn more about culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices that are needed to increase academic achievement of African American students.

Compensation:

Students that agree to participate in this study will receive a \$5 gift coupon to be used in the school's annual Scholastic® Book Fair.

Confidentiality:

In the event that a case of child abuse is revealed, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used in any aggregated written material generated as a result of this research. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Participants' identities will be protected by the use of a code name or number. Recorded notes will be stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. After completing the doctoral degree, the researcher will destroy the information/notes from the focus group interview.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would like your child to participate, please check the box on the next page that says, "I give consent for my child to participate". Even if you give consent for your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Choosing not to give your consent or to withdraw consent will **not** impact your child's grades or participation in the school's extracurricular activities, if applicable.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Please check BOTH boxes if you consent for your child to participate:

- I give consent for my child to participate.
- I allow the researcher to have access to my child's grades, work samples and standardized test scores as provided by the school's principal and classroom teacher.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to allow your child to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. If you would like your child to participate in this study and have signed this form, please place it in the envelope provided, seal it, and return the envelope to your child's teacher.

Your child's name

Parent Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX G
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Project Title: Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Investigation of Effective Practices
For African American Learners

Researcher: Antonia L. Hill

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough

Introduction:

As an eighth grade student, you are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Antonia L. Hill for a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an African American that is currently attending one of the most consistently higher academically performing (achieving) schools within the Chicago Public Schools based on your school's Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results.

Please read this form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate in this study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the successful characteristics, practices and strategies of two eighth grade teachers in a predominately African American public school to determine their impact on student learning and engagement within their classroom settings. This study will explore the effective practices of the two teachers and their approach to teaching African American students. Furthermore, this study will seek to deepen the understandings about the educational challenges of African American students as well as offer insights to teachers detailing how culturally responsive teaching can effectively impact the level of engagement and achievement of African American students.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group interview consisting of twenty-four students; twelve participants at a time. In this group, you will be asked about 8-10 questions about your teacher and what practices and or strategies he/she uses that are effective in helping you to achieve academically.

The focus group interview will last approximately 45-50 minutes during your class' reading block. Additionally, I am requesting permission to obtain your standardized test scores and Report Card grades from the building principal. This information is only needed to select students for the focus group.

The focus group participants will also be observed in their classroom setting along with the other student participants. During these classroom observations, the researcher will be listening, observing and notating the interactions among the students and teacher, students to student; the frequency or number of times there is: teacher-student/student-student talk, group engagement,

direct instruction, student interaction with peers and teacher, on/off task, book talks, literature reviews, student questioning/teacher responses, etc.

The researcher is the only person who will have access to this information. This information will be kept in a password-protected computer file and destroyed after completion of this study. Your principal will, however, have a list of names of the students that will be participating in the study. The principal has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that she will not disclose this information or use it for any other purpose.

Risk/Benefits:

There is a small possibility that you may experience discomfort as you reflect on your teacher's practices within the classroom setting. This type of discomfort may yield "minimal risk". Federal regulations define "minimal risk" as: "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests". Understanding the students' perceptions of teaching and learning within the classroom environment can provide rich data and information that may reveal the characteristics and strategies that should be used by all teachers serving predominate African American population of students in urban educational settings. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the results from this research will help other educators learn more about culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices that are needed to increase academic achievement of African American students.

Compensation:

Students that agree to participate in this study will receive a \$5 gift coupon to be used in the school's annual Scholastic® Book Fair.

Confidentiality:

In the event that a case of child abuse is revealed, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality. Pseudonyms (a false name) will be used in all written material generated as a result of this research. Therefore, students will not be identified by their real name or identity as data is gathered and collected for this research. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Your identity will be protected by the use of a code name or number. Recorded notes will be stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. After completing the doctoral degree, the researcher will destroy the information/notes from the focus group interview.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate, please check the box on the next page that says, "I give consent to participate". You can decide at any time not to participate even if your parents give you permission to participate. If you give consent to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Choosing not to give your consent or to withdraw consent will **not** impact your grades or participation in the school's curricular or extracurricular activities.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Antonia L. Hill at aLhill1@cps.k12.il.us or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Ruanda Garth McCullough, at (312) 915-6918. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Please check the box below if you consent (agree) to participate:

- I agree to participate in this study.
- I do not wish to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. If you would like to participate in this study and have signed this form, please place it in the envelope provided, seal it, and return the envelope to your teacher.

Student's name

Student Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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VITA

Antonia Lippitt Hill was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Her foundational years of schooling were in Clarksdale, Mississippi and Decatur, Georgia. Before attending Loyola University, Antonia attended the University of Illinois at Urbana, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Prior to beginning her doctoral coursework, Antonia attended Governors State University in University Park, Illinois, where she completed her Masters of Arts in Educational Leadership as well as a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership at National Louis University in Chicago, Illinois.

Antonia's professional career began in 1991 as a Research and Development Chemist for Abbott Labs and Walgreens Pharmaceuticals. In 1994, Antonia became a Substitute Teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. After realizing her passion for education and creativity in the classroom, Antonia pursued and met the qualifications of becoming a certified teacher within the district. Antonia has served as both an elementary and high school teacher; Jobs for Illinois Graduate Career Specialist, an Area Instructional Technology Coordinator, New Leader for New Schools Resident Principal and Assistant Principal.

In 2012, Antonia received *Congressman Danny Davis' Outstanding Educator Award* for her contribution and continued success in educating students within the Chicago Public Schools. Married and the mother of three great children, Antonia is

currently, the proud Principal of John J. Pershing East Magnet School. In this role, she has consistently proven that effective leadership plus a dedicated staff and parents contributes to closing the achievement gap for students. Pershing East Magnet's achievement scores have steadily increased under her leadership and she thanks the children, parents, staff members as well as her family and friends that have helped her along this journey.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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