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School Leaders' Assessment of Teachers' Preparedness for Culturally Responsive Teaching

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SCHOOL LEADERS' ASSESSMENT OF TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS FOR
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

Societal and school inequities continue to be highlighted via widening achievement gaps that adversely impact historically marginalized groups of students and their communities. An acknowledgement of the importance of developing teachers who are prepared to work with students of culturally differing identities from their own in the day-to-day work of teaching has inspired a shift in language and practice from a more general multicultural approach to a culturally responsive teaching methodology in which a purposeful inclusion of the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students is prioritized. Addressing challenges schools face related to cultural difference between teachers and the students they serve, in the last two decades, scholars of learning who have devoted their professional lives to this urgent topic have constructed culturally responsive teaching (CRT) frameworks that offer practical strategies for teachers to use to support learning of ethnically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse students. This qualitative study investigates how school leaders guiding CRT efforts in K12 schools assess teacher preparedness for culturally responsive teaching. Using grounded theory, it unearths a process for guiding school leaders in making decisions about where to focus CRT efforts.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Growing inequities and widening achievement gaps observed during the pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2021) have prompted dialogue among teachers and researchers concerning challenges in the K-12 classroom that prevent culturally and linguistically diverse students from succeeding in school. Scholar of culturally responsive pedagogy, Geneva Gay (2002), has written that the consequences of the continuing achievement gap are “long-term and wide-reaching, personal and civic, individual and collective” (p. 1). In search of “the Why,” researchers have pointed out various contributing factors, one of which is the predominantly homogenous teaching force that does not adequately represent the diverse demographic of students and families living in the U.S. (Hussar et al., 2020). Scholars concerned with educational inequity have pointed to Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as a pedagogical approach that bridges the cultural divide many students face in school, since it has been noted to improve student learning (Byrd, 2016): “Teaching methods that connect with students’ real lives and interests and promote understanding of other cultures are associated with better academic outcomes” (p. 7). Questions surfacing today relating to this area of pedagogy center on how well teachers understand, feel confident in, and can use culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom - this is important for school leaders as they work to plan and deliver professional learning opportunities for their staff in areas needing

improvement, teachers as they continuously work to improve their professional practice, and most urgently, students and their communities, who are most impacted by inequities in school and society.

My dissertation investigates teacher preparedness for CRT and seeks to unearth a process that can help school leaders know where to begin addressing teacher learning needs in this area. To contextualize the aims of this qualitative study, it is important to briefly examine the history and evolution of CRT and its current state in American schooling. Following this, the purpose and significance of this study will be outlined.

Context

CRT evolved from the efforts of groups concerned with multicultural education in the U.S. In my view, their efforts with curriculum reforms set the scene for current work being done toward advancing culturally responsive pedagogy.

A Brief History of Multicultural Education

In defining terms relevant to this discussion, culture has been defined by Gay (2013) as inclusive of “customs and traditions,” “values, attitudes and beliefs,” “heritages and contributions,” and “experiences and perspectives” (p. 52). Multicultural education, according to The Glossary of Educational Reform (2013) refers to “any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds.”

According to Ryan et al. (2020), from the 1800’s onward, U.S. curriculum reflected White Western cultural norms and practices that excluded the knowledge and experiences of African Americans, Mexican Americans, and indigenous Americans. In

the early 1900's, progressive educators like Jane Adams worked to bring students' families and their respective cultures into schooling. By the 1930's, efforts were made to leverage student cultural heritages within the curricula of subjects such as art and history to help diverse students bridge the incongruity of home and school. However, ideas about what was referred to as "intercultural education" met resistance in the 1940's and 1950's, when World War II and the Cold War era caused a national mood swing toward unity. Though there was opposition in certain urban centers such as Detroit and New York City, districts continued a focus on intercultural curriculum; then, after the 1954 landmark ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, curriculum and pedagogy shifted toward improving intergroup relations, focusing on the educating of immigrants, which evolved into what became known as multiethnic or multicultural education in the 1960's-1970's. During the 1980's, curriculum reform efforts began to focus aims on reducing prejudice reduction, promoting equity pedagogy, and forming school cultures that supported students from all backgrounds. Then, in response to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, however, the nation was urged by political forces to get back to a core curriculum of basics to prepare for jobs in the international workplace. Alongside standards-based federal interventions, intended to improve learning outcomes for underserved, impoverished students, a new shift in multicultural education policy began with curriculum reforms such as embedded competencies for meeting the needs of all learners into state standards, which, according to Muñiz (2019), were intended to address the problem of associating low expectations of students due to their race, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or linguistic

diversity. These historical trends can be viewed alongside the efforts of diverse groups who worked for the inclusion of their experiences in U.S. curriculum over the same time period.

Reform Efforts Towards Culturally Inclusive Curriculum

Scholars and writers reporting events as they unfolded have illustrated how African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have historically worked to bring inclusive content into U.S. K-12 curriculum and, to revise inaccuracies (Ryan et al., 2020; Au et al., 2016; Moss, 1969; Hooks, 1994; Dans, 2003; Eisner, 1969; Love, 2019). The discussion about efforts toward reform of curriculum in the U.S. to include multicultural perspectives will be guided by the scholarship recorded primarily in historical curriculum texts by Ryan et al. (2020) and by Au et al. (2016). Both illustrate multicultural curriculum reform efforts in the U.S. to include stories and case studies that offer depth and richness to history. Ryan et al. (2020) have made evident the struggles and efforts of diverse groups by introducing often unheard voices of students and teachers, which made the history come alive. Dionne Dannels, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University, who is quoted in the text, calls the book, “one of the most inclusive foundations of education texts as issues around race, ethnicity, gender, and disability are weaved throughout, rather than solely in a separate chapter.” The Au et al. (2016) book has been critically appraised by Gloria Ladson-Billings, whose words appear in the editorial review: “Discourses around 'multicultural education' often fail to engage the long and significant curriculum history and hard-fought efforts that made the field viable,

necessary, and intellectually powerful. This book should be on the shelf of every curriculum scholar.” These two texts allow us to understand curriculum multiculturalism efforts of various groups - and those of students.

Au et al. (2016) have written about the history of curriculum studies in the U.S. taking place during the early decades of the 1900’s, illustrating the various conversations, struggles, and contentions of diverse communities who viewed curriculum historically as a manifestation of colonization and White supremacy and worked against, what the authors refer to as, a “master narrative” of predominantly White, male, and scholarly curriculum canon. Critical conversations described as a “heartfelt struggle to resist oppression” (p. 149) were taking place by African Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans as they worked to inform and revise curriculum while contending with issues of White supremacy, racism, xenophobia, and nationalism. According to Ryan et al. (2020), the following decades brought with them reforms inspired by social upheaval and the emerging Civil Rights Era. After *Brown vs Board* in the 1950’s, the multicultural education movement blossomed; then, with the advent of the Civil Rights Movement and the 1960’s and 1970’s Black Power Movement, there was a shift in focus to inclusivity of Afrocentric curriculum, since curriculum provided to African Americans was recognized as limiting progress economically and politically, including racist content. Leaders in the community began to respond to inaccuracies with African American scholars writing texts and culturally relevant curriculum was embedded into weeks that celebrated Black history; eventually, in some districts, changes were made in schoolbooks and curricula.

Mexican American students' culture and language were disregarded as being deficit until their communities created curricula that highlighted Mexican American culture, history, traditions, and language. Indigenous communities, in response to assimilationist curriculum, rebelled and continued to speak their home languages in secret, with certain populations opening their own tribal schools (Ryan et al., 2020).

Historically, thus, the efforts of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans have shaped curriculum through their efforts towards multicultural education. Young people of Color, meanwhile, were not sitting in the sidelines. According to Ryan et al. (2020), the Civil Rights Era saw increased student activism surrounding curriculum reform in larger cities, with organized walkouts and protests to increase access and promote curricula that included histories and contributions of diverse communities. These protests were highly publicized and took many forms, including walkouts, manifestos, and debates about curriculum, and in some cases, resulted in changes to curriculum informed by student demands. Examples of reform efforts by young people abound. According to Dans (2003), students from Englewood High School and Waller High School in Chicago during the 1960's succeeded in inspiring a new Negro History course for freshmen that included critical appraisals of the Reconstruction era, civil rights legislation and inequality experienced by African Americans, a change from the written American history curriculum that school leaders claimed included Negro history. Their demands came on the heels of the infamous 1963 Chicago Public School (CPS) two-day boycott, in which 200,000 students protested the renewal of superintendent Benjamin Willis's

contract over his segregationist policies by not attending classes. Another example of students' reform efforts during the time took place in 1969, when six of 166 "outstanding" minority high school students from around the country, who had participated in an intensive critical thinking seminar designed to inspire discourse around various issues including education, attended a three-week workshop at the National College of Education in Evanston, Illinois. Collaborating with high school and college faculty to find solutions to critical issues arising in education, among other topics, they shared their feelings about the importance of learning experiences that touch students' communities (Moss, 1969). Educational scholar and curriculum reformer of the time, Elliot Eisner (1969), described the time period as one that redefined the role of students, who are "not only concerned with the military posture of the country, but they are also disenchanted with an educational program that they believe has little relevance to their lives. "They want, and are demanding, a say-so in the curriculum. They want to decide what they will study and how" (p. 371). Various other examples of later grassroots student-led movements seeking to improve the education and human rights of young people via curriculum included the Parkland youth activists, Black Youth Project, Dream Defenders, and United We Dream (Love, 2019).

The Emergence of a Movement

By the late 1900's, a new trend in curriculum had begun. Closely aligned with aims of multicultural education, culturally relevant curriculum and instructional practice was being described and examined in the work of cultural difference scholars, following the work of progressive social scientists such as Benjamin Bloom (Gay, 2018). Notions

of “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings, 1995), “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2002), and later, “culturally sustaining” (Paris, 2012) pedagogy emerged. The distinction between multiculturalism and culturally responsive pedagogy is noted by African American scholar, Geneva Gay (2013), who writes that,

culturally responsive teaching, in idea and action, emphasizes localism and contextual specificity. That is, it exemplifies the notion that instructional practices should be shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the settings in which they occur, and the populations for whom they are designed. (p. 63)

Culturally “relevant” teaching as a pedagogical approach began after Gloria Ladson-Billing’s (1995) landmark work on the practices and perceptions of strong teachers of African American students in the 1990’s recognized it as a means to bring access and equity to diverse students’ education. Ladson-Billings (1995) later referred to “culturally relevant” teaching as a pedagogy specifically committed to collective empowerment (p. 160). During that time, other scholars, including Bartolome (1994, as cited by Ladson-Billings, 1995), made arguments for teaching practice that utilizes students’ realities, histories, and perspectives. By 2000, Gay published a framework for “culturally responsive teaching” (CRT) in the first edition of the text, “Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice” (Gay, 2000). In the following decades, scholarship in this growing field emerged quickly and soon frameworks for culturally responsive pedagogy were developed by Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), Hammond (2015), Stemberge (2020), Muhammad (2020), and others. Scholars note misconceptions about culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching (CRT), the

most significant being its distinction relative to multicultural education, in which content presented is representative of various cultural perspectives. As Gay (YouTube, 2018) elaborates, multicultural education is the “umbrella” under which CRT fits. Culturally responsive teaching asks teachers to use the cultural experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students who are present in their classrooms as means to teach them (Gay, 2002; 2012; 2018). This pedagogy, this “set of skills that teachers develop” (Gay, 2014), is gaining momentum, as some states are embedding CRT standards into teacher preparation programs.

State standards are agreed upon, defined skills and dispositions of newly minted teachers. Standards for teacher preparation differ from state to state (Saenz-Armstrong, 2021). While all states do - to some degree- embed competencies associated with CRT into standards that inform coursework in teacher preparation programs, a report in New America (Muñiz, 2019) points to evidence, however, that the majority do not provide clear descriptions comprehensive enough to support teachers in developing these capacities. According to the report, all 50 U.S. states embed combinations of key competencies, including those relating to family and community engagement and expectations for teachers to exhibit high expectations for all students. The majority of states also expect teachers to promote respect for student diversity and link curriculum or instructional practices to students’ culture; however, no state clearly addresses low expectations of students that are commonly associated with their race, class, culture, and language. Some states are in the process of crafting new standards for culturally responsive teaching and school leadership to address gaps in teacher learning. An

example of this is the approval, in February of 2021 by the Illinois General Assembly's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules of a new rule requiring that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) newly developed Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards be formally incorporated in all Illinois teacher preparation programs (ISBE, 2020) and integrated into all educator preparation programs in colleges and universities programs granting professional educator licenses in areas of teaching, school support, and administration by October 2025 (Korte, 2021).

As teacher preparation efforts have been underway, ISBE has provided a page of resources for educator preparation providers and stakeholders, including FAQs, matrixes for both the development of new and redesigned programs, timelines, alignment guides, and a self-assessment tool kit (ISBE, 2022). Alongside new teacher preparation, ISBE (2020) has stated that the scope of this new policy extends to teachers currently in the profession, who will be supported with optional new courses on learning the new standards intended to help educators in the following eight areas identified in the standards: gain a deeper understanding of how their life experiences impact their perspectives; understand societal systems in society that create and reinforce inequity; learn from and about their students' cultures, languages, and learning styles; value students' feedback and leadership; support and create opportunities for student advocacy; develop relationships with students' families and communities; curate curriculum to be more inclusive; and work so that the diversity of students is represented in learning environments.

The Problem

Most teachers do not enter teaching with CRT capacities including understanding students' cultural backgrounds, the ability to communicate cross-culturally, aligning curriculum to students' cultures, nor differentiating instruction for culturally diverse backgrounds (Gordon & Espinoza, 2020). Students who are on the "other" side of the cultural divide face challenges that can be addressed with CRT, yet the teaching force has not been adequately prepared for work with an increasingly diverse student population. Scholars of CRT and equity, including Geneva Gay (2018), Zaretta Hammond (2015), Gholdy Muhammad (2020), Christine Sleeter (2004), and Adeyemi Stenbridge (2020) have written about various problems of practice relating to learning standards and the materials that are developed or used to teach them and their effects on learners. In this section, I address noted areas of concern by these scholars of CRT who have developed frameworks for helping schools seeking to support underserved, historically marginalized students.

Geneva Gay

According to Gay (2018), the purpose of culturally responsive teaching is to "empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy" (p. 142) to improve the achievement of children and adolescents who have been impacted most by inequities that persist in the US. Curriculum content, as a one aspect of pedagogy, should be seen as a tool to help African American, Asian American, Latino American, and Native American students gain confidence in their capabilities, their attitudes, and the experiences they have in school. Gay reminds us that

since NCLB, the standards-based movement has disproportionately hurt underachieving youth of color and poverty, instead of helping them as intended. Though many states' standards *could* accommodate cultural diversity, few have meaningful language or content that identifies and encourages culturally responsive curriculum.

Since textbooks are aligned to standards, Gay (2018) notes, there is a content gap in culturally responsive materials widely used in schools. Curriculum is distinguished by Gay (YouTube, 2018), as being formal, hidden, symbolic, or that which is found in media. Formal curriculum, including resources such as literature and textbooks, and curriculum found in mass media, which teachers rely on as important resources for learning can prevent ethnically diverse students from feeling validated and accepted because of the way that content is created, presented, and how it portrays them. Biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and typecasting exist in these materials, as well as limited perspectives from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural viewpoints. Consequently, the misinformation embedded in many available resources interferes with students' motivation for learning, engagement, and persistence, resulting in low perceptions of worth and achievement gaps. The most widely embraced learning materials used in K-12 schools are reading resources and mass media. According to the author, there are some good books out there, but more are needed. Multicultural literature and trade books are valuable, "even if they are not always bias-free and culturally affirming for different ethnic groups" (Gay, 2018, p. 162). No one author or text can offer a sufficient profile of all ethnic groups and their cultures, contributions, and experiences, therefore, all-in-one trade books can be problematic. Some literature perpetuates myths and inaccurate

portrayals of culturally and ethnically diverse groups, contains biases, misrepresentation, or are culturally inaccurate. Others have few or nonexistent characters of Color, thereby minimizing the perspectives of insider ethnic, racial, and cultural individuals and groups. Teachers often use mass media to supplement traditional texts. According to Ellsworth and Whatley (1990, as cited by Gay, 2018), research over 35 years has shown that much of mass media content students see is not neutral in the way it is presented- and that this content holds cultural, social, and political meaning.

In sum, stereotypes, exoticization, marginalization, homogenization, and making “invisible” immigrant groups of color and ethnic Americans, as represented in texts and media used to teach in school, costs students time and emotion regarding managing feelings, monitoring self, and altering behavior to fit norms and expectations. Feelings of ethnic shame result in low self-esteem, lack of confidence and negative self-worth that are significant barriers for succeeding in school because they interfere with students’ abilities to focus on academic tasks.

Zaretta Hammond

Zaretta Hammond (2015) in the text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain; Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, presents culturally responsive teaching as a tool that aims to help underserved learners, who are culturally and linguistically diverse, develop the cognitive skills needed to become self-directed learners by using brain principles from neuroscience. CRT practices are seen as vehicles for helping dependent learners develop new habits of mind and cognitive skills. This enables students to accelerate their own

learning by challenging them cognitively and building cognitive capacity through the brain's natural input, elaboration, and application cycles. Curriculum, as framed by the text, can be seen as a pedagogical element through which brain power can be activated. Hammond argues that gaps in students' achievement will not be eliminated by motivating learners to become more engaged; instead, educators must focus on strategies that help learners who have become "dependent" due to school inequities leaving them in unchallenging and unmotivating classrooms think in complex ways and create environments that are rigorous and inclusive of students' contexts and ways of learning. Curriculum, thus, should be shaped so that students see its connection to their lives and ways of knowing, in order for the developing brain to grow and cultivate higher order thinking skills.

Hammond (2015) argues that the reasons why students fall behind and why the achievement gap is widened by color and race are due to systems in schools that perpetuate inequity. Systemic problems arising from inequity include majority culture archetypes embedded in schooling that are incongruent with students' home lives and ways of knowing, resulting in diminished access to more challenging courses and content.

In the U.S., being labeled as "disadvantaged" is equated with factors of race, language, SES, or cultural background, though the reality, according to Hammond (2015), is that educational systems, reflecting a majority White workforce in the U.S., have developed pedagogy that reflects a cultural mindset that is incongruent with the ways of knowing of students of Color. Hammond notes that though cultures may be

different at the surface level, there are common values, practices, and viewpoints that many share that constitute archetypes. For example, in America, one dominant cultural archetype is individualist, while cultures of many Latin American, African American, Native American and Pacific Islander people are more collectivist in their way of thinking. The problem arises when students' ways of knowing are incompatible with pedagogy, making students disengage, and consequently become labeled as slow learners or having deficits preventing them from continuing with more challenging work. According to Hammond, "for culturally and linguistically diverse students, their opportunities to develop habits of mind and cognitive capacities are limited or non-existent because of educational inequity" (p. 13). Underserved English learners, students from poor families, and students of Color have less challenging and more repetitive curriculum focused on basic skill mastery, which affords less opportunities to engage in higher order thinking and developing advanced cognitive skill development. This results in students becoming dependent learners who are unable to complete complex tasks without ongoing support. By postponing more challenging and interesting work for students until they have mastered the basics, we have essentially created what the author calls "an epidemic of dependent learners."

In addition to the problems culturally and linguistically diverse students face in the classroom, Hammond (2013) points out issues with high stakes assessments used to determine students' fates, arguing that standardized tests make students feel judged and threatened, thus triggering anxiety that students often don't recognize. The testing experience can raise blood pressure and release stress hormones into the brain impacting

memory and decision making. As adrenaline makes the heart race and students' thinking become increasingly more clouded, this inability to focus can inhibit students' performance on tests. The author outlines suggestions for teachers on how to frame the meaning and purpose of tests. "As culturally responsive educators, we can't change the test, but we can influence students' frame of mind going into it" (Hammond, 2013).

Finally, according to Hammond (2015), a problem that contributes to the achievement gap is that teachers by and large do not understand brain science and struggle with how to bring CRT into teaching practice. Part of this problem, the author acknowledges, can be owned by framers of culturally responsive pedagogy. "We have not made it clear to math and science teachers how they would interject culture into the teaching of math when teaching formulas and procedures seem straightforward and culturally neutral" (p. 138).

Gholdi Muhammad

Muhammad (2020) discusses pressing problems, including debilitating structures of education such as standards, assessments, and curriculum content designed from White perspectives that are not serving the growing population of culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse youths and families in the US; teaching beyond the sanctioned curriculum and standards such as the Common Core is encouraged, since "too often, educators passively follow curriculum and standards" (p. 52).

According to Muhammad (2020), IQ tests, which were an influence on standards and standardized testing, are incomplete and biased, reflecting White attitudes, norms, and stories. High stakes tests are also problematic as they determine access for students,

preventing many from a future because they create labels, classifications, and segregation with unfair and biased measurements of achievement. A point of noted concern is when assessments include items that can only be understood from a singular viewpoint that not everyone shares; the author notes a pervasive Whiteness in the children's literature in the Common Core State Standards. As teachers work on becoming more culturally responsive to the identities of their students and the time in which we live, standards for learning must be transformed to be more inclusive of identity, intellectualism, and criticality to not only improve schooling, but become measures for the quality of teaching. Textbooks that are embedded in school curriculum, by not giving a complete account of Black and Brown lives in history, not only discourage, but undermine efforts to bring the heritages and cultural identities of children of Color into curriculum. The author also sees a lack of progress of portrayals of Black experiences in literature and a pervasive Whiteness in children's texts, including nursery rhymes, comics, and literature. Literature used in schools is also problematic because it is not responsive to students' identities, histories, and literacies, and students do not have opportunities to engage in text selections.

Other curricular challenges are embedded in the content children and adolescents see every day. Films, television, advertisements, and social media have all conditioned us to accept inhumane portrayals of Black and Brown people. Advertisements, in particular, have negatively represented people from these groups as not capable, attractive, or civilized. Deficit thinking that results from traditional texts and media used in schools can lead to trauma and affect students for the rest of their lives, making young people feel

worthless, that they do not belong, or are not good enough. As a result, their academics and engagement are negatively impacted.

Christine Sleeter

From the ethnic studies viewpoint, the standards movement that began with NCLB is seen as a political struggle over the right to define how future generations will comprehend the world and their place in it. Some of the problems are: the standards-based movement “casts children as empty vessels to be filled with prescribed knowledge” (Sleeter, 2004, p. 126), which has been defined from a White, Eurocentric perspective, preventing students from claiming their ethnic identities and limiting chances of achieving in school; the glossing over of issues of racism or perpetuation of a myth of racial progress; and curriculum resources aligned to standards that are problematic, requiring transformation in order to become vehicles for social justice.

According to Sleeter (2020), differences in children, such as culture and languages spoken at home, have not been acknowledged in standards discussions, with the exception of comparing the achievement of groups. Standards and consequent curriculum defined from a cultural perspective incongruent with their own experiences impacts students’ identity and sense of self. Students of Color understand the problem of textbooks and other resources being grounded in White studies perpetuating White perspectives. In response, students of Color tend to either speak out, seek alternative resources, or lose interest in school. In order to do well in school and graduate, students of Color must master knowledge that conflicts with what they learn in their homes and communities that “marginalizes people like themselves” (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 43).

Research says: young people who possess a strong sense of ethnic identity have better mental health and higher achievement.

Curriculum used in K-12 schools has been found to gloss over issues of racism or perpetuate a myth of racial progress. There is also a disconnect between racism of the past and racism that exists today and, a perpetuation of the notion of racism framed as a “few bad individuals” rather than systemic systems of oppression. Scholars note that “overt messages and viewpoints are taught through a variety of multimodal texts, such as textbooks and other materials like novels, curriculum packages, videos, and online curriculum resources, and even classroom discourse” (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 24). Teachers’ viewpoints, and even classroom discourse, reflect White perspectives. Teacher-created curriculum reflects teachers' viewpoints, perspectives, and ideologies, according to Sleeter (2020), and since most teachers in the US are White and have not completed ethnic studies coursework, there is a disconnect. An incongruency exists in perceptions of White teachers regarding race and racism. For example – the belief that racism is a problem with individuals, rather than systems of oppression.

Many curriculum resources used, though improved in recent decades, are still problematic. Textbooks often depict stereotypes of groups in representations of people of Color while perpetuating notions of White as a ruling, intellectual elite. Sleeter (2004) maintains that there has been an erasure of representations and narratives of the experiences and viewpoints of Blacks in curriculum, and further, African Americans intellectual thought is not visible. Latinx peoples in texts have also been found to be represented in stereotypes when represented, with some ethnicities invisible, texts

featuring the same few authors, and Latin/American literature positioned as “multicultural” rather than American. American Indians are also stereotyped, and historical events and issues oversimplified, lacking accurate perspectives. Examples of these appear in various resources and textbooks used in K-12 classrooms, impacting students as consumers of curriculum.

In sum, since standards define what is taught in American classrooms, teachers must become scholars of ethnic studies so that they are able to develop curriculum that is relevant to children and adolescents from historically marginalized groups, and *then* align it to standards, since culturally responsive, anti-racist curriculum is essential for reclaiming the ethnic identity of students of Color (Sleeter, 2004; Sleeter & Zavala (2020).

Adeyemi Stemberidge

Stemberidge (2020) discusses the urgency of closing equity gaps in school achievement outcomes by cultivating students' awareness of their culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and abilities via engaging, student- centered, rigorous learning experiences: “Discernment, analysis, synthesis, and interpretation are all tools for developing understandings, and when our students understand how to learn, they can better use these strategically in the interest of their own growth” (p. 18). In this way, equity gaps are confronted and addressed: by helping teachers become responsive and reflective practitioners.

Some of the challenges facing diverse students are deeply embedded in society and schools. Stemberidge (2020) defines some of the most pressing issues as: social

injustices, biases and marginalizing mindsets, unchanging tools and methods used in the classroom, and student outcomes that leave some groups behind. The author challenges teachers to think about their own practices and reflect on these areas when doing curriculum design work. Concerning biases and marginalizing mindsets, Stenbridge reminds us that biases we hold impact our lesson planning and curriculum choices; therefore, teachers must be intentional about what selections they make to ensure that content and its delivery is fair to all students. The responsibility to address and correct biases lies on the teacher, who must be responsible in identifying racist or marginalizing mindsets. Additionally, tools of curriculum and content delivery are not always a reflection of the greater purpose of American public schools, which is a multicultural, pluralistic society. Finally, the achievement gap highlights the reality that racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic identity are predictors of success in school; clearly, educational equity remains a pressing issue of our day.

Assessment is noted as another area of concern by the author. Measurement is a critical part of efforts to improve learning for marginalized groups of students by assessing how students are doing in comparison to other schools and districts, and to ensure accountability to groups. Today, high stakes standardized tests continue to assume the position of most widely used assessments. Rather than offering helpful data for closing equity gaps, they are functioning as correlative indicators of zip code and publicly available records of student outputs, highlighting predictable patterns of underperformance along racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic lines. The problem is that although we understand that gaps exist, standardized tests are not useful as tools for

addressing inequities. To move in the direction of equity, we must reconceptualize assessment and deprioritize the use of standardized tests. Stemberge (2020) advocates for schools working toward alternative ways to discern what is the best and most reliable evidence of student learning, while using standardized test as a variable in the greater equity assessment landscape.

Synthesizing Needs

These scholars of CRT paint a compelling picture of the urgency of developing teachers who have a rich understanding of the issues faced by ethnically diverse students, for example, the impact of societal norms, stereotypes, and prejudice on student learning, and what culturally responsive practice entails. Addressing these concerns and helping develop teachers with an understanding of the challenges diverse students face lies in the hands of many. According to Malo-Juvera et al. (2018),

the onus of responsibility falls on teacher educators, school system administrators, and scholars to ensure that both preservice and in-service teachers are provided with research-based strategies to improve the lives and learning of all their students through meaningful culturally responsive instruction. (p. 155)

In preparing emerging educators for work with diverse students, teacher preparation programs offer various kinds of learning opportunities for candidates with little exposure to diverse student populations so they can gain skills as culturally responsive teachers. Existing literature identifies aspects of teacher preparation programs that may contribute to the development of culturally responsive teachers. These include integrated social emotional learning (SEL) and CRT in core coursework and practicum

experiences (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019); ongoing SEL research and teacher training embedded into structures of teacher education training with the support of community-embedded, multigenerational resources (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019); integrating multiple instructional supervision processes, specifically- professional development, professional learning communities (PLCs); curriculum development, and action research (Gordon & Espinoza, 2020), field experiences, critical classroom discourse, and engaging with literature that centers race and equity across teacher education curriculum, and ongoing self-reflection (Warren, 2017); and repeated practice, content and guided reflection (Bottoms et al., 2017).

There is little literature, however, that investigates in-service teachers' CRT practice. The problem this study seeks to address is the knowledge gap that exists in teachers' professional practice of CRT. Closing the gap is possible; however, this must begin with the identification of specific areas of need so that resources are not spent on areas in which teachers are already excelling due to prior learning, experience, or in-service training. Bryk et al. (2015) has identified theoretical principles for school improvement, the first being identification of an area that is "problem- specific and user-centered" (p. 35). This identification is important, since it offers a starting point for building systems of positive practices that can grow across schools and networks. However, there are dozens of various skills and competencies associated with CRT. A framework is needed to identify areas of competence and needed improvement in order to support teachers in CRT.

Purpose

Teacher professional development is situated within curriculum and instruction domains that can be framed as “classroom practices”. My dissertation investigates how school leaders assess in-service teachers’ preparedness for CRT in specific areas of teacher practice. School leaders are significant to this investigation due to their role as instructional supervisors in evolving models of school leadership. According to Bryk et al. (2015), school personnel with “boots on the ground” are best situated to assess where problems are located.

Traditionally, principals have determined both topics and methods for professional development in their roles as instructional leaders; however, given trends toward collaborative decision-making inspired by research on school improvement planning (Boudette et al., 2014; Bryk, 2015), many schools have flattened this hierarchical model and dispersed leadership to include teacher leaders who guide areas such as curriculum development, data use, instructional coaching, etc. (Killion et al., 2016). As Illinois rolls out the new CRT standards for teacher preparation (ISBE, 2020), therefore, it is safe to assume that principals are working closely with other school level leaders in gathering data and making decisions about teachers' professional development needs.

In my work with urban schools, I have noted an interesting phenomenon. Since principals themselves may not reflect the demographic of the teachers, students, or communities that they serve, they are increasingly bringing on collaborators to bridge the cultural divide for work on CRT by developing affinity teams, Diversity Equity, and

Inclusion (DEI) work groups and other versions of teacher teams to work alongside administrators in co-developing CRT PD that meets teachers' needs. These teams may or may not be guided by the principal. If these assumptions are to be taken at face value – (1) trends toward shared decision-making, and (2) expanded and more diverse teacher leadership regarding equity efforts- then it cannot be assumed that principals are the only voices that can describe teacher CRT professional development needs. In their literature review of leadership for educational equity, Poekert et al. (2020) identified 31 papers that reflected a senior leadership view of leadership and 10 taking a teacher leader perspective. Most studies, therefore, slant towards views of principals and may not reflect the weight of invaluable voices of teacher leaders who represent non-dominant group students and who may ride “both sides of the fence,” helping administrators develop, enact, and evaluate PD initiatives, while also taking part in them. Abacioglu et al. (2020) call for research that seeks to gain information from multiple informants to validate findings of CRT studies that rely on teacher perceptions of efficacy. Cruz et al. (2020) ask researchers to examine teacher preparation and professional development for CRT. In response to these calls, my dissertation seeks out voices of school level leaders who are guiding equity efforts in their schools to learn about specific areas of teachers' needs for professional learning.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to understand how school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching in specific domains of K-12 classroom practice. I will introduce a procedure for assessing teachers' preparedness for CRT and investigate its use via grounded theory. Grounded theory will be my strategy of

inquiry due to its use in research that strives to bring about a theory about a process that is grounded in the views of study participants (Creswell, 2009).

The main research question driving this qualitative investigation is: *How do school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching?*

Significance

The significance of this study relates to research efforts, theory development, practical relevance and most notably, potential student learning gains.

This qualitative study contributes to the little existing research on CRT leadership because it seeks out voices of school leaders working to bring CRT to Illinois K-12 schools in order to understand how they assess teachers' current preparedness for CRT. School leaders in roles such as principals, assistant principals, equity leaders, or teacher leaders such as instructional coaches, mentors, learning facilitators, who work with teachers to help them grow in their practice (Killion et al., 2016), will contribute their assessment to help develop a better understanding of the landscape of CRT as demographic changes and learning gaps continue to grow. Theoretical, as well as practical knowledge can result from these insights. Theoretically, if we can discern where school leaders are seeing teacher learning needs within domains of CRT frameworks, then these frameworks might be applied in similar studies on CRT or expanded, informed by new knowledge. Theoretically informed trends identified by scholarly research may prompt the development of shared practices via networked improvement communities (NICs) (Bryk, 2015) such as school-university partnerships intended to support professional practice. Results can also help schools practically by offering an opportunity

to contextualize larger trends, thereby assisting school leaders in PD identification and targeted professional learning methods that are relevant for many teachers as they move around in the field. Finally, knowledge gained in this area can inform policymakers' efforts in state, district, and local level decision-making about processes that can be used to identify and address teachers' professional learning needs. Ultimately, and most importantly, teacher training needs that are identified as a result of the study can benefit historically underserved, diverse, urban students and help close achievement gaps.

To define the scope of this study, it is important to define terms that will be used. Culture has already been defined as inclusive of “customs and traditions,” “values, attitudes, and beliefs,” “heritages and contributions,” and “experiences and perspectives” (Gay 2013, p. 52). “Culturally responsive teaching” (CRT) is defined as pedagogy that emphasizes “localism and contextual specificity,” that is, it exemplifies the notion that instructional practices should be shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the settings in which they occur, and the populations for whom they are designed” (p. 63). Gay (2018) has referred to culturally diverse students as “marginalized ethnic students” (p. 143) and “ethnically diverse students” (p. 142); in solidarity with her scholarship, this paper will refer to this population of students as “ethnically diverse,” “diverse,” and occasionally, deferring to other scholars, as “culturally, ethnically, racially, or linguistically diverse.” Teacher leadership refers to the roles and responsibilities, formal or informal, in which “teachers have the capacity to lead from within and outside the classroom” (Killion et al., 2016, p. 10). Finally, effective professional development (PD) is defined by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) as “structured professional learning that

results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2).

Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and an appendix section. The first chapter provides a brief introduction about how CRT has entered the landscape of teaching, the rationale for the study, the rationale for selection of participants, statement of the problem, and the research question. Chapter II presents a review of the literature on CRT. Chapter III describes the research design, including methods, participant and site selection, the instrument, the forms of data collection, how data will be analyzed, strategies used to increase the validity and reliability of the study, potential ethical issues, and the role and background of the researcher. Chapter IV presents results of the analysis of survey data and identifies emerged themes organized by CRT framework domains (Gay, 2018). Chapter V discusses study results, implications for theoretical application, policy, practice, future research, strengths and limitations of the study, and a conclusion with overarching lessons learned. This chapter includes a references section of sources used in the dissertation. An appendix section includes copies of the Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from Loyola University Chicago (LUC), informed consent forms, and the questionnaire.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature presented in this chapter seeks to share what is known about teachers' preparedness for CRT, introduce areas of teaching practice that CRT theorists identify as critically needed, offer student perspectives of essential practices, present current efforts by school leaders to help prepare culturally responsive teachers, and situate a theoretical framework. Specifically, this includes: (1) recent peer-reviewed published research on teachers' CRT preparedness; (2) writing by contemporary theorists of CRT synthesizing areas of recommended learning for schools and teachers who work in them, (3) students' perspectives on CRT, (4) trends in leadership efforts toward advancing CRT, and finally, (5) an outline and rationale for the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018). A synthesis of this literature provides a road map of what is known about teacher preparedness for CRT and how teachers' needs are being addressed.

CRT Literature

The studies on CRT PD are few and far between; however, by studying literature reviews, peer-reviewed studies of CRT efforts in K12 schools and synthesizing the work of contemporary scholars of CRT, trends about teacher learning needs have emerged. This section introduces literature on teacher preparedness for CRT, theorists' perceptions of CRT needs, students' perceptions of CRT, and current efforts at bringing CRT to schools.

Teachers' Preparedness for CRT

A systematic review of the literature by Bottiani et al. (2018) through 2014 concluded that there was little empirical research on professional development (PD) outcomes for in-service teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy. More recently, Brodeur et al. (2020) has stated that little is known about how to best prepare teachers for working with diverse student populations. Therefore, the literature review I am conducting looks at the most recent studies of teachers and school leaders to understand what is known about strengths and challenges of teachers relating to CRT. Many studies rely heavily on teachers' perceptions, which is challenging due to the singular perspective from which knowledge is generated; however, significance is noted in their "user-centered" perspective, which Byrd (2017) defines as essential for school improvement work, since it means, "respecting the people who actually do the work by seeking to understand the problems they confront" (p. 32).

Studies of teacher CRT efficacy have indicated how teachers feel about CRT and their work with diverse students. Bonner et al. (2018) found very positive attitudes toward culturally diverse populations and culturally responsive pedagogy and an understanding of it as fostering attitudes of acceptance and respect, inclusion of various aspects of culture in their practice, and a connection with students' families and communities. In addition to demonstrating positive attitudes, teachers have also expressed confidence in skills associated with CRT. For example, teachers in one recent study (Cavendish et al., 2021) perceived their CRT strengths as: compassion and "active valuing of diversity" (p. 325); building of positive relationships with students; facilitation

of constructive interaction; ensuring content relevance; differentiated instruction; and growth goal. Evidence of teacher confidence building trust and developing relationships has also been demonstrated by Cruz et al. (2020). These are two significant areas in the work of culturally responsive teaching, also found by Siwatu (2007), and should be celebrated; however, peer-reviewed studies paint a picture of other general competency areas that require our attention: (1) identity exploration, development of cultural perspectives and critical consciousness, and (2) integration of culture into curriculum and instructional practice.

Identity exploration, cultural perspectives, and critical consciousness. Bonner et al. (2018) has summarized the ideological foundation of CRT as starting with teachers' personal and professional self-awareness. Others have emphasized, specifically, exploration of one's' cultural identity and understanding of various cultural perspectives as important attitudes for effective, culturally responsive teachers. For example, high school teachers in Cavendish et al. (2021) study identified compassion and "active valuing of diversity" (p. 325); building of positive relationships with students; facilitation of constructive interaction such as relevant student group work with open dialogue; working to ensure content relevance to facilitate engagement; differentiated instruction; and growth, rather than outcomes-based goal setting as strengths in teachers' work with diverse students. Teacher professional development needs were identified as being cultural identity exploration and pedagogical methods with an emphasis on developing social-justice perspectives. Perspective-taking abilities and multicultural attitudes was also a focus of Abacioglu et al. (2020), who studied teacher perceptions in the

Netherlands, finding that teachers who had better and more positive responses in these areas reported to engage in CRT more often than those who did not, and that developing these attitudes may support teachers' efforts to navigate the differing perspectives and cultural elements of others. Brodeur et al. (2020) discussed the importance of teachers developing sociopolitical consciousness in their study in which teachers' perceptions of professional development were gathered with intended goals of engaging participants in reflection and discussion around their core values as teachers, their "why" of teaching and how it reflects their values, getting to know the students they teach, identifying and addressing teachers' implicit biases, and connecting with culturally diverse learners. Researchers noted that only a few participants articulated knowledge about the need for developing sociopolitical consciousness. Lomelí (2021) has discussed the significance of the development of a collective critical consciousness, which is also noted by Cruz et al. (2020), who has argued that measures used in studies on teachers' self-efficacy in CRT (Siwatu, 2007) should include items about cultivating students' critical consciousness of barriers that perpetuate learning disparities.

Integration of culture in curriculum and instruction. Other areas of focus for teacher learning that have surfaced include the integration of culture into pedagogy. Malo-Juvera et al. (2018) analyzed teacher perceptions finding low self-efficacy in centering students' culture in instruction, working with English Learners and their families, and identifying cultural bias in standardized tests and curricula prior to professional development. This study echoes the Siwatu et al. (2016) study of preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy, in which teachers' doubts about

their effectiveness emerged in areas relating to students' home lives, including language and culture and teaching about historical relevance of diverse cultures today, such as contributions to mathematics and science. In this study, conversations with participants suggested that the lack of confidence was a result of limited knowledge of student diversity, experiences of observing and working in diverse school settings, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Cruz et al. (2020) similarly found low confidence in teacher self-efficacy associated with validating students in their home language, teaching students about their contributions to math and science, using culturally responsive techniques and including specific cultural elements in curriculum. These findings amplify the need for teachers to understand how to integrate students' cultural ways of thinking and understanding the world into classroom practice. For example, Abacioglu et al. (2020) have emphasized the importance of teachers gaining exposure to texts written by and about diverse populations; taking part in social experiences of cultural communities different from their own; and incorporating regular critical dialogue with peers into CRT professional development programming, noting that, "introspection on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions toward students and their families form the basis of these dialogues" (p. 746).

Theorists' Perceptions of CRT Needs

Voices of scholars and theorists who study CRT and are invested in improving the school and life experiences of students of diverse ethnic backgrounds support and expand on these topics. Gay (2018), Hammond (2015), Muhammad (2020) and Stemberge (2020) have written extensive texts that are currently being used in schools by school

leaders looking to introduce CRT to staff. These texts offer insights that are decidedly student-centered. My review of them has unearthed common aims for teaching: (1) the importance of supporting and strengthening students' identity development alongside their intellectual development, (2) diversifying and continuously updating curriculum to reflect the lives of students, and (3) creating safe classroom communities that are free of psychological and social threats.

Supporting healthy identity development. Teaching that is culturally responsive calls for incorporating strategies that create circumstances in which the students will find responsive and meaningful learning opportunities; ones that foster identity development as well as skill development. Stenbridge asks teachers to reflect on the extent to which texts they select portray cultures through a deficit lens and how instruction allows students opportunities to draw from their “cultural backpacks” and bridge students' cultural and academic identities. Muhammad (2020) calls for the shifting of curriculum to become responsive to the histories, identities, literacies, and language practices of non-White student populations by embedding learning goals of identity development, skills development, intellectual development, and criticality in lessons, in order to make learning more humanized and giving students opportunities for personal, intellectual, and academic success. By critically analyzing and adapting curriculum content with teachers' students in mind, adding to existing curriculum, becoming more responsive to the social and political times that they and students have lived in and live in today, teachers can bridge the divide that prevents culturally diverse students from access to, and success in, rigorous learning.

Diversifying and continuously updating curriculum. Biases, stereotypes and negative portrayals of African American, Asian American, Latino American, and Native American people that students see, hear, and read about in literature, mass media, and trade books can interfere with their abilities to focus on academic tasks and succeed in school. Therefore, it is imperative that curriculum should be diversified in form and substance to reflect the knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and learning of diverse students while offering adequate background knowledge and contextual orientation to critically discern problematic elements (Gay, 2018). According to Stenbridge (2020), a good starting point for teachers is to know why curriculum is chosen and how it leverages the themes of engagement, cultural identity, relationships, vulnerability, assets, and rigor. Curriculum should be designed to compel students to draw from their cultural backgrounds; teachers should be continuously updating materials and references, seeking solutions to problems of practice that are innovative and responsive to the needs of students, reflecting on successes and failures, and taking every opportunity to improve. Muhammad (2020) calls on schools to transition toward more engaging content that is “honest, bold, raw, unapologetic, and responsive to social times” (p. 54), for example, by cultivating libraries that include historically responsive texts for teaching that are diverse in representation, authorship and thought.

Creation of safe classroom communities. Knowledge of students’ cultural, social, and political perspectives is also discussed by Hammond (2015), who argues that students will not build cognitive capacity by simply being offered surface level cultural content; rather, teachers must develop an understanding of “deep culture” that includes

various ways of understanding, learning preferences that have embedded roots in families of non-dominant cultures. Teachers must meet students where they are and build learning spaces and routines that foster self-efficacy and empower them as independent learners by familiarizing themselves with conditions that make students feel unsafe and creating classrooms that are free of psychological and social threats. Gay (2018) discusses how stereotypes, exoticization, marginalization, homogenization, and making “invisible” immigrant groups of color and ethnic Americans costs students time and emotion regarding managing feelings, monitoring self, and altering behavior to fit norms and expectations. Feelings of ethnic shame result in low self-esteem, lack of confidence and negative self-worth that are barriers for succeeding in school because they interfere with students’ abilities to focus on academic tasks. Stenbridge (2020) suggests that teachers routinely ask themselves to discern the various environmental risk factors that students may face in the classroom and identify any protective factors that could be put in place to mitigate those risks.

Students' Perspectives of CRT Practices

Students also weigh in on where teachers' focus should be centered. Byrd (2017) surveyed 315 sixth through 12th grade students, sampled from across the US, to learn how culturally relevant teaching and school racial socialization are linked to students’ academic outcomes, finding that certain elements of CRT were significantly associated with academics and ethnic-racial identity development when applied. Three specific suggestions are offered based on the results of the study: (1) Get to know students and learn about their cultural backgrounds, since “by acknowledging student’s whole self,

teachers build better relationships and encourage students to see value in school (p. 7); (2) help students be successful in an increasingly diverse US by teaching students about cultural diversity even when the class is not diverse to help students learn how to interact with those of differing cultures and races; and (3) acknowledge current inequities.

“Opportunities to explore racism and anti-racism in school will help students to see that school is relevant in their everyday lives and can build their sense of agency and civic engagement” (p. 7). This study is particularly significant, since it brings student voice, one of the essential aspects of CRT found in the CRT framework (Gay, 2018), to the table.

Exploring teacher preparedness, theorists' views on CRT needs, and students' perspectives, we can begin to see patterns in essential practices as well as contributing factors toward academic improvement. This study hopes to uncover the areas of CRT development that Illinois school leaders see as the most urgent in order to begin the work of closing achievement gaps exacerbated by the pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Recent peer-reviewed studies shed light on current efforts to bring about CRT.

Leadership Efforts

School leaders must strengthen teachers' skills and dispositions to teach culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. Moore-Johnson (2019), who has studied teacher development extensively, synthesized the work of three major studies undertaken over eight years, presenting an argument that whether teachers perform well relies on “whether their school supports their development and multiplies the strength of their human capital throughout the school” (p. 4). Exactly how schools are supporting CRT

efforts is the question at hand. Poekert et al. (2020) has identified five themes in their recent review of literature of leadership for professional development towards equity in education: the framing of social justice issues; dialogue and inquiry; learning and identity development; context, resources, and motivations; and normalizing inclusion and shared leadership.

Recent peer-reviewed literature specific to CRT leadership highlights collaborative practices, guiding critical inquiry, and systems work as essential for facilitating a culturally responsive mindset.

Immersed, reflective and collaborative practices. Teacher PD for CRT should be immersive, reflective, and collaborative, according to recent studies in which teachers and principals weigh in.

In their study of 143 primary school teachers, Abacioglu et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of teachers gaining exposure to texts written by and about diverse populations; taking part in social experiences of cultural communities different from their own; and incorporating regular critical dialogue with peers into CRT professional development programming. The authors noted that “introspection on emotional, behavioural, and cognitive reactions toward students and their families form the basis of these dialogues” (p. 746). This was echoed by Brodeur et al. (2020), who explored the professional development of teachers, including both pre- and in-service practitioners’ knowledge about and self-efficacy for culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), finding that in-service teachers placed emphasis on reflecting on their practice and collaborating as essential to advance CRP in their own schools. Principals have also weighed in on these

topics. Gaikhorst et al. (2019), in their multiple case study with principals, also found that opportunities for collaboration, as well as an open work climate are significant. Some studies emphasize collaboration between principals and staff. Working alongside teachers to prepare them to implement a community cultural wealth initiative, Lomelí (2021) conducted a qualitative participatory action study as a school principal and researcher examining how participation in administrator-teacher circles develops a collective critical consciousness and culturally relevant teaching skills. The author sought answers to questions about the impact of engaging teachers in CRT PD on pedagogy. As they worked in circles together with the principal, impactful changes were noted in classroom practices and relationships with students and parents due to developing a collective critical consciousness.

Guiding critical inquiry. Peer-reviewed studies have also emphasized the importance of critical inquiry in CRT PD. Gordon and Espinoza's (2020) position paper argues for clinical supervision to promote CRT, especially when in conjunction with other teacher learning activities that facilitate collaborative inquiry by the supervisor and teachers. The researchers argue that by integrating multiple instructional supervision processes, specifically professional development, professional learning communities (PLCs), curriculum development, and action research- teachers improve their cultural responsiveness. Experiences such as these in which teachers can engage in critical inquiry are already in most school leaders' wheelhouses of PD practices. Peer coaching, for example, entails teachers working with mentors or expert teachers. In efforts to identify effective teacher PD practices, Mun et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive

literature review on culturally relevant leadership, system reform and services for gifted culturally diverse students, finding two models that demonstrated improved teacher practice. In the first, the Arkansas Evaluation Initiative (AEI) study (Cotabish & Robinson, 2012, as cited by Mun et al., 2020) identified positive effects of peer coaching on CRT practice; in the second, the Young Scholars model (Horn, 2015, as cited by Mun et al., 2020) study noted that participating teachers and leaders engaged in collaborative efforts with teachers, administrators, parents, and other key stakeholders to solve problems of inequity. Certain activities and protocols are used in this kind of collaborative work. In their literature review on the intersection of school leadership and equity, Poekert et al. (2020) cite studies coded as mid and high WoE (Weight of Evidence) which highlight dialogue and inquiry as interconnected activities significant to leadership for PD towards social justice; for example, “teacher talk” to develop inclusive teacher practice is explored by Bristol (2015, as cited by Poekert et al., 2020) and “teacher dialogue,” highlighting data conversations in PLCs and informal settings, is studied by Park (2018, as cited by Poekert et al., 2020). The authors also present a high WoE study highlighting “resistance as a developmental process as well as a construct,” by Hynds (2010, as cited by Poekert et al., 2020, p. 551) in which an argument is made for collective inquiry and sustained dialogue using inclusive principles and protocols. Research on the development of systems toward culturally responsive practice is also emerging.

Systems work. Some studies explore systems work surrounding CRT. Bal et al. (2021) shared the design of a culturally responsive behavioral support system at an urban

middle school that brought together parents, school staff, school leaders, and researchers to solve the problem of racial disproportionality in school discipline. Researchers analyzed the development of the new system which created a shared vision for eliminating racial disproportionality in part by a new focus on community assets and actors. The focus of this study was Learning Lab, a collaborative knowledge production and design process in which all stakeholders were involved in developing the design of a new system to improve culturally responsive practices in the school. This system offered tools needed for creation of an inclusive space for knowledge production. The formative intervention study conducted at the school resulted in a developed collective vision for eliminating disproportionality between races through emphasis of community strengths and offering teachers opportunities for improvement in areas identified as needing work. Administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents were noted as redefining their roles and the division of labor in the process of Learning Lab; these stakeholders collectively guided the creation of new pillars, or defining constructs, of the new system—race consciousness and cultural responsiveness. Researchers noted that the concept of cultural responsiveness and its ambiguity “energized members and created a basis of collaboration to integrate their specialized areas of *know-how*” (Bal et al., 2021, p. 298). As new practices are developed in efforts at organizational change, new systems in schools are created; however, lessons have been learned about how this should happen with equity work. Ishimaru and Galloway (2021) conducted a participatory action research year-long comparative case study of two school equity teams, investigating schools’ theories of change toward improving equity of school policies and practices,

finding that equity teams developed theories of change aimed at improving educational equity that addressed changing “hearts and minds” before taking action. The researchers argue that systems-focused race talk aimed at changing “hearts and minds” prior to action may inhibit organizational-level change. These studies illustrate new, developing facets of professional learning for teachers that are being undertaken to address the needs of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students.

Assessment measures. School leaders use various tools to assess teacher professional learning needs. In one study investigating teacher preparation for culturally diverse classrooms, performance-based assessments were used to assess beginning teachers. Daunic et al. (2004) compared the levels of preparation of general education and special ed teachers by studying 68 teacher graduates of four traditional university programs. Assessors in the study used three data-collection methods, which included direct observation of classroom practice, interviews structured around the classroom observation, and written descriptions of the students, what they are to learn, lesson materials, and evaluation procedures.

These types of assessment measures are traditionally used to evaluate teacher effectiveness. In my own experience as a teacher leader who was tasked with evaluating visual and performing arts teachers for many years, these categories reflect the data collection methods I used routinely. Daunic et al. (2004) argue for the need for assessment measures that can effectively evaluate teachers’ levels of preparation for CRT:

In sum, to evaluate the CRT competence of program graduates adequately, we need assessment systems that can examine CRT within the teaching and learning context and are applicable across a variety of classroom settings. Precise, systematic measurement requires rigorous and replicable scoring of criteria specific to cultural and linguistic diversity. Development of a reliable and valid performance-based assessment of subtle and complex processes is tedious, but the potential rewards are considerable. If we continue to espouse standards in teacher preparation that we cannot assess systematically across programs, it is difficult to hold teacher colleges accountable for the competence, or incompetence, of their graduates. (p. 116)

The literature surrounding leadership efforts of advancing CRT in schools, thus, highlights the kinds of work being done to support educators in developing their capacities as culturally responsive practitioners. The emphasis on collaboration and opportunities for teacher and administrators to work closely, bring more stakeholders to the table, and dialogue mirrors the CRT emphasis of bridge-building. Literature points to need for critical inquiry about topics of cultural difference aimed at surfacing teachers practices that may be preventing ethnically diverse students from meeting learning goals via protocols and processes to guide teachers' discussions. Systems in schools are argued as requiring a student-centered approach in which structural changes are made, though faculty in schools may not yet have dispositions to support CRT. Finally, assessments of teachers CRT capacities are needed to inform future direction and progress towards goals.

Lessons Learned About Teacher Preparation and Confidence

A study by Siliunas et al. (submitted for publication) responds to calls to examine teacher preparation and professional development for CRT (Cruz et al., 2020). Conducted over the COVID 19 pandemic, it addressed how changes in teaching during the pandemic may have impacted teachers' confidence in CRT, contributing to previous studies on teacher self-efficacy in CRT (Cruz et al., 2020; Siwatu et al, 2016). The purpose of this study is to understand teachers' self-efficacy in classroom practices associated with CRT (Siwatu, 2007) and to identify the impact of aspects of teacher preparation on teachers' confidence in these practices.

In this study, primarily quantitative data was collected to answer research questions about perceptions of pandemic era K-12 U.S. teachers regarding their use of CRT practices in working with students of various linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to learn about the kind of teacher preparation that may impact confidence in the use of these practices. Participant teachers representing all teaching content areas and grade levels (PK-12) and 45 states took part in a survey on CRT self-efficacy. The CRTSE scale developed by Siwatu (2007) that was used consisted of 40 items in which participants were asked to rate confidence in their ability to engage in specific CRT strategies by indicating a degree of confidence ranging from 0 (i.e., no confidence) to 100 (i.e., completely confident). The Likert-type scale used in this study was researched and validated by Siwatu et al. (2017) through a pilot study to determine factor structure and both internal and external reliability of the scale (Siwatu, 2007) with a strong reliability ($\alpha = .96$) (Cruz et al., 2020). A section with demographic questions asked participants to

indicate the grade and subject(s) they teach, the type of school in which they work (e.g., public, private), the school's geographic setting (e.g., urban, suburban, rural), the percentage of diverse student body in the school, and the mode of instruction they used that year (in-person, on-line synchronous, on-line asynchronous, or hybrid) and one open-ended question that asked participants to comment on their culturally responsive teaching preparation or experience.

Quantitative findings of our study revealed teacher confidence with relationship-building, getting to know students' needs, interests, and preferences, and adapting instruction to them. Lower confidence was found in areas of communication, gathering information about students' home lives, and addressing home and school cultural incongruity in teaching and lesson design. Researchers performed a one-way ANOVA test to compare the means of teachers' confidence in CRT across different modes of teacher preparation. The test revealed a statistically significant difference among teacher preparation modes, which prompted us to conduct a post hoc analysis. This analysis indicated that confidence of teachers who had reported to have completed coursework in multiculturalism, culture, diversity, or equity or completed field work in their preparation was significantly higher in some scale items than that of teachers who had reported to have had CRT units in classes. While coursework is usually a semester-long class, units may be week-long modules or embedded texts that address culturally responsive teaching in other coursework for education studies. The qualitative findings of our study illustrated teachers' various levels of understanding relating to teaching diverse students. For example, teachers expressed that they understood CRT to be related to concepts of

“culture” and “diversity.” While some identified general good practices for teaching diverse students, many were able to point to specific strategies that fall into the domains of Gay’s (2018) CRT framework, which we had chosen as a theoretical construct to take apart our findings. One teacher wrote, *“We should understand their interests and personalities, and be more careful with them without being impatient,”* demonstrating a rudimentary level of understanding of CRT, while another showed an ability to name specific CRT skills and strategies: *“Give full play to the role of local traditional culture and education base,”* and *“Help students develop coping strategies to deal with acculturation stress.”* In the study, teachers indicated a variety of experiences in their training on CRT: from zero coursework in their preparation programs to a wide range of professional development, including learning from special groups, graduate school coursework, and various kinds of training. Qualitative data suggested that in-service teachers lack formal training on CRT in their teacher education programs and that many did received CRT training, but in various or informal ways.

We learned that confidence in CRT was very much linked to preparation that teachers had experienced. We found greater confidence in “cultural congruity in teaching and learning” (Gay, 2018) to be related to the kind of preparation teachers had in working with diverse students. Teachers completing fieldwork and taking courses centered on work with diverse students were significantly more confident in using culturally responsive practices than those who experienced embedded CRT units in classes. Teachers who had taken coursework in “multiculturalism, culture, diversity, and equity” and completed field work were consistently more confident than those who reported to

have had CRT units embedded in teacher preparation classes they had taken. Coursework was identified as significant in addressing cultural bias. For example, we noted that teachers who took coursework were more confident than those who had experienced professional development (in-service or otherwise) in their ability to “identify ways that standardized tests may be biased toward culturally diverse students.”

Our musings about teacher training and preparation are that teacher preparation programs might address teacher learning needs through coursework that includes topics of cultural difference, curriculum work that addresses these differences, and field work that allows teachers to see effective culturally responsive teaching in practice. We argue that teacher preparation programs should embed identified needs of the teachers into curriculum and model pedagogy that is community-based to empower teachers as they enter diverse classrooms (Cavendish et al., 2020) to improve historically marginalized students’ learning experiences; continued research in areas of “culture and communication in the classroom,” and “cultural congruity in teaching and learning” is urgently needed; and finally, that teaching competencies that teachers feel less prepared for should be supported via ongoing teacher professional learning that “goes deep” in various domains of effective CRT practice.

The above literature - both empirical and academic - paints a story that teachers do have skills in creating environments that support learning of culturally diverse students; however, there are areas in which they require more training. Bridging cultural incongruity is one that has been identified by applying the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) (Siliunas et al., submitted for publication).

Theoretical Framework

Gay's (2018) extensive literature and recently updated CRT framework have been used by researchers to center questions about the instruction of diverse students by practicing teachers and those in preparation programs. This theoretical framework, which focuses on teachers' culturally responsive classroom practices, will help identify specific domains of learning that school leaders are seeking to improve and how these are being assessed; provide insights into the use of this model for CRT PD; and connect researchers with a methodology that may be useful in educator preparation research.

The CRT framework (Gay, 2018) offers four interconnected components: culturally responsive caring, culture and communication in the classroom, ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content, and cultural congruity in teaching and learning. For this study, I have developed an instrument – a questionnaire – that aligns with the framework and its general constructs, which are explained in the following paragraph.

According to the theorist, “culturally responsive caring” refers to a consciousness of social justice regarding the effects of the educational system on culturally and linguistically diverse students and a commitment to facilitate authentic, high level classroom experiences that place students and their personal interests at the core of learning. Gay (2018) distinguishes caring “for” as opposed to caring “about”; while caring “about” can be regarded as an attitude and emotionality, caring “for” is purposeful practice and action combined with emotionality. “Caring” in this manner entails personally investing in diverse students by seeing, respecting, and helping them grow. “Culture and communication in the classroom” mean active efforts made by schools to

seek better ways of communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse students by first understanding one's own methods and preferences, and then working to incorporate various other cultural styles of communication into instruction. The third component is "ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content," and a perspective that what is taught must be meaningful to students' lives and involve them explicitly in decision-making. Gay notes that, "content about the histories, heritages, contributions, perspectives, and experiences of different ethnic groups and individuals, taught in diverse ways" (p. 142) is critical for culturally responsive teaching since its aim is to empower students through success in the realms of academic achievement, personal efficacy, and cultural connection. Finally, "cultural congruity in teaching and learning" considers culturally and linguistically diverse students' various learning preferences and experiences to inform how students and teachers interact and engage with one another in classroom environments that honor diversity, since students' learning processes are influenced by cultural socialization unique to various groups.

Gay (2018) developed this framework after gathering evidence of best practices in curriculum and instruction with aims to "empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy" (p. 142). This is urgent, since

ethnically diverse students who feel invalidated in society and school are not likely to perform as well as they might on academic tasks, if for no reason than these prejudices interfere with their motivation to learn, time-on-task, and persistence in learning engagements. (p. 194)

A Rationale

The identification of Gay's (2018) CRT framework as a conceptual lens was informed by the decision to select a practical framework that bridges theory and practice and an investigation of theoretical frameworks in contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship on CRT. The purpose of educational research, from my own perspective, should always center on our students and the improvement of their lives through education, which relies heavily on the day-to-day preparation, actions, and materials of teachers in the classroom. Theory, therefore, must be very closely aligned to teacher practice. Educational theorist John Dewey (Biesta & Burbules, 2003) wrote about the relationship between theory and practice, expressing an aim to "reintegrate human knowledge and action in the general framework of reality and natural processes" (p. 84), suggesting a focus on teachers' realities and the work of using research findings in practical day-to-day inquiry in the classroom. Teachers, according to Dewey, are not only implementers of new theories and knowledge, but creators of educational knowledge themselves. Recent scholarship on culturally responsive efforts in schools offered insights into theoretical approaches to research designs. Some scholars, including Sleeter (2017), employ critical race theory in their work on CRT practices; others suggest anti-racist pedagogy set within critical theory (Blakeney, 2011); others in school racial socialization theory (Byrd, 2016) or social cognitive theory (Cruz et al., 2020). After investigating these and other recent curriculum-oriented frameworks by scholars of CRT (Hammond, 2015; Stembridge, 2020; Muhammad, 2020), this author chose Geneva Gay's (2018) CRT Framework, due to its focus on the classroom practices of teachers

that address the needs of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse learners. Several significant peer-reviewed studies found in educational journals on culturally responsive teaching using the framework solidified this decision.

Studies Using the Framework

Questions that have been posed by researchers using Gay's framework (2000; 2010; 2018) have asked about the perceptions of teachers who teach diverse students in urban settings and their use of teaching strategies associated with CRT (Bonner et al., 2018), the attributes of professors who successfully facilitate learning of students of Color (Case, 2013), and the way teacher preparation courses facilitate emerging teachers in becoming culturally responsive (Gordon & Espinosa, 2020). These studies are relevant to this dissertation due to their focus on CRT and teachers' practice. Due to the scale and generalizability of the Bonner et al. (2018) study and the attention to curricular areas that teachers have been found to feel less efficacy, such as Math and Science in the Siwatu et al. (2017) study that are addressed in greater depth in the Bottoms et al. study (2017), I see these peer-reviewed studies as sharing a purpose and aims with my work. The Case study (2013) is also useful as it captured student's perceptions, although it was limited to one institution, making it less generalizable to other contexts.

Gay's (2018) updated CRT Framework conceptually connects with the topic I will be investigating: it addresses the current realities of the landscape of education; bridges theory and practice by clearly defining domains of curriculum and instruction, and within these domains, the mindsets, attitudes and practices of teaching that have been found to empower ethnically diverse students, thereby responding to the effects of

inequity that can be found in traditional curriculum and instruction, according to equity scholars (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Mohammad, 2020). As evidenced in peer-reviewed literature, its constructs can be effectively applied to research questions, methodology and interpretations of study findings. Finally, theoretical frameworks can inspire continued inquiry and relationship with allies in the scholarly community, and I have found such a connection with Geneva Gay through her work of nearly four decades with schools. I recognize that CRT as a theoretical framework for research is still in early phases of use, and according to Gay (2018), the CRT framework is incomplete; however, the scholar hopes to provide opportunities for teachers and scholars “to develop their knowledge, thinking, beliefs, actions, and reflections about culturally responsive premises and practices” by proving “general principals and parameters” (p. xxxiv), which, for this researcher and the beneficiaries of this study, will help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Gay’s CRT Framework (2018) wholly supports this study. The research question is framed by the theory. Its constructs not only center the research question, but also shape the manner in which research methods are used to excavate phenomena and inform how new knowledge is interpreted. Its emphasis on cultural difference leans directly into the problem this study seeks to address – cultural difference and resulting challenges in schooling that inhibit positive academic outcomes for historically marginalized groups of students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Situating the assessment of teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching within a methodological framework is essential in this study. Two crucial factors impact the way information is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and explained: methodology and the role of the researcher. In using qualitative methods, I recognize that I must consider my biases, the personal values I bring to a study, and the positionality with which I undertake the work. This chapter addresses both the methodology of this study and my own role as a researcher.

Methodological Approach

This study investigating school leaders' perceptions of teachers' use of classroom practices associated with CRT utilizes a descriptive qualitative study design. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning using questions that are emerging, collects data in the participant's setting, and is inductive in its analytical approach, allowing for narrative and non-rigid writing structure.

The philosophical assumptions of my approach are constructivist, seeking to unearth meaning from multiple contexts and perspectives to support or generate new theoretical applications by social construction (Creswell, 2018). Grounded theory is the strategy of inquiry in my methodology, since using this approach, the researcher "derives a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of

participants in a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 243). According to Stough and Lee (2021) who conducted a recent literature review in which they examined highly ranked educational journals to determine grounded theory methodologies used most often by educational researchers, grounded theory approaches are a good option for research investigating learning, interactions taking place in classroom, and classroom processes. Strauss and Corbin (1998) have posited that some researchers use grounded theory techniques to generate theory, while others capture descriptions or classify or elaborate on phenomena. I sought to elaborate on the domains of the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) to unearth how school leaders identify and assess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for culturally responsive teaching. The methods I employ, therefore, include open-ended questions, emerging approaches, and using text as data (Creswell, 2018). School leaders in Illinois, who guided PD in their schools, were asked to complete a questionnaire via a survey that gathered their perceptions in open-ended question responses aligned with the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) and a demographic section.

Sample and Population

The participant pools I hoped to reach out to were individuals who identified with networks of school leaders working in Illinois K12 schools that had aims of equity established, and who were in the process of conducting CRT work. I wanted to include voices of Illinois school administrators and teacher leaders whose roles included teacher observations and planning for teacher professional development and continuous learning.

Since there were over 9,000 public and private K12 schools in Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022, April 4) (Great Schools, 2022, April 4) and it was not

possible to know who leading CRT efforts within them was, a homogenous purposive sampling was employed to gain a sample of school leaders responsible for teacher professional learning who were actively engaged in these efforts. I recruited three Illinois K12 public and private school leaders working on CRT efforts in elementary and secondary settings. Snowball sampling was used to gain additional participants- these three potential participants agreed to pass on the survey to up to 15 Illinois school leaders in their professional networks. I hoped that these methods of sampling would ensure that participants were Illinois K-12 school leaders leading CRT in their schools. Patton (1990) has proposed that homogeneous purposive sampling reduces variation, which was consistent with my methodological aims.

Instrumentation - SLAT CRT

An instrument was developed to answer the research question: *How do school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching?* I sought to develop an original instrument aligned to the Gay CRT Framework (2018) that could be used by school leaders as a reflection tool to gauge where to target professional development in CRT for their faculty. In the following paragraphs, I describe how judgement validity was sought through a peer review process in the development of the original instrument. Following this, I explain the instrument structure.

Judgmental validity is defined as when a target audience of “experts” assess the goals, procedures, and effects of an intervention. These “experts” may be chosen based on their status as, for example, a client, consumer, program implementer, administrator, researcher, or knowledge expert (Fawcett, 1991). For this study, judgmental validity was

important to ascertain in order to raise the likelihood of instrument validity. To assess for judgement validity, the instrument was sent out for critical peer review to teachers and teacher leaders to gather feedback on its goals, procedures, and feasibility, and was then revised based on this input. Benda and Engels (2010) discuss the importance of peer review, which they define as “the practice of having knowledgeable colleagues judge the ideas and findings of a scientist” (p. 167). Their study, which investigated what the available data on predictive validity of peer review can add to the understanding of judgmental forecasting, concluded that peer review is a good example of small group judgmental forecasting in which a small group of experts, acting either individually or as a group, evaluates the quality and potential impact of a construct or candidate. The benefits of peer review include allowing accurate decisions to be made, identifying, and selecting quality, and judging future impact. According to Benda and Engels, though errors can occur, at least some can be explained by unintended biases of peer review against innovative work.

I conducted two rounds of peer reviews: one with an expert teacher and one with two highly regarded school leaders. In the first round of peer review, I sent the instrument to an expert teacher to understand from a teacher’s perspective if it met its goal of identifying areas of greater and lesser competence in CRT. “Elena” is a veteran Math teacher in a public suburban district who has taught middle school math for over 15 years and has served as an instructional leader. She is also a history and culture teacher of bilingual K12 students at a community Lithuanian school on Saturdays. “Elena” has served on a local school board of education and holds a master's degree in teaching as

well as an endorsement in Mathematics. I know that she is very highly regarded by her students, her peers, school leaders and the community as well as by secondary school leaders of schools to which her students matriculate since I taught in a high school in which many of “Elena’s” students became enrolled. When developing the survey questions, “Elena” was contacted to obtain feedback. She provided positive and supportive feedback on the components of the tool and a few recommendations including clarification of two of the questions; she also shared high confidence that school leaders working in a supervisory role with teachers would be able to answer the questions in the survey. In the second round of peer review, I sent the instrument to “Kyra”, a principal of an elementary urban school. “Kyra” has been guiding CRT and equity work in her school for a number of years and successfully navigated the changes that have impacted students, teachers and families in schools. She is widely respected as a responsible leader who is working tremendously to positively impact students' academic, social, and emotional success, hold an EdD and instructional leadership certification. “Kyra” provided important feedback on how the questions in the survey could be clarified to better meet the study goals, for example, replacing the word “assess” with the word “see” in asking participants how they understand specific practices of teachers. “Kyra” told me that the instrument, “would be helpful to evaluate how we as a school are doing and where we need to go.” Next, I sought feedback on strengths and challenges of the instrument from “Erik”, who serves as an administrator at a large Illinois school district at the high school. “Erik” is a veteran teacher and school leader who for many years was devoted to teaching fine and performing arts as a theater director and later, went on to

work in school administration. “Erik”, an EdD candidate, is widely respected for his dedication to underserved and marginalized groups. His research investigating LGBTQ students’ experiences is relevant for assessing equity measures, since Illinois CRT standards address and are inclusive of LGBTQ concerns. Finally, the instrument was shared with my committee during my dissertation proposal defense. This process of peer review via judgement validity allowed me to gain critical feedback regarding strengths and areas for improvement related to the instruments’ goals, procedures, and effects, which I used to improve the final tool.

The final, developed instrument is a questionnaire, which is found in Appendix C. It consists of three sections: Section 1 has eight questions about participants perception of teacher preparedness for CRT in the four domains of Gay’s framework (2018). There are two questions that address each of these four domains: the first addresses knowledge and skills of CRT; the second addresses dispositions and mindsets of CRT. The purpose of these questions is to narrow the discussion to classroom practices associated with the framework, invite participants to reflect on teachers’ preparedness for them in relation to their contexts, and assess areas of need for professional development. Section 2 has four questions that ask how participants make assessments of teacher preparedness in their school contexts. The first question asks participants to describe the way that they generally assess teacher learning needs in their schools. The second question asks them how they assess teachers’ learning needs specific to CRT. The third invites participants to reflect on how they assess teachers' greatest need for PD in CRT. The fourth is an open-ended question for participants to generally comment on their assessment of teachers'

preparation for CRT. The purpose of the final open-ended question is triangulation. Section 3 includes five demographic questions about the participants' role in the school, responsibilities relating to teacher learning, participant's racial/ethnic background, student and teacher demographic and school type. This questionnaire was created in Qualtrics, a survey tool used by researchers at Loyola University Chicago. I copy pasted all the questions into the survey tool and worked to ensure that it had a similar format with clearly identified sections. Each section was on a separate page with the CRT domains defined as headings in section one. The demographic section of the survey had questions that were multiple choice and extended response. I made every effort to offer participants every opportunity to be clear and explicit along the way. After making the survey, I sent it out in preview mode to "Kyra" and one of my committee members, who both tested it to ensure that it worked as intended.

Internal validity strategies employed were triangulation within open-ended response in survey, participants' piloting and critical feedback on areas for improvement, and committee member expert reviews of procedures.

Data Collection and Procedures

Procedures for collecting data included: (1) gathering emails of participant leaders from my professional networks of public and private K12 schools; (2) emailing them and asking them to take the survey and to forward it to 10-15 potential participants (see Appendix D); (3) monitoring numbers of respondents to gather at least 10; (4) closing the survey after a one-month time period had elapsed; (5) pulling spreadsheets of results from Qualtrics to the secure Loyola University Chicago One-Drive; (6) moving them to a

folder in One-Drive that was shared only with committee members. School leaders in the networks I sought out were not expected to be in the same roles or having the same titles, though they would all be leading equity work: My expectation was to reach principals, equity directors, DEI leads, curriculum directors, APs, and others. Incentives were used to encourage participation. Participants who agreed to take part in the study had the option to be placed in a drawing to win a \$100.00 Amazon gift card by providing an email which linked to a separate form.

Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (1990, as cited by Creswell, 2016) note that grounded theory can offer researchers a process for data analysis. Qualitative methods were used to analyze survey responses. Data was analyzed in a coding process (Creswell, 2016) that moved from (1) assignment of codes (categories or concepts) to chunks of data having subtle meaning, to (2) grouping of these codes to axial codes to break them down further, to (3) identification of themes and finally, (4) cross-referencing these themes across domains of the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) to identify potential alignment and differences. The goal of this process was to seek depth and breadth in areas of convergence with natural participant voice to inform the analysis of phenomenon. Coding was conducted by myself, and my committee members' expert reviews of all procedures was sought.

Projected Limitations

Projected limitation of this method was a potentially small participant pool, due to the time taken to complete the questionnaire - approximately 30 min. I tried to address

this with a cash incentive, anticipating that this might, however, invite rapid and unthoughtful responses from unwilling participants. Another consideration was that school leaders' perceptions of teacher preparedness may not reflect consistently applied assessment measures of teachers' preparedness. I tried to address this concern by targeting networks of leaders who may have similar methods of teacher professional learning, assessment of teacher proficiency, and language surrounding these.

In developing a methodological approach, I continuously reflected on the importance of identifying research methods and a participant pool that could best assess the issues surrounding CRT needs of teachers and produce new knowledge about the status of CRT work in Illinois schools. I saw this as is an issue of social justice- that research be focused on truth. Becoming increasingly aware of the effects of marginalization on students, schools, and educational research, I worked to ensure that voices of those who are best positioned as evaluators of where schools are in CRT work are heard and the data I collected, analyzed, and interpreted accurately represented their perceptions. Measures I used to ensure this were: reaching out to participants who were members of entities (school networks or consortiums of leaders) who had identified equity and/ or CRT as a priority in teacher education and were beginning work in this area; including linguistic, racial and ethnic diversity in my dissertation committee who would be working with me to ensure validity in data analysis; continuous focus on the CRT framework (Gay, 2018) and its constructs as a guiding framework, and collecting demographic data to assess the degree of diverse participants.

Researcher Role

According to Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers articulate their positionalities, collect participant meanings, focus on a single concept or phenomenon, bring personal values they hold into their research, study contexts and settings of participants, validate the accuracy of their study findings, interpret data, develop an agenda for reform, and employ text analysis procedures. These values will be deliberate aspects of this study and connect with the topic of CRT.

CRT has aims of empowering ethnically diverse students via academic success, cultural belonging, and personal efficacy (Gay, 2018); supporting literacy of historically underserved students (Muhammad, 2020); improving education for students of Color (Sleeter, 2020); and closing equity gaps in school achievement outcomes by cultivating students' awareness of their culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and abilities (Stembridge, 2020). A researcher in this movement situated within multicultural education must consider their own positionality when beginning the work of CRT due to the weight of injustice that informs its need in educational settings. As an educator-researcher, I take the expressed aims of CRT to heart and reflect on the social identities that have formed me. These identities impact me as a researcher and demonstrate how I personally connect with this area of research.

Social Identities

I am a White, bilingual, Catholic, Lithuanian American woman navigating the field of educational research. My whiteness and ability to navigate the world without handicaps or impairments have afforded me many privileges in educational, employment,

housing, and social contexts; however, other aspects of my identity, such as deeply embedded cultural and linguistic ties to another country and its traditions have helped me grow and embrace notions of social justice and equity that I may not have felt had I not lived life with them, since they have afforded me the ability to empathize with those who have faced tremendous barriers, people whose voices have been diminished because of identities challenging the norms that white privilege has created in the world. Still, I recognize that my perceptions of inequity are felt from a prism of White privilege. All aspects of my positionality influence my work as an educator and researcher, including the epistemological perspectives through which I see the world and the landscape of education.

White racial identity. Bourdieu (1986) reminds me that I am the beneficiary of cultural capital as a White, European via all three forms of capital which have enabled me to appropriate social benefits: the embodied state, which is through long lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the objectified state, which includes cultural good; and through the institutionalized state, including schooling. Through my identity as racially white, I have, indeed, benefitted from cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including ontological and epistemological perspectives that have been embedded in curriculum and teaching throughout my experiences of schooling, which have made it easy to navigate the experience of education as well as the world of scholarly research. Educated with very familiar traditions of white Western civilization have enabled me to understand the theoretical, historical, psychological, and sociological tenets of education and navigate the demands of the research process. Being White, however, has more recently

challenged me as an emerging scholar of culturally responsive pedagogy, due to a growing awareness of the potentially harmful impact my White, Eurocentric voice and resulting confidence on peers and colleagues of Color.

Non-English home language. Cultural difference theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) inspiring study on the practices and perceptions of strong teachers of African American students in the 1990's began to recognize cultural relevance as a means to bring access and equity to diverse students' education. In the study, Ladson-Billings referenced research of sociolinguists and argued that when students' home languages are infused into classroom experiences, they are more likely to succeed. As a Lithuanian speaking child who learned English at school (I was the lone non-English speaker at Kipling Elementary), I navigated the linguistic divide at school alone. The views on language of Ladson-Billings reflect what I have learned as a teacher in a school in which students spoke twenty different languages at home. Effective teaching meant bridging the cultural divide through language, even if informally and simply embedded in everyday routines. Bilingualism facilitates my work as a researcher in that it allows me to connect with scholars of multiculturalism and culturally responsive pedagogy. The intersection of my positionality as White and bilingual poses challenges, however, due to my ignorance of the oppressive experiences of peers who are bilingual and non-European and have felt the effects of racism due to their race or ethnicity, for example, bilingual peers who have Asian or Hispanic identities.

Catholic religious affiliation. As a member of a widely recognized globally accepted religion – Catholicism – I have been spared religious persecution or

ostracization here in the US and have benefitted from pedagogy and traditions that frame educational equity as an issue of social justice and a manifestation of loving one's neighbor. The faith instilled in me as a result of my Catholic upbringing has inspired me to act towards social justice and to oppose injustices such as racism. I suppose it may be true that being Catholic may challenge me as a researcher if the faith that has been deeply ingrained in my identity as a scholar is challenged by cultural traditions that oppose my own. However, it is my belief that Love, the manifestation of God, is at the heart of all religions, including humanist thought. Ibram Kendi, author of "How to Be an Antiracist" (2019) asks a profound question, that to me, is theological in its emphasis on justice, a Catholic virtue: "What side of history will we stand on?" (p. 22). Kendi uses analogies to describe the labels of racist and antiracist as being "like peelable name tags," "like fighting an addiction," "not permanent tattoos." The reader is taught softly but firmly that to be an antiracist is a radical choice, an ongoing action, a continuous redirecting oneself and ongoing reflection and action against policies and ideas that normalize two or more racial groups being on unequal standing. This deeply resonates with my identity as a Catholic.

Lithuanian ethnicity. According to Ryan et al. (2020), historically, curriculum has been written from a Eurocentric perspective, ignoring the contributions and history of other cultures, perpetuating stereotypes, and oversimplifying complex topics and experiences, which has prompted challenges regarding what is to be taught in the school so that representations of culturally diverse groups in texts and curriculum are accurate. An example of this is presented by Sleeter (2020), who discusses the under-

representation of Latinx groups in literature, with texts featuring the same few authors and stereotyping. As a Lithuanian American child of refugees, I have known what it is to be “other” and thus, to honor students’ ethnic identities and work to be inclusive in the curriculum I develop; therefore, my work as a researcher will be grounded in the acceptance of diverse voices and seek to understand the experiences of students of various ethnicities. My Lithuanian identity has been instilled in me since birth as a source of great pride; yet I recognize the challenges and ethnic “shame” (Gay, 2018) that has been inflicted on students and peers of non-White, non-European, historically marginalized groups.

Female gender. As a feminine female, I have become acutely aware of misogyny and its effects on girls and have thus learned the importance of acquiring perspectives of those who identify as non-males and challenge hierarchical systems that perpetuate inequities of the world. Teaching art in an all-women’s high school impacted my positionality by a growing awareness of the effects of collective socialization of women and of male-dominated curriculum canons. Once I became aware of the “missing” voices of women in art by intentionally seeking them out, I continuously worked to amend art history by familiarizing students with the works of artists like Artemisia Gentileschi, a favorite artist I have loved since I first found her, one who left indelible marks on the Baroque era in her powerful and graphic depictions of the female experience (Strickland, 1992), yet was never mentioned in art history classes that I took. Canonical textbooks of my memory published in the 1970’s and 1980’s largely ignored women artists. My positionality compelled me to seek out her work and the work of other overlooked artists

to make learning meaningful and empowering for my students. It also nudged me to seek out and elevate the voices of oft-silenced students, who like me, were socialized to be quiet and complicit. As a researcher, my identity as a female allows me to understand the roots and ontologies of critical theory and feminist theoretical paradigms and work to be inclusive of all voices, especially those who have been historically marginalized by oppression.

Researcher Reflection

Positionality, informed by both positions of power and disempowerment, affects the ways we teach, the relationships and communities we form, as well as paths we follow regarding research. Contemporary CRT theorists point me in directions of need. Geneva Gay (2018) tells me that there exists a need for knowledge on bringing cultural content into learning across subjects. Gholdi Muhammad (2020) whispers notions of collaborative transformations of entire “villages” including educators, communities, and partners to transition towards more engaging curricula that is “honest, bold, raw, unapologetic, and responsive to social times” (p. 54). Zaretta Hammond (2015) suggests that I focus on the classroom as a space, since this is the “critical container” for empowering marginalized students that serves as a space reflecting value of trust and partnership (p. 143). I continue to be inspired by these voices. These scholars of equity may view educational systems from a debated revisionist ontological perspective (Au et al., 2016); however, I see their voices as essential to counteract the forces that have created impediments to school equity reform. They guide the direction of this study.

My personal values have been formed by my social identities. They have informed my broad research goals, which are three-fold: (1) to conduct research in areas that marginalized communities see as important for obtaining equity in education, (2) to ensure that important voices are elevated in seeking answers to questions about their communities, and (3) to bring about critical knowledge that will assist school leaders and those who prepare teachers for work with diverse students. The first three chapters of this dissertation have intentionally been committed to these goals.

This study explores the preparedness of teachers for CRT as assessed by school leaders using the domains of the CRT framework (Gay, 2018) to excavate how the framework might be used for in-service teachers' professional learning.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

According to Scott (2009), grounded theory is a method of research that helps develop a theory which explains the main concern of the population studied and how that concern is processed. Using grounded theory, I sought to unearth a process for guiding school leaders in making decisions about where to focus CRT efforts by developing a theory-aligned instrument and testing its use. Seven participants took part in this study. The instrument, which served as the interview guide and as the measure I used, included a set of posed questions that were aligned to the domains of the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) and were designed in a way that would elicit the meaning of this construct as a tool for assessing teacher practice. I sought to analyze this definition of CRT as being about caring, communication, curriculum, and congruity (Gay, 2018) to learn if this meaning is true and useful for discerning “problems of practice” (Boudette et al., 2014) for school leaders guiding CRT efforts in schools. I hoped that my process of developing the instrument would illuminate a theory about planning for professional development in CRT.

As discussed in Chapter III, in grounded theory, the researcher's role in interpreting data is that of coder in order to find categories of meaning. Memoing, theoretical data saturation, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sensitivity (Birks & Mills, 2015) define my analytical approach, with memoing an integral part of

the process. As soon as the survey was released, I began to write down observations and identify patterns in the data by individual domains and across domains, since, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), in qualitative grounded theory method, in which theory is interpreted by the observer, the researcher actively structures data to reveal theory. Structuring the data in this way, by domain, was done to treat each of the four domains—caring, communication, curriculum, and congruity as an area of analytical exploration. Once a structure was established, participant responses were carefully coded by color to reveal patterns, then themes and description within these patterns. The purpose of initial coding, according to Tie et al. (2019), is categorizing and giving meaning to the data, comparing incident-to-incident, and labeling initial patterns using in vivo codes that are defined as verbatim quotes from the participants used as labels to capture participant's words as representative of bigger concepts or processes that are represented in the data. I identified in vivo representative examples of descriptions that repeated consistently within the four CRT domains that were defined in the instrument. In the second phase of coding, or axial coding, I sought to transform basic data into more abstract concepts allowing the theory to emerge from the data (Tie et al., 2019). According to Mayes (2020), when additional gathering of data and analysis of the data can no longer bring added understanding of a category, a point of “theoretical saturation” is reached and data stops being collected allowing the researcher to move onto the next concept. Once data saturation was reached for each domain, data collection ended. I then developed a theoretical interpretation surrounding the CRT assessment measure. In this final stage of data analysis, which may be referred to as advanced, or selective coding, the focus is

facilitating integration, construction, formulation, and presentation of research findings through the production of a coherent theory (Tie et al., 2019).

In this chapter, I bring to light people and patterns of assessment expressed by participants using their individual and distinct voices. My aim is to unearth both common threads and differing viewpoints. Demographic data on participants is reported descriptively to gather a sense of the roles and responsibilities and contexts of leaders who are working on developing teacher CRT competencies and the K12 schools, students, teachers, and communities they represent. Similarly, participants' responses to how they assessed teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions is summarized descriptively. Core category and surrounding concepts around the four domains of CRT (Gay, 2018) are explained through direct quotations and narrative descriptions of these concepts in a storytelling method used by grounded theorists. In this chapter, therefore, I shift our focus to answering the research question driving this investigation, "*How do school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching?*"

This section outlines findings expressed by participants - Illinois school leaders guiding professional development in their schools - using the SLAT-CRT tool, including: (1) the methods of data collection school leaders used to make assertions about teachers in their schools, and (2) their assessment of the four domains of CRT (Gay, 2018).

Methods Used to Assess CRT

Study participants were asked how they assessed teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions in the CRT (Gay, 2018) domains of Caring, Communication, Curriculum, and Congruity. Examples of such assessment methods were given: "(e.g., conversations

with administration, formal observations, surveys, informal work with teachers, evaluation tools, curriculum reviews, combination of these, etc.).” Their responses to this question highlight the various kinds of data that were used to evaluate teachers’ preparedness for CRT.

Participants relied on both qualitative and quantitative data to make their assertions. Most described both formal and informal surveying techniques as examples of data collected. For example, one participant described a formal survey to teachers in which teachers were asked about the type of training in CRT they would like to receive to improve their understanding of various aspects of pedagogy. Another reflected on formal surveys that were administered within staff training sessions and data from formal focus groups conversations. Others reported informal dialogue with teachers that took place during team and committee meetings and discussions at faculty meetings. One noted, “I have spent time talking with teachers, administrators, and department chairs.”

Some participants shared that their schools were in the process of curriculum reviews by noting this directly (“we are doing a curriculum review now”) or referring to the examples provided in the question (“We leverage all of the above”), suggesting that school leaders reviews of curriculum in place in their schools was used to make some assessments, likely in the domain of Curriculum. Other participants also wrote about classroom observations as part of how they assessed teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions, while only one participant specifically described discussions with students and other stakeholders as part of ways that teacher assessments had been made.

Participants' Assessments of Teachers' Preparedness for CRT

The seven participants of this study all completed the questionnaire in its entirety. Every question was answered, with extended responses ranging in length from one to five sentences. The seven did distinguish teachers' dispositions toward the domains of "culturally responsive caring," "culture and communication in the classroom," "ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content," and "cultural congruity in teaching and learning" using the Assessment of Teachers' Readiness for CRT (SLAT-CRT) instrument developed for this study. Participants taking part in the survey were able to define teachers' general readiness for what the domains address and identify the problems that prevent teachers' enacting the domain skills or exhibiting dispositions toward readiness. In each domain, participants' voices expressed two distinct themes: (1) those relating to teachers' readiness for CRT, and (2) identification of problems or needs of teachers surrounding CRT. Each of the four domains elicited clearly differing responses, indicating that to some degree, participants saw these domains as distinct with each one requiring differing skills and dispositions. Responses for each individual domain were analyzed separately so that themes and categories could be coded independently of each other. Only after the four domain responses were coded and analyzed qualitatively did I look for core concepts among them and seek out overarching themes. This analysis is explored in the next sections.

Caring: Readiness and Concerns

According to the Gay (2018), "culturally responsive caring" warrants a commitment to facilitate authentic, high level classroom experiences that places students

and their personal interests at the core of learning. This emphasis on high level and rigor in “caring” is also centered in other CRT frameworks, including one developed by Zaretta Hammond (2015) called “Ready for Rigor.” How did school leaders assess teachers’ preparedness for this commitment? Teachers’ readiness and challenges preventing readiness emerged as themes in this domain. In vivo memo coding of participants voices illustrated nuances among them.

Participants consistently expressed most teachers’ readiness for culturally responsive “caring” in generally positive terms and indicated that this is representative of their faculty. The terms that consistently appear as responses, indicating that this is true of what respondent see as “most” teachers they are considering in their contexts are “many,” “teachers,” “our teachers,” “most teachers,” and “our teachers are at a 7.” Teachers’ attitudes are consistently described by participants with words and expressions such as “very willing,” “want to,” “good intentions,” “caring,” “willingness,” “committed” “want to understand and respect”, “commitment,” “willing and excited,” “intent is there.” One participant wrote about the hesitation of “some teachers,” and addressed their concerns, while most participants described what they saw in general terms, referring to “teachers” in their schools or districts. These attitudes were consistently qualified in the “Caring” domain with statements of “but,” which signaled problems that were seen. For example, “Many teachers have the ability, but are not trained in this area.” “But” as a qualifier consistently appeared in almost all responses in questions surrounding the “Caring” domain. Following the many “but” conjunctions, respondents expressed concerns that consistently fell into two categories: (1) those

related to teachers' attitudes or beliefs, and (2) external structural factors dependent on the work of school and district level leaders.

Those factors that participants saw as impacting teacher readiness that fell into the realm of teachers' beliefs painted a picture of teacher dispositions required for work with culturally diverse students. One participant noted an issue of teachers addressing their own shortcoming, for example, "Some teachers blame students, families, and communities for students' lack of engagement during classroom instruction, failing to address their own limitations when it comes to facilitating authentic, high level classroom experiences for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students." Another participant noted that teachers "need to fully embrace and respect the diversity of all students." Yet another wrote, "It seems that the intent is there, but the mindset shift that needs to take place makes teachers get in their own way." In one clarifying response, a participant expressed that, "teachers believe that caring is enough, but they do not work to go deeper and stick with what they know." Observing the cultural disconnect that occurs when teachers are in classrooms with students of culturally different identities, this respondent went on to say that "teachers often struggle as their identities do not match those of the children they serve. I feel they have good intentions, but rarely work to learn more about the needs and learning styles of the students in their classrooms." All school leaders noted challenges in this domain that prevented some teachers from addressing it in their teaching. Structural factors that participants wrote about included district commitment and school leadership efforts. Participants saw these factors as

significant in illustrating the degree to which teachers engaged with the practices. For example, one respondent wrote,

the degree to which teachers express a genuine commitment to understanding and respecting diverse students' contexts varies. For some teachers, their commitment level mirrors the commitment of the district. The moment the district changes the discourse, the conversations among some teachers also begins to shift.

Other respondents qualified teachers' general willingness and desire by describing the important role of local school leaders. For example, one participant wrote that for teachers to have "knowledge" and "comfort level," "professional development opportunities need to be provided" as well as a "relationship established with teacher/administration in order to assure a teachers willingness to participate." Problems relating to professional learning were described in words such as: "not trained in this area," and not having the "tools and training about how to make this happen proactively," and lacking "the tools, resources, or experience navigating conversations." One participant's statement about this reflected many respondents' comments about leadership issues: "the direct PD for the content is not as readily available as other topics." A summarizing quote about the needs of teachers for CRT was written by a participant who argued where the responsibilities for this work center: "It all will come down to the district's philosophy, professional development, and accountability."

In the Caring domain, although most participants expressed what might be described as a positive momentum in their teachers practices and attitudes toward supporting diverse students, all identified challenges such as lack of district commitment,

professional development needs, and some teachers' beliefs and mindsets that they saw as hindering the work of supporting diverse students' learning.

Communication: Readiness and Concerns

“Culture and communication in the classroom,” (Gay, 2018) or efforts made to seek improved ways of communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse students by understanding one's own preferences and incorporating students' cultural styles of communication into instruction, was a domain that participants saw as distinct from the Caring domain. Participants reflected on teachers' skills and dispositions of working with students of diverse linguistic backgrounds and communication styles. How did school leaders assess teachers' preparedness in this domain? Again, both readiness and challenges preventing readiness emerged as themes through in vivo memo coding and distinguished how participants view teachers' preparedness in this domain in contrast with the domain previously discussed, Caring.

Participants expressed a divergent range of teachers' readiness for “cultural and communication in the classroom” with some making efforts, some unaware of the practices, and others resistant. Participants consistently referred to teachers in terms such as, “small number proficient,” “very few teachers,” “some teachers,” “small number of our teachers are proficient here,” “at the beginning of our journey,” “starting to obtain awareness,” and one respondent noted, “depends on the teacher.” Teachers were often described in terms suggesting a lack of understanding of this domain with statements such as, “still learning to understand the differences,” and “do not understand cultural cues and codes.” Some respondents described teachers in words and statements that

depicted a marked resistance, for example, “concern,” “not something that is comfortable,” “fear,” “seen as a deficit,” and “not perceived as a resource or asset for many teachers.” One participant's words captured a kind of active resistance: “Some teachers believe it is their responsibility to “correct,” “fix,” and “teach students the ‘right way’ to communicate.” Another provided somewhat of a rationale for resistance, noting that teachers’ “concern of ‘saying the wrong thing’ supersedes the willingness to try.” Some participants expressed efforts of some teachers in their work to “affirm students’ linguistic abilities and try to provide diverse linguistic representation in the curriculum.” This effort at understanding and bridging communication gaps by some teachers was expressed by other participants. One teacher noted that, “some teachers proactively approach students about understanding communication styles.” This may be dependent on teachers’ experience or identity, as noted in a comment that, “teachers who share students’ lived experiences or who are widely read on the topic and implement practice, are more likely to identify cultural cues and codes.”

Participants further addressed some of the problems teachers faced surrounding this domain. Echoing findings in the Caring domain, problems expressed emerged as (1) beliefs and perceptions of teachers, and (2) factors within the realm of school leadership. Participants began their reflection with the problems, contrasting the Caring domain, in which their discussions began with general assessments of teacher preparedness; in the Communication domain, participants jumped right into the problems they saw occurring. Some of the problems relating to teachers engaging with diverse communication styles and linguistic traditions were described by school leaders as having to do with beliefs as

well as perceptions of diverse communication as assets. Problems relating to perceptions were illustrated by comments such as “lack of awareness of cultural cues and codes,” and “not something that is comfortable for ‘veteran’ teachers who may not be as familiar with current cultural modes,” and “I fear to think that this is not perceived as a resource or asset to many teachers,” and again, “do not see these as assets.” Beliefs about this domain of CRT were illustrated by comments such as, “Some teachers believe it is their responsibility to “correct,” “fix,” and teach students the “right way” to communicate.” These beliefs were supported with examples such as, “Some teachers mock students or engage in cultural appropriation. There are others who believe that students must be taught to code-switch and model the practice themselves.”

External problems were described as needs for PD or resources. For example, relating to PD, some participants specifically cited topics of “mainstream stereotypes, bias and assumptions,” “need PD on implicit bias,” and “ongoing conversation and training of their/our/my own tendencies and language habit,” or how to “ask students to bring in their home language or traditions into the classroom.” One participant noted, “textbooks not updated,” which signals the intersection of this domain with the area of curriculum. Another specifically addressed broader work for administrators, that is: “research that speaks to systemic inequities and how systems were created w/out BIPOC in mind, etc.” All school leaders noted challenges in this domain that prevented many teachers from addressing it in their teaching.

In the Communication domain, work needed was frequently described by participants as addressing the challenges of societal and teacher resistance, beliefs, fears,

biases, and assumptions about the diverse linguistic and communications traditions that students bring to the classroom. The attitudes expressed differed from the more positive attitudes that questions in the Caring domain elicited.

Curriculum: Readiness and Concerns

The third domain, “ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content,” (Gay, 2018) is the notion that what is taught must be meaningful to students’ lives and involve them explicitly in decision-making to be inclusive of content about students’ histories, contributions, and experiences. How did school leaders assess teachers’ preparedness for creating and including diverse topics, perspectives, and voices into what is taught in school? Both readiness and challenges are discussed using participants voices to illustrate nuances among them through in vivo memo coding, with distinctions emerging between the domains of Caring and Communication.

Teachers’ readiness in this domain was described by many participants as being an in-progress or an underdeveloped area. This was stated as: “teachers do not have experience,” “very touchy area,” “this is a struggle,” “something we are working on,” “we are still working,” “need to be developed,” “I don't see that as something that teachers themselves are doing with any validity,” and “this is not something a lot of teachers feel comfortable with.” One participant wrote, “teachers’ abilities to develop or use curriculum that honors diverse students’ ethnicities and cultural backgrounds need to be developed.” Some participants offered qualifiers, for example, that readiness was dependent on the teacher or the department they worked in. This was expressed as such: “some teachers want to,” “some departments,” “while others,” “others,” “just depends on

the teacher,” and “depends.” Some participants offered examples of qualifiers for teacher readiness, which included, “will I get supported for challenges the status quo?,” “especially at this time,” “teachers not willing to risk,” “depends upon how teachers view their administration.” These qualifiers indicate some of the readiness rests on teacher support, timing, and perceptions of risk. Only one participant indicated that “the vast majority of our teachers” had dispositions to support ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum.

Expressions of problems again fell into the categories of (1) beliefs and perceptions of teachers, and (2) factors within the realm of leadership. Participants expressed problems associated with this domain that related to resource access and PD, but shifted the weight of responsibility to various actors: teachers, administration, and community. Respondents who discussed this as a teacher-centered problem described time and lack of experience as issues, for example, “Teachers do have to spend a significant amount of time seeking out outside resources to implement,” “Teachers do not have experience developing curriculum in this area. They are also to locate resources and use previously developed curriculum,” “Teachers do have to spend a significant amount of time seeking out outside resources to implement,” and “Take up a considerable amount of teacher time outside of the classroom.” Other respondents discussed this as a school, district, or administration issue. For example, “This is a struggle - schools are not spending the time to do this work,” “PD and accountability. It will need to be a part of the teacher evaluation to truly impact the way that we teach,” and “We are still working on the first step of being able to identify biases or knowledge voids.” One participant

described it as teachers “looking to the administration or if applicable to the district to provide that resource,” and offering support as needed: “When parents want to challenge my CRT...will I be supported?” This challenge - teachers needing support from their administrators, schools, and districts is expressed in one participant’s words:

I think this is a very touchy area with many teachers not willing to risk ‘saying the wrong thing.’ The wide range of family viewpoints, misrepresentation/ misinformation being shared from students when they arrive at home, etc. can cause parental concerns that take up a considerable amount of teacher time outside of the classroom.

Teachers' beliefs that were seen as posing challenges were also noted in participant responses. One participant expressed this issue relating to teacher beliefs about culturally responsive curriculum: “Some teachers want to address cultural misinformation, biases or knowledge voids that exist in curriculum. Others don't see it, relying on a Eurocentric body of works and claiming that it is the rigor that students need.” Another wrote about beliefs pertaining to the distinction between multicultural curriculum and culturally responsive curriculum: “Teachers’ abilities to develop or use curriculum that honors diverse students’ ethnicities and cultural backgrounds need to be developed beyond multiculturalism and the belief that simply offering students texts with BIPOC characters is enough.” Many school leaders taking part in the survey noted challenges in this domain that prevented some teachers from using culturally responsive curriculum.

Summarizing the findings of the Curriculum domain, participants describe this being an in progress or an underdeveloped area that school leaders saw differently: some saw it as a teacher issue and others, as a district or school administration responsibility. Compared to the Caring domain, in which most participants expressed having generally positive attitudes though with qualifiers, and the Communication domain, which revealed themes of teachers' resistance or unawareness, the Curriculum domain raised issues about the tensions associated with where responsibilities for this work should lie.

Congruity; Readiness and Concerns

Finally, “cultural congruity in teaching and learning” (Gay, 2018) considers culturally and linguistically diverse students' various learning preferences and experiences to inform how students and teachers interact and engage with one another in diversity-honoring classroom environments. This domain is concerned with bridging the incongruities experienced by students between home and school; teacher and students; school personnel and families and communities. How did school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for this commitment? Both readiness of teachers and challenges highlighted by participants are discussed using participants voices to illustrate nuances among them. In this domain, interestingly, there was a shift in tone to reflect confidence and consistency in what was needed for teachers to succeed.

Participants expressed a similar assessment of teachers' readiness for “cultural congruity in teaching and learning,” indicating that preparedness in this area was not evident, inconsistent, or in the very beginning stages. Terms used to describe this were, “at the beginning of journey,” “not at the point of being embedded,” “they do not

consider this at all,” “surface recognition”, “not as much as is needed,” “this will be a challenge” “teachers try their best,” “Right now? There is not a lot of this going on.” A few hopeful participants expressed more positive assessments. One noted, “It is department dependent. Our Communication Arts, Social Studies and Math departments are doing a good job with this.” Another wrote, “Teachers are open to learning and gaining an understanding.” There were very few transitional qualifying words like “but” in the responses for this domain. Some respondents either made statements about teacher readiness or jumped directly into the solution, which was a shift from the style or the responses in previous domains, in which most responses touched on both readiness and problems teachers face.

In this domain, participants expressed more confidence and consistency in identifying what was needed to help improve teachers' ability to bring culturally and linguistically diverse students' various learning preferences and experiences to their teaching. In contrast to the other domains, fewer respondents emphasized an identification of various problems teachers encountered; more frequently, direct expressions of needs were observed. These fell into two general categories relating to (1) teachers' work, and (2) factors that school leaders needed to address.

Participants who saw the needs as being related to teachers' work were very consistent in noting the importance of developing relationships with students and communities as important to succeed in this domain. They expressed this in clear terms. One participant saw this as a starting point, saying, “Beginning with establishing a relationship with students and the school community, sharing differences of all, including

the instructor, and providing students with resources to understand and explore differences with others.” Another wrote about the importance of teachers needing to “develop this background knowledge through conversations with students and parents.” One participant saw this work as an indicator or measure of proficiency in the domain, noting that, “establishing positive and meaningful relationships with students and their families will be paramount to success in this area.” Still another noted that relationship work includes teachers helping students see cultural difference, for example by, “providing students with resources to understand and explore differences with others.” A few respondents assessed the issue as problem-focused, noting that there is a “surface recognition (i.e., holiday), but some teachers still lead with “I don't see color,” and “teachers see themselves as very busy,” but did not provide solutions, contrasting the majority of respondents comments.

Tasks or responsibilities of school leaders were grouped as having to do with teacher evaluation and support. One respondent wrote about, “accountability measures in place that speak to the evaluation model” expressing that, “then we will have a better shot at this becoming the norm.” Another similarly expressed, “the system does not ask them to do so.” Other respondents talked about supports and resources required to achieve success in this domain, for example, noting that teachers “need support in how to do this.” One participant was clearer and identified resource needs of teachers to become more responsive to individual students' backgrounds and needs by writing: “Teachers often rely upon traditional, single forms of assessments without much differentiation. They need more examples and models.”

In sum, participants describe this area as being in its beginning stages or an underdeveloped area that they see as requiring efforts of teachers and school leaders: developing relationships among students, teachers and families, or the resources needs that would support teachers in learning and using strategies for succeeding in this domain. Compared to the Caring domain, in which most participants expressed having generally positive attitudes, though with qualifiers, and the Communication and Curriculum domains, which revealed themes of teachers' resistance and tensions associated with where responsibilities for this work lie, and lastly, in the Congruity domain, respondents expressed a clearer vision of what needed to be done.

Teacher Preparedness for CRT

Respondents to the survey were asked to share their perceptions of the areas of greatest need for teacher professional learning relating to any areas of CRT. Data was triangulated via this open-ended question: *Please share your perceptions of the areas of greatest need for teacher professional learning relating to these or other areas of CRT and how you have made this assessment.* A pattern was observed in the responses to this question: participants saw greatest needs not as related to specific domains, but being elemental, that is providing foundations for learning by growing an understanding of CRT and its meaning relating to teaching and learning. School leaders described this foundational learning in different ways that included two general themes: (1) gaining a comfort level for discussing CRT, and (2) learning about what CRT entails.

Gaining a comfort level reiterated the themes expressed in the above domain-specific responses; participants confirmed the issue of what could be described as some

teachers' resistance, skepticism, or uncertainty about topics surrounding cultural responsiveness and the need to get buy-in for CRT work. Examples of how participants expressed these ideas through similar terminology and expressions included participant's words such as, "more comfortable," "being vulnerable," "very skeptical," and "very concerned." The school leaders wrote about greatest areas of need as related to attaining readiness or desire. One participant emphasized this as related to particular aspects of CRT and the importance of teachers, "being vulnerable to discussing topics they know/don't know/want to know." Another touched on the possible reason for this hesitancy by stating: "Currently, our stakeholders would be greatly opposed to anything closely related to CRT and are already very skeptical and concerned about SEL training the staff receives."

The second theme observed was that an expressed need for professional learning in what could be called foundational CRT, or the basic practices and strategies that distinguish this kind of approach to teaching and curriculum development. Words and expressions that illustrate this were, "historical," "CRT," "culturally responsive," "other cultures," "meaning of CRT," "CRT practices," "culturally responsive instruction," and "related to CRT." A few respondents expanded on ideas about what kind of foundational training for teachers was needed. For example, one participant wrote: "Understanding the meaning of CRT and the difference between CRT and multiculturalism is necessary. Observed practices during curriculum writing or discussion about equity reveal that teachers don't fully understand CRT practices." Another expressed the greatest area of need as being, "professional development with a concentration on understanding the

historical context of other cultures customs,” and “the relationships to other cultures as well.” Professional development in CRT was observed as needed by all seven participants.

Although each domain solicited clear distinctions, such as subtleties surrounding salient examples of ranges of readiness and various challenges facing teachers, in each domain, participants noted that CRT training was needed for their staff. Data collection yielded emerging themes and concepts - part of the process of grounded theory investigation. A core category was identified by transforming basic data into more abstract concepts allowing the theory to emerge from the data. By using the SLAT CRT instrument, participants identified emerging abstract concepts including resistance vs. commitment of faculty; resources needed for CRT to be implemented; roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; internal vs external pressures; addressing a range of understanding about CRT, and problems prohibiting culturally responsive practice in schools. The core category that emerged from these concepts was an overarching theme that most teachers in their schools were at the beginning stages of learning about culturally responsive practice. Though there were aspiring and hopeful examples of proficiency in small numbers of teachers or departments within schools, all schools were working to address teachers’ and stakeholders’ comfort levels or foundational level understandings of CRT as a pedagogy. This overarching find that participants assessed most teachers in their schools to be at the beginning stages of learning about culturally responsive practice- was evident in all four of the CRT domains of the framework: caring, communication, curriculum, and congruity.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study began with the idea that a CRT theoretical framework should guide the development of any instrument or tool for assessing teachers' professional learning needs due to the different contexts and struggles of schools and the communities they serve. By creating the instrument, *School Leaders' Assessment of Teachers' CRT Practices (SLAT-CRT)*, I hoped to test this premise by asking school leaders to use it and by analyzing the data generated. I wondered if the instrument would yield a clear answer to my research question: How do school leaders assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching? I hoped to see clear directions illuminated in the data; guiding lights for beginning of school year teacher preparation and indicators of where to begin professional development. What was unearthed via participants' voices was a process for planning efforts for training teachers in CRT.

There are early steps that must occur before educator training in CRT can begin. From the bird's eye view I have acquired in the process of this investigation and the compelling voices of study participants, these lie squarely at the intersection of CRT scholarship and literature on school improvement planning: (1) the importance of selecting a contextually appropriate, evidence-based framework to narrow the scope of inquiry and ensure contextual appropriateness, (2) the development of an instrument aligned to this framework, and (3) its use for the identification of problems teachers are

encountering. Discoveries and insights, gleaned over the course of the investigation, will illustrate how these steps have played out, using grounded theory as a methodology for interpreting findings. Practical and future implications relating to these steps will be addressed; however, we begin by examining the leadership profiles of study participants, including their roles, ethnic identities, and the contexts of their schools and communities.

Leadership Profile

Seven Illinois school leaders representing various titles, roles, ethnicities, and work settings in various stages of providing CRT professional learning for teachers took part in this study. Three participants were equity directors, two were principals, one was a regional director, and one was an educator. These school leaders all held roles involving professional development. They described their responsibilities in descriptive terms that highlighted some of the specific tasks related to teacher PD: planning, facilitating, and evaluating professional development. Four participants described their responsibilities as providing and facilitating PD: “I am on the team that organizes and supports professional learning this year,” “professional development facilitator, teacher mentor, curriculum writer, and equity committee member with an emphasis on CRT,” “I provide and present professional development related to curriculum, instruction, and SEL,” and “PD Leader.” Three participants’ roles emphasized evaluation of professional learning: “Professional Learning Evaluation,” “Deciding professional development goals and evaluation of staff,” “working with principals coaching principals’ work with teachers assessing student growth data.”

These leaders reported their cultural and ethnic background in response to a demographic question asking them to name how they identify with an ethnic group, “which may include a common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Four participants described themselves as “Black or African American,” and three as “White or Caucasian” ethnicities. They described the students in their schools and districts as representing various diversities: One participant worked in a school that served more than 90% ethnically diverse students, one was at a school with more than 50% ethnically diverse students, two were in schools with less than 50% ethnically diverse students, and two worked in schools with less than 10% ethnically diverse students. The schools that participants represented were both public and private: four participants worked in public districts or schools and three worked for private schools; three were in elementary schools, three in secondary, and one in a K-12 setting. Regardless of the diversity of their student bodies, all participants reported that less than half of the faculty in their schools were ethnically diverse: in four of the schools, less than 10% were ethnically diverse.

Participants reflected on how their schools were working to provide teacher supports and professional learning for teachers in CRT. These were very distinct with each school approaching this work in a different way or degree. One participant’s school was actively working with CRT scholar, Dr Gholdy Muhammad, on implementing the Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Framework, while four others were in the process of providing support for teachers in CRT in various ways: through stand-alone courses, teacher training, new equity cohorts for lesson planning, and providing

needed resources. Finally, two participants' schools were not yet providing teachers support and professional learning aimed at CRT.

The seven participants who shared their assessment of teacher skills and dispositions in CRT in this study represented differing ethnicities and K12 school contexts. However, all reported as working in schools in which the majority of faculty were not ethnically diverse. All seven participants were involved in school and district leadership roles in which they held responsibilities for developing, guiding, or assessing professional learning for teachers. All but one participant's schools were in the process of working to provide supports and professional learning for teachers in CRT.

Practical Implications

According to Charmaz and Bryant (2010), in constructivist grounded theory, a statement of current emphases and future directions is provided. Through this investigation and its participants, a practical process has been identified that may be used to prompt decision-making about professional learning needs for in-practice teachers in culturally responsive teaching. I present the three key steps of this process by elaborating on each one and sharing how the story unfolded. These essential components for acquiring an understanding of where K12 schools are in implementing CRT can be described as: (1) the selection of a theoretical framework for culturally relevant or responsive practice aligned to school or district goals, missions, and visions for student learning; (2) the development of a theory-aligned instrument such as the SLAT-CRT tool that can be used as a reflection tool to synthesize data on teacher practices within particular domains; and (3) the subsequent identification of issues that school leaders

must address in order to support teacher learning and success in these areas. This study followed these key steps and illuminated challenges teachers faced in domains of the CRT (Gay, 2018) framework, leading to practical suggestions for school leaders working to address similar challenges in their own settings.

Step 1: Selecting a Framework

A number of frameworks have been developed, on the heels of Ladson-Billing's (1995) landmark work, that school leaders can use to guide teachers' professional development in culturally relevant practice. In selecting a framework, my process involved investigating many frameworks that schools at the beginning stages of training in-practice teachers in cultural responsiveness would find (1) contextualizable, and (2) having a brand that aligned with overarching goals for student learning. I conducted an examination of five theoretical frameworks for CRT, including Gay's (2018) CRT Framework, Hammond's (2015) "Ready for Rigor" Framework, Muhammad's (2020) "Culturally Responsive Literacy," Stenbridge's (2020) "Culturally Responsive Education," and Paris' (2012) "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy" (2020). These differ in the CRT domains that they espouse and consequently, their areas of teaching emphasis.

In addition to Gay's CRT framework, which has been addressed in Chapter II, two other frameworks were in the running for final consideration: Hammond's (2015) "Ready for Rigor" framework and Muhammad's (2020) "Historically Responsive Literacy". I sought a "best fit" for developing a tool that would be applicable to K12 leaders from a variety of contexts and one that addressed, specifically, cultural difference. Ready for Rigor (Hammond, 2015), which was a final contender for selection, is

comprised of four core areas that support teachers' CRT practice: (1) Awareness, which means placing instruction within sociopolitical context which helps teachers understand their own positionality, sharpen the cultural lens through which they perceive others, and manage how they respond to student diversity; (2) Learning Partnerships, which emphasize that by learning to build trust with students, teachers can create authentic connections, provide feedback in ways students can accept and act on, and hold students to high standards so that they are able to rise to higher expectations; (3) Information Processing, which entails learning the process, tactics, tools and strategies for engaging students in more complex learning, so that teachers can understand how culture affects information processing in the brain and, over time, can help students build higher order thinking skills; and (4) Community building, or working to create socially and intellectually safe learning environments so that teachers can learn to integrate universal cultural elements and routines into the classroom setting that help students become self-directed learners. This was eliminated due to several core areas having a lesser focus on addressing cultural difference, which was a priority for this study's setting. Another consideration was the Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) framework by Muhammad (2020), intended for literacy education; it identifies intellectual goals for learning to be used across content areas in four areas: Identity development; Skills development; Intellectual development; and Criticality. This was eliminated due to its explicit focus on literacy and potential challenges that may have arisen in assessing preparedness of subject area teachers for whom literacy is not necessarily an essential skill students must hone to succeed. Examples of this are math, physical education, music, and visual arts.

Questions surfaced about which framework was most contextualizable, or “best fit” for use in a variety of K12 schools. Leaning into recent scholarship on teacher professional learning, I sought a purposeful theoretical framework to use as “a lens to learn with” in order to reflect on sociopolitical factors inherent in teaching in urban settings and unearth effective teaching dispositions for this work (Truscott & Obiwo, 2021, p. 54). The CRT (Gay, 2018) framework was selected, as expanded on in Chapter II. This was an essential starting point of my process: identifying a framework that aligns with K-12 school-based practices and one that can be widely applied regardless of contextual differences in schools. I considered multilingual learners, students of diverse races and ethnicities, as well as generally underserved students who think differently from the norm when deciding on a contextualizable “best fit.”

Participants’ voices emphasized their awareness of these kinds of sociocultural factors that distinguished one school context from another and underscored differences among them. I grew to understand that school leaders should be the ones selecting frameworks.

Framework brand and its theoretical and scholarly significance in my selection was another important aspect of framework identification. In a study responding to Ladson-Billing's (2014) essay in which the author discusses the development of culturally responsive teaching theory, Hollie (2019) highlights the importance of reflection on the choice of a framework. The researcher conducted a non-evaluative survey of teacher education programs in an effort to understand the many brands of CRT that California institutions have invested in and the unique features of those brands. Recommendations

for seeking out brands of CRT, or frameworks, included asking three critical questions: What is the theoretical basis of a particular type of CRT work? To what extent does a name indicate a link to a brand? How has the intentional use of the brand been tied to specific outcomes? (Hollie, 2019, p. 51). In addition to the contextualizable constructs, my investigation hinged on the use of the CRT Framework developed by Gay (2018) due to its influence on scholarship in the field and its development in response to evidence of student learning gains for historically marginalized groups of students. The name Geneva Gay has been linked to a brand of CRT that is widely considered, as Hollie (2019) describes it, one of the “most influential” works on culturally responsive teaching. In my investigation, I saw Gay’s CRT framework as one that offers constructs, each addressing cultural difference, that are clear and broad, encompassing teaching practices that have been shown to work for culturally and linguistically diverse students and constructed in response to student achievement data from schools and districts across the US (Gay, 2000). Its brand fit the range of schools that leaders taking part in my study would likely represent.

In sum, important elements of this stage of assessment of teacher practices were noted as investigating and reflecting on a framework for its “best fit” for the context in which it will be used and studying the “brand” of the framework to consider if outcomes align with those desired for student learning and success.

Step 2: Developing a Theory-Based Instrument

Framework constructs can inform the development of instruments that can collect data to identify teacher professional learning needs. An obvious example is the Charlotte

Danielson framework (Danielson, 2022), widely used across the US and other countries, which has inspired tools that many schools and districts employ for observation and professional practice evaluation. Another example is an accreditation agency framework “Teacher Observation Tool” used by Cognia (2022) to evaluate teachers during their school reviews, which are aligned with the professional framework that the agency has developed outlining teaching for engaging learners. These instruments are aligned to broader goals for teacher professional practice. However, to be used for the assessment of teachers’ preparedness for CRT, the tool must be designed expressly for that purpose. A literature review by Cox et al. (2019) unearthed five tools for assessing various aspects of culturally responsive teaching, or what they referred to as, “Instruments for measuring the cultural responsiveness of students’ educational experiences.” Only two tools in the study were found to be intended for use by school, district, and state leadership: One is a checklist-type instrument used to assess changes needed to create positive school climates for girls of Color. The other is a self-report tool aligned to equity domains that provides school leaders guidance in reviewing standards and curricular materials, including a scoring and analysis guide to assist with the evaluation process.

This study provided insights for the development of a new theory-aligned instrument useful to school leaders and those guiding CRT efforts toward identifying a focus area for improvement - a jumping off point for school administrators and school level, decision-making leaders in conversation about implementation of CRT PD. These centered on various ways it would be used to generate data and guide (1) evidence-based, and (2) targeted reflective conversations about teachers’ learning needs.

Evidence-based. The potential for using the SLAT-CRT instrument as an evidence-based tool was conceived, developed, and tested by collecting and analyzing data: I consistently thought about various domains of teacher learning and “buckets” or focus areas that could encompass various elements of teaching practice. The CRT (Gay, 2018) research-based domains of Caring, Communication, Curriculum, and Congruity provided the constructs for my questions, which allowed me to analyze the data leaders generated and test the instrument for its use as a tool that could isolate specific aspects of teachers’ preparedness for CRT. As outlined in Chapter III, each domain in the SLAT-CRT held two questions that prompted reflection by school leaders on teachers’ skills and dispositions in associated practices. The second section questions about how assessments were made were designed to ensure evidence-based practices, so that as the participants were reflecting on teacher preparedness, they were prompted to articulate the kinds of data they used to make evaluations. Therefore, the SLAT-CRT framework-aligned instrument helps hold the user accountable to themselves regarding *how* assessments are made. For example, if a particular domain is assessed poorly, but the user can provide no evidence other than anecdotal, informal “cafeteria talk” about teachers’ preparedness, further investigation may be warranted. The idea here is that a user can support statements with consistent and equitable evidence.

Identifying problem areas. Identification of focus areas for learning can prompt conversations about problems of practice and be useful for reflective practitioners. An example of this is the Data Wise method (Boudette et al., 2014) used in schools and districts around the country. Quay and Lockwood (2019) identified the Data Wise

process as a clear approach to continuous improvement, driven by practitioner collaborative research, that has helped improve student outcomes. This method espouses cyclical, productive, collaborative conversations to improve learning outcomes for students and enhance culture in their schools. School leaders select a focus area for improvement, generate data to illuminate a story about the focus area, share the story via several carefully designed visual data representations (charts and graphs), then ask teachers to generate questions about the data, identifying a student-centered problem, and finally, transform the way the problem is looked at by reflecting on problems of practice they name and commit to investigating. The development of a CRT assessment instrument may be used to assist school leaders in the identification of learning needs surrounding CRT by guiding reflective conversations about where teachers are in various domains of professional practice. For example, a school's administrative team or instructional leadership team, including those school leaders who serve as instructional coaches and guide professional development efforts, could use it collaboratively to guide reflection by gathering insights about teacher practices which would lead them to identify major obstacles faced by teachers in specific areas of teaching, assessment, and curriculum development in order to isolate problems of their leadership "practice." This reflective exercise could isolate needed tools, resources, PD, and training towards new learning about culturally responsive practices.

School leaders using a theory-aligned qualitative instrument, such as the SLAT-CRT or one they develop to "fit" their own contexts, can synthesize data about teacher practices to inform next steps in PD and broader school improvement planning for CRT

to support teachers in their work of inspiring, engaging, and elevating learning for historically marginalized groups of students. I illustrate this by responding to study participants' reflections about teacher challenges associated with CRT and the problems of practice they identify *by modeling* this next step in the process and offering suggestions for improvement.

Using Findings to Support Teachers

The SLAT-CRT instrument, to some degree, succeeded in identifying teachers' readiness for CRT and allowed school leaders to name the challenges faced by teachers in their schools. Although some of the responses were inconsistent or imprecise and may have not reflected rich understandings about specific teaching practices associated with the domains, yet when analyzed, patterns, themes, and codes emerged that highlighted key concepts about teacher readiness and challenges they faced. Inspired by the data collected using the SLAT-CRT, as well as academic and empirical literature on CRT leadership, practical suggestions for school leaders at the beginning stages of CRT work are surfaced in each of the four domains of the CRT (Gay, 2018) framework.

Caring: Commitment, collaboration, and conversations. The SLAT-CRT survey revealed that in the Caring domain, a positive momentum in teachers' practices and attitudes toward supporting diverse students was noted, but all school leaders identified areas of concern. Participants expressed various barriers that existed preventing teachers from being able, as the SLAT-CRT tool worded, to "facilitate authentic, high level classroom experiences for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students," and to "express a genuine commitment to understanding and respecting diverse students'

contexts.” Concerns noted included teachers' own biases and beliefs and those reliant on school and district level work, such as needed training, resources, and a commitment from the district to make this work a priority.

For teachers to overcome these barriers, school and district leaders must commit to prioritizing this work, beginning with identifying challenges that ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse student populations they serve face, and conducting self-assessment to understand learning and opportunity gaps that exist in their own contexts. This step is urgent in the domain of caring, which is centered on a mindset that all students receive access to challenging, relevant, and motivating experiences in school. In prioritizing diverse students' learning, schools should conduct audits of their policies, practices, and pipelines to identify aspects that negatively impact diverse students to gain a clearer picture of where roadblocks exist and then work to address them via school improvement planning that involves teachers in the decision-making process. Collaborative professional learning opportunities in which teachers have active roles can be offered for learning about cultural difference. Cavendish et al. (2020) make arguments for collaborative, growth-driven and teacher-responsive CRT PD that values teachers' voice, collective decision making, and co-construction. With supporting foundational scholarship of Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995), the researchers argue that professional development for teachers of diverse students should include learning culturally responsive methods with an emphasis on fostering a critical, social justice-oriented perspective. When teachers are part of decision-making and learning and have opportunities to take part in developing solutions to problems they see, they are

empowered and inspired towards growth. As Cavendish et al. (2020) note, teacher professional development must be “collaborative spaces that value and incorporate the knowledge of all stakeholders” (p. 331). Brodeur et al. (2020) study also supports the argument for reflective and collaborative practice as essential for teachers to advance CRP in their schools.

Teachers should be provided opportunities to have conversations about their students’ cultures so that they can experience and learn the beauty and significance of these cultures for students’ families and communities, as well as understand barriers faced by students of non-mainstream cultural backgrounds, thus gaining empathy. Exercises in learning how to understand the world through multiple perspectives are essential towards this. Warren (2017) argues the importance of the development of teachers’ empathy by the process of “perspective taking,” in which alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world are reflected upon; teachers should be helped in developing a mindset that youth and their families have much to share. Many resources are available that help teachers gain the ability to understand their students’ cultural contexts more deeply, which school leaders can introduce to teachers in professional development such as faculty book clubs and bringing in expertise to discuss cultural aspects of communities with teachers. One text that has been used in schools since its release for this purpose - as evidenced in teacher blogs and social media group postings - is Zaretta Hammond’s (2015) *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain; Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, which offers various reflective exercises that teachers can use independently or in

discussions with colleagues. Hammond also offers various practical online presentations that can be used to facilitate dialogue about how to create rigorous classroom environments that foster a sense of belonging, opportunities to succeed, where efforts are acknowledged, and students see that the work they do has value for them. As an example, I reference the Culturally Responsive Teaching presentation at the San Francisco Public Library (Hammond, 2018), available on YouTube.

To support teachers in developing mindsets and skills in the domain of culturally responsive caring, school leaders are urged to make this work a priority, provide teachers opportunities to collaborate in order to deeply understand students' cultural contexts, and grow perspectives that respond to diverse students' linguistic, cultural, ethnic traditions.

Communication: Addressing biases and barriers. Relating to the Communication domain, the SLAT-CRT survey illuminated school leaders' perceptions about teachers' *and societal* resistance, beliefs, fears, biases, and assumptions about the diverse linguistic and communications traditions that students bring to the classroom as well as the barriers students face. School leaders assessed teachers' abilities of "identifying cultural cues and codes that are embedded in curriculum and instruction," and how well teachers "perceive linguistic and communication styles of diverse students as assets and instructional resources," as worded on the SLAT-CRT tool.

Leaders saw most teachers as not yet proficient or actively questioning the practice of bringing students' modes and traditions of language and other forms of communication into the classroom, with a few noted exceptions. For example, one respondent's comment that, "teachers who share students' lived experiences or who are

widely read on the topic and implement practice, are more likely to identify cultural cues and codes,” and another noted some efforts “to provide diverse linguistic representation in the curriculum.” For teachers at large to overcome these barriers, school and district leaders should recognize the importance of providing ongoing opportunities for staff to delve into topics of stereotyping and implicit bias, as well as help teachers learn how to address barriers that multilingual learners face in the classroom that are embedded in materials, resources, and assessments. These can be very high stakes measures impacting diverse learners in K12 schools.

Gay (2018) discusses the impact of mass media on self-esteem of children of Color, including fostering feelings of self-shame and loss of confidence in their abilities. Our brains’ neuropathways, that continue to develop well into adulthood, can reinforce biases and stereotypes that we encounter early on because, according to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2018), “the neural connections between our associations get stronger as we take in more information that confirms our stereotypes or biases. By monitoring our exposures to text and media and making choices to seek a decision to find experiences that challenge our biases, we can disrupt the reinforcing effects on our neural pathways and weaken those connections. Two methods that are proposed are mindfulness and intergroup contact, which have been demonstrated as having the effect of halting the manifestation of our biases (Kirwan, 2018). By providing implicit bias training to staff, school leaders can help teachers understand the biases they carry so that they can see cultural differences relating to communication and language as simply that - differences. Additionally, strategies found to minimize implicit bias

reinforcers in media such as mindfulness and intergroup contact (Kirwan, 2018) can be used to mitigate the effects of stereotypes and demeaning portrayals of ethnically and linguistically diverse peoples found in television, film, social media, and visual culture.

Once leaders in schools and districts guide a better understanding of how implicit biases are formed and how they impact students whose home cultural and linguistic traditions differ from those of school expectations, professional development can address barriers that are embedded in materials, resources, and assessments. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2020) is one approach that is intended to support learning of diverse students, which is why The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) has embedded language recommending that districts use this pedagogical approach to creating relevant and engaging teaching and learning environments. Focused on providing students multiple means of engagement, access, and ways of demonstrating proficiency of learned content and skills, UDL is a method of teaching that has entered district and school planning conversations for effective professional development to address diversity in the classroom, since the framework is recognized as an effective teaching methodology for improving the process of learning for students through engagement, as a meta-analysis of multiple studies has found (Capp, 2017). UDL has demonstrated positive effects on student learning and engagement, specifically, for English language learners and students of Color. For example, Katz et al. (2019) found that students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and Indigenous students in UDL classrooms scored significantly higher on measures of academic achievement, as

reflected on a rubric that assessed levels of critical thinking than students not in UDL classrooms.

Therefore, to cultivate teachers in addressing the domain of culture and communication in the classroom, school leaders must respond to larger societal issues at play that enter into schooling such as implicit biases we hold due to negative stereotypes about historically marginalized groups, including African American, Mexican American, Asian American, and Native American peoples, that are reinforced in media. By providing needed training on the effects of implicit bias, including strategies for how to mitigate these effects through mindfulness and intergroup contact, school leaders can shift mindsets caused by implicit biases. Further, barriers that hinder student learning due to linguistic and cultural difference can be addressed by training on UDL to support teachers in developing skills for addressing differences between communication norms of teachers and the students they serve.

Curriculum: Structural conditions and systems. In the Curriculum domain, the SLAT-CRT survey brought up tensions associated with where responsibilities for selection and development of resources and curriculum that honors diverse student backgrounds lies. This tension was unearthed as something that may be preventing teachers from engaging in developing or seeking out culturally relevant curriculum. Participants evaluated this domain using the SLAT-CRT tool by assessing teachers' abilities of "developing or using curriculum that honors diverse students' ethnicities and cultural backgrounds" and addressing "cultural misinformation, biases or knowledge voids that exist in curriculum."

As school leaders addressed the issue of diversity in content, voice, and curriculum topics in K12 schools, they expressed teacher readiness as reliant on clarifying where responsibilities for what should be taught lie and ensuring that when it comes to teachers and their work in this area, assets of time, resources, and supports to revise existing curriculum are all needed for teachers to become more culturally responsive. Research in these areas points to specific systems in place in schools and conditions needed for successful PD.

Tensions surrounding “who does what” were evident in this CRT domain. Participants saw one of the issues challenging teachers as the belief that work on developing culturally responsive curriculum was a risk, uncomfortable, or potentially not supported by administration. It is essential for school leaders engaging in curriculum work to reflect on the social systems in their schools to understand stakeholders’ roles and expectations in school improvement work. Moore Johnson (2019) and others sought to understand conditions and practices in high poverty, successful schools where students and teachers were thriving noting that the adoption of systems involving roles of teachers were evident in all successful schools. These included systems for teacher teams with clearly established and predictable time set aside in which teachers could be “candid and take risks” to learn and make improvements to their practice and their school; and systems for teacher evaluation that emphasized teacher development rather than dismissal. Systems for evaluation in these schools included ample opportunities for observations and feedback, which teachers saw as valuable to help them improve their

practices. Bal et al. (2021) and Ishimaru and Galloway (2021) discuss systems work and organizational change as necessary for equity efforts to succeed.

School leaders must also ensure that teachers have the time, resources, and support to revise existing curriculum. A recent empirical study out of the Research Institute for Child Development and Education at the University of Amsterdam in collaboration with the Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche sur La Socialisation, l'Education, et la Formation at the Universite Catholique de Louvaine (Gaikhorst et al., 2019) studied structural and cultural work conditions that principals in primary schools in the Netherlands identify as important for teacher professional development in order to identify the leadership practices needed to create and maintain them. Their extensive literature review articulates the “structural” versus “cultural” conditions required for successful teacher PD. Results of the SLAT-CRT survey revealed that problems encountered by teachers fell into structural conditions of time, resources, procedures, and content- each of these involves essential issues to be addressed for successful PD. "Time" refers to having enough versus not enough hours within the workday to complete teacher-associated tasks; “resources” means on-demand and adequate books and materials, monetary support, and prolonged coaching; “procedures” include clarity and cyclical work processes; finally, “content” refers to level of appropriateness, active teaching methods, and a student-centered approach, and integration of content within school context (Gaikhorst et al., 2019). School leaders in my study described the problem teachers faced in the domain of curriculum as relating to *all* of these structural conditions.

Participants using the SLAT-CRT instrument in this study expressed varying concerns that may have contributed to why CRT readiness in the domain of culturally responsive curriculum was not attained by most teachers in their buildings - some overlapping and others singular in the topics they addressed; yet all of the concerns fell squarely into what Gaikhorst et al. (2018) describe as structural workplace conditions. Thus, findings of this study suggest that if schools and districts are working toward improving curriculum to become more culturally relevant, they may assess whether they have (1) time embedded in the workday for teachers to work on revising or adapting the curriculum they teach, (2) needed supports such materials, financial incentives and coaching staff, (3) clear and cyclical procedures in place, and (4) context and level-appropriate student-centered protocols to help teachers accomplish curriculum goals.

Thus, important considerations for school leaders in working towards culturally responsive curriculum are reflecting on whether their systems include collaborative spaces in which teachers are encouraged to take risks and grow, as well as structural conditions such as needed time, resources, supports, and content considered to be important for teacher professional development.

Congruity: Relationship-building and furthering learning. Finally, in the Congruity domain, the SLAT-CRT survey results revealed the importance of the development of relationships with students, teachers and families and resources for supporting teachers' learning about how to address cultural difference in the classroom. Participants evaluated this domain by assessing teachers' abilities of "gaining an understanding of diverse students' prior knowledge, frames of reference and learning

styles,” and how instructional or assessment practices are “attempting to honor and support diverse students’ cultural contexts and experiences.” In assessing this domain, school leaders emphasized the importance of relationship-building and resources for understanding cultural differences in learning.

Getting to know students and who they are as learners also involves immersing in their lived experiences and giving them space in school to share their strengths, how they like to learn, what makes learning relevant for them, and the prior knowledge they bring into the classroom. Researchers have assessed how teachers can be supported in working with ethnically diverse students and the kinds of activities that can help them grow in understanding cultures, customs, and concerns that may differ from their own. As underscored by Abacioglu et al. (2020), teachers can gain exposure to texts written by and about diverse populations, take part in social and cultural experiences of their students’ communities, and be given regular opportunities for dialogue with peers in CRT professional development in order to become proficient in CRT. School leaders can build relationship-fostering events and activities by engaging with the community, as seen in school-community art exhibitions, sporting events, parent workshops, etc. Students have expressed the importance of teachers getting to know them and their cultural backgrounds so that they can build stronger relationships and encourage students to see value in school, help them be successful, learn how to interact with those of differing cultures and races, and see current inequities (Byrd, 2017).

There are also many kinds of methods and tools that can help teachers learn about students’ learning strengths and preferences in order to help them bridge home and

school. Surveying by sending out electronic forms can ask students to assess their learning and comment on their preferences for group versus independent work, or collaborative versus competitive activities, which can be indicative of “deep” culture (Hammond, 2015) in collectivist versus individualist societies and cultural groups. Tools need not be digital. For example, exit slips on index cards that ask students to comment on *What went well? / What would help you learn?* can provide information and offer immediate feedback after a lesson to help teachers adjust their instructional practice. In brief meetings of small groups at the end of a class, students can be asked to discuss what activities are the most helpful for them in their learning and then share these in class, which can empower and motivate students as co-constructors of learning.

Coursework, though more costly for schools, can also help teachers learn instructional practices to bridge the incongruity that many students experience in K12 schools and may be a better option than in-service professional development. For example, in our study (Siliunas et al., submitted for publication), we found that teachers’ confidence in their use of teaching strategies related to cultural congruity was very much linked to their preparation. Greater confidence in “cultural congruity in teaching and learning” (Gay, 2018) was demonstrated by teachers who had completed fieldwork and taken courses centered on work with diverse students. Teachers who had indicated that they had taken “Coursework in Multiculturalism, Culture, Diversity, Equity, etc.” and those who had completed field work were consistently more confident than those who reported to have had CRT units embedded in teacher preparation classes they had taken. This kind of coursework was linked to being more confident in addressing cultural biases.

For example, in identifying “ways that standardized tests may be biased toward culturally diverse students,” teachers who took coursework expressed more confidence than those who had experienced professional development (in-service or otherwise).

School leaders can also provide professional development for staff in emerging mind, brain, education science (MBE) that can help teachers identify practices that support development and strengthening of neuropathways in the brain. Texts merging neuroscience and educational research are out there. For example, Whitman and Kelleher’s text, *Neuro Teach* (2016), offers research-based strategies in an engaging book reviewed in its pages by Mariale Hardiman, co-founder and director of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education’s Neuro-Education Initiative and author of *The Brain-Targeted Teaching Model for 21st Century Schools*, who writes, “This level of respect for the process of teaching and learning is sustained throughout the guide, providing its distinct voice and strengthening the authors’ call to incorporate neuroscience with pedagogy.” Whitman and Kelleher (2016) discuss strategies teachers can use to foster learning emphasizing the importance of teachers continuous linking of prior knowledge and new content. Addressing one of this study’s participant’s concerns, which is that teachers “often rely upon traditional, single forms of assessments without much differentiation,” MBE science points to project or product-based authentic assessments for deeper learning that stimulate cognitive functioning (Wittman & Kelleher, 2016). Providing teachers structures and space for engaging in collective inquiry and reflection surrounding brain science and MBE-supported instruction can allow teachers the

opportunity to make connections between effective practices and student learning successes.

When considering how to help teachers foster instructional skills relating to bridging the cultural incongruity that poses barriers to their learning, school leaders can develop more frequent and diverse opportunities for teachers to develop relationships with students and their families, provide tools to help them understand and bridge cultural differences, and offer professional learning through continuous education about cultural difference and MBE.

Conclusion

Participants' voices illuminated a 3-step process for assessing teachers' preparedness for CRT, including identification of CRT framework, the development of an instrument, such as the SLAT-CRT, and using it to reflect on readiness and concerns about teachers' use of classroom practices associated with CRT. As demonstrated in this study, once the qualitative data was collected and analyzed, themes emerged that were consistent with the study aims of identifying how school leaders assess teacher preparedness for CRT in specific domains of teaching in K12 schools. School leaders were able to describe teacher readiness as emerging, being reliant on certain variables, or with qualifying statements – some proficient, some not. School leaders were also clear about the problems teachers face and discussed what needed to be in place in their settings for teachers to succeed. The SLAT-CRT instrument inspired by the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) was able to discern- to some degree- teachers' professional

learning needs, school resource needs, and community assets required to bring about culturally responsive teaching to K12 schools with whom this sample was associated.

From a practical perspective, once frameworks are chosen, developed into instruments to guide school leaders' reflective practices, and the data generated is used to identify areas of needed PD, instruments such as the novel SLAT-CRT can be used to monitor learning gains in professional development, study trends, and inform decision-making about the next steps for teacher learning.

Future Direction

My contribution to the area of CRT assessment and PD is this three-pronged process, since it provided insights and potential direction for one small cohort of Illinois school leaders in their work of supporting teachers' culturally responsive practices. I also offer the SLAT-CRT instrument for school leaders who select Gay's (2018) CRT framework as a guiding theoretical light for their work in developing teachers' capacities for CRT. If the tool is implemented in assessments of teacher preparedness in multiple contexts its reliability and usefulness can be assessed. I urge school leaders, however, to consider their own contexts when working to assess teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching. It is important that the constructs used in decision-making, development of theories of action, and school improvement action plans be aligned with schools' and districts' contexts, missions, and visions for student learning, so that the work being done to ensure that the needs of historically marginalized groups of students are being met is consistent with overarching school goals for student learning and success. This is important. My perception is that frameworks for culturally relevant

(Ladson-Billings, 1995), responsive (Gay, 2000; 2010; 2018), or sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogies must be aligned with beliefs that communities have articulated about desires and dreams for their children to be useful and effect change. In essence, the constructs we develop, or use, must be student-centered,” as well as acknowledge the realities and concerns of communities.

To some degree, this study validates aspects of previous research findings of teachers’ areas of confidence and challenge in CRT. Teachers in this study were assessed by participants as seeming to have generally positive feelings about facilitating authentic, high level classroom experiences for diverse learners, which was found by Bonner et al., (2018) and Cavendish (2021). However, this study suggests that in all CRT domains (Gay, 2018) teachers needed support in addressing cultural difference. Particular shifts and challenges were unearthed in areas of curriculum and communication relating to how teachers felt about these areas, which has been noted by Cruz (2020) and Siwatu (2016). Participants voices, however, highlight another important facet. They point to specific conditions in schools, rather than teachers’ professional abilities, as factors preventing teachers from succeeding as culturally responsive practitioners. Study results highlight guidance and structural supports, including time and resources, as essential elements to be implemented for CRT efforts to succeed.

For future direction, more research is needed as to how to best support teachers in their work with students whose ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic identities are different from their own. Questions that have arisen in response to this investigation are: How can assessment tools and practices inspire collaborative inquiry about CRT? Which

structural conditions are needed in beginning equity work to address learning gaps and inequities facing diverse students? How can tools for assessing CRT be used to measure progress over time and monitor goals for student learning? How are schools embedding CRT aims into school improvement plans?

Some questions address what can only be called “the current state of politicization” surrounding CRT. Many school leaders have shared with me the conflicts, tensions and polarizing narratives that have arisen in recent years, reflecting the undercurrent of resistance noted by study participants when they addressed particular domains. Questions for immediate investigation are: Which supports are essential for teachers to have the courage and capacity to resist broader societal resistance to culturally responsive teaching? How are school leaders navigating this terrain? What are schools and districts, that are finding success in CRT work, doing in addressing a climate of resistance? Following in the footsteps of Ladson-Billings (1995), researchers can alter our course for the future with continued investigation into success stories in which underserved students shatter the myths, stereotypes, and expectations that our society at large continues to impose on them.

Limitations

A number of limitations of this study are noted. These include issues relating to methodology and those that are inherent to the realities of the landscape of teaching and CRT work. Methodological limitations have to do with sampling, biases, potentially problematic instrument questions. Since my sample size was seven participants, this may not paint a reliable picture of how school leaders assess teacher preparedness. Participant

biases may also be a limiting factor. Since respondents self-selected to take the survey once it was passed on from a third party, it may be possible that those who chose to complete it had strong feelings about how CRT training efforts were going and were not representative of the many school leaders working on this who may not have had time or felt urgency to do so. Instrument questions may have been a limiting factor since they assumed a degree of understanding about CRT and the domains that Gay (2018) outlined. Finally, respondents may not have been familiar with practices and strategies of the domains, thus, responded in more general terms, which would limit the reliability of domain-specific findings. This author, therefore, recommends that as schools work to identify how to prepare and support their teachers in CRT, care is taken in the process of designing an instrument so that it can appropriately distinguish not only readiness levels and problems teachers face, but addresses specific curriculum and instructional strategies associated with framework domains, so that resulting data can be richer and more detailed in providing direction.

This study illuminates a theory about how school leaders can assess teachers' preparedness for CRT. The SLAT-CRT instrument inspired by Geneva Gay's CRT Framework (2018) can be used as part of a process to help leaders reflect on problems faced by K12 teachers in various domains of culturally responsive teaching practice: however, a recommended and culturally responsive approach would be for leaders at the beginning stages of this work to develop their own instruments aligned to frameworks that fit the realities of their settings and communities, having compatible aims and desirable outcomes for students, and use the resulting tool to guide conversations about

how to advance CRT in their schools. Districts and schools wishing to assess teacher preparedness in broad domains of caring, communication, curriculum, and congruity inspired by the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018) are invited to use the reflective SLAT CRT tool, which is attached as Appendix C.

APPENDIX A
INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Printed on: Monday, August 22, 2022

Dear Victoria Silunas,

On Saturday, August 20, 2022 the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for confirmation of exemption titled "**School Leaders' Assessment of Teachers' Preparedness for Culturally Responsive Teaching**". Based on the information you provided, the IRB determined that this human subject research project is exempt from the IRB oversight requirements according to 45 CFR 46.101.

If you make changes to the research procedures that could affect the exempt status of this project, your proposal should be reevaluated by the IRB to confirm it is still exempt from the IRB oversight requirements. To modify this proposal, please submit an Amendment/Project Update Application using the online CAP program. Complete details about the application process and your responsibilities can be found on the [Office for Research Services web site](#).

Please notify the IRB of completion of this research and/or departure from the Loyola University Chicago by submitting a Project Closure Application. In all correspondence with the IRB regarding this project, please refer to IRB project number #3523 or IRB application number #8260.

Best wishes for your research,

Loretta Stalans, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board
lstanan@luc.edu

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Assessing Teacher Needs for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Researcher: Victoria Siliunas

Introduction: School leaders (principal, equity director, curriculum director, AP, e.g.) in K-12 Illinois schools tasked with guiding culturally responsive teaching efforts are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Victoria Siliunas from the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. My goal is to collect insights from leaders in various Illinois settings who have begun or are anticipating training teachers in CRT. If you agree to take part in this study, I will ask you to complete a questionnaire. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before you participate in the study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to collect school leaders' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) using the domains of Geneva Gay's CRT Framework (2018).

Procedures: If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to: Complete an anonymous online questionnaire which consists of open-ended questions and a set of demographic questions. The estimated time for completing the questionnaire is approximately 15-30 minutes.

Risks/Benefits: There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Sharing your perceptions helps improve teacher education and student learning outcomes.

Compensation: If you choose to, you will have the option to enroll in a drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card. Those interested will be asked to provide an email address and be

contacted once data collection is completed, approximately 2 months after inception. If you withdraw from the survey before completing it, you will waive your right to compensation. The odds of winning the raffle are no more than 1:45.

Confidentiality: You are being asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously, (i.e., not provide your name or other identifying information). I will ask a set of open-ended questions and a set of demographic questions which will help me to aggregate and categorize the open-ended responses into different groups for analysis. The demographic questions will NOT identify you, your school, nor your district. If you choose to enroll in the drawing for the \$100 Amazon gift card, you will be directed to a separate survey not linked to the study survey. All data will be collected via secured data collection portal, Qualtrics; data downloaded from this portal will be stored in a folder on Loyola University Chicago's Secured One Drive account and accessible only by the researcher and LUC research committee faculty.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to be in this study, you may ignore the invitation. Even if you decide to participate, please feel free to skip any question or to withdraw at any time without penalty. Please be aware that since the data collection is anonymous once a questionnaire is submitted it will not be possible to withdraw your responses.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Viki Siliunas (vsiliunas@luc.edu) with any questions. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent: By clicking on the *Start Survey* button below and commencing with the questionnaire you are indicating that you have read the information provided above and are agreeing to participate in this research study.

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

SLAT-CRT**School Leaders Assessment of Teachers' Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices**

Please answer the following questions about teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching. Provide examples where you are able.

SECTION I:**Caring**

1. How do you see teachers' ability to facilitate authentic, high level classroom experiences for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?
2. To what degree do teachers express a genuine commitment to understanding and respecting diverse students' contexts?

Communication

1. How do you see teachers' abilities of identifying cultural cues and codes that are embedded in curriculum and instruction?
2. To what degree do teachers perceive linguistic and communication styles of diverse students as assets and instructional resources?

Curriculum

1. How do you see teachers' abilities of developing or using curriculum that honors diverse students' ethnicities and cultural backgrounds?
2. To what degree do teachers want to address cultural misinformation, biases or knowledge voids that exist in curriculum?

Cultural Congruity

1. How do you see teachers' abilities of gaining an understanding of diverse students' prior knowledge, frames of reference and learning styles?
2. To what degree are teachers' instructional or assessment practices attempting to honor and support diverse students' cultural contexts and experiences?

SECTION II

1. How has your school worked to provide teacher supports and professional learning for CRT? (Where are you in this process?)
2. How have you assessed teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions in the above four domains? (E.g., conversations with administration, formal observations, surveys, informal work with teachers, evaluation tools, curriculum reviews, combination of these, etc.)
3. Please share your perceptions of the *areas of greatest need* for teacher professional learning relating to these or other areas of CRT and how you have made this assessment.

-
4. **In this section, please add your general thoughts about teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching.**

Inspired by the CRT Framework (Gay, 2018)

SECTION IIIDemographic questions

1. What is your role and/or title in your school?
2. Briefly list any responsibilities you hold that relate to teacher learning:
3. What is your racial/ethnic/linguistic background?
4. How diverse is the student body in your school? How diverse is the faculty?
5. Is your school elementary or secondary? Public or private?

APPENDIX D

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Heading: Looking for school leaders!!!

Dear Illinois K-12 school leader (or name) _____,

I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation towards an EdD in Curriculum and Instruction at Loyola University Chicago and am seeking participants.

If you are a school leader (principal, AP, DEI or equity director, curriculum director, teacher leader, etc.) working in a K-12 Illinois public or private school who is actively engaged with guiding culturally responsive teaching (CRT) efforts, you are invited to participate and to share this email with others in similar roles in Illinois schools!

My goal is to collect insights from leaders who have begun or are anticipating training teachers in CRT.

This survey will take between 15 and 30 minutes to complete, depending on the depth and length of your responses. Click here to read the Informed Consent and begin the survey.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Victoria Siliunas

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VITA

Victoria (Viki) Siliunas was born in Chicago, Illinois on July 25, 1964. She has three grown daughters and resides near Chicago with her husband. Victoria attended public schools while being very active in the Lithuanian Catholic community through Saturday schools, summer camps, folk dance groups, and Lithuanian youth events, including marches at Daly Plaza for the freedom of Lithuania from Soviet oppression. She graduated from Rosary College in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Art and Communications. In 1990, Victoria earned a type 09 Teaching Certificate from Dominican University, then in 2010, a Type 75 School Administrative Certificate. Victoria has worked in the field of education as a curriculum and instructional leader for three decades. She is an instructor and clinical supervisor for university teacher preparation and instructional leadership programs and an educational consultant with research interests in school improvement planning, UDL, and culturally responsive teaching. Victoria began her career as a high school art and design teacher, spending summers teaching arts in bilingual immersion settings. In the secondary setting, she served in various mentoring and leadership roles including department chair, data team lead, director of school improvement, and curriculum director. Victoria is a member of ATE and serves on boards and organizational committees that provide cultural immersion experiences for Lithuanian youth.

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