

# Closing the Achievement Gap in the Classroom Through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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## Abstract

It has been shown that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is beneficial in schools with a wide range of populations because of its emphasis on academic achievement for all students, cultural competency, and social justice issues. This study focused on teachers' perceptions about how to use a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy model in the classroom. Interviews with 20 in-service teachers across eight states revealed the following themes: (a) teachers' ideas about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the classroom environment, and (b) school and district support on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and social community, resources, and teachers' training to understand Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. This paper explores themes to reveal how in-service teachers perceived their preparedness to teach using CRP strategies in the classroom. In order to close the achievement gap, a paradigm change is required. It is necessary to employ CRP strategies to create this change and integrate students' everyday life with classroom learning objectives so that achievement disparity in classrooms may be reduced. English Language Learners (ELLs), students with low socio-economic status, and racial/ethnic minorities were the focus of this study.

**Keywords:** achievement gap, culturally relevant pedagogy, disadvantaged student groups, in-service teacher preparedness

## 1. Introduction

Educators are on a constant search for methods to instill a sense of hope and inspiration in students. As a teaching approach, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) has been used by a number of educators (Ladson-Billings, 2014). It is possible for educators who work in multicultural settings to avoid unconscious prejudice by being familiar with the theoretical background of culturally appropriate education (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). In-service teachers are defined as those who have completed all their academic and pre-service teacher training and are certified educators that are currently teaching in the classroom (Lecorchick & Peterson, 2019). Pre-service teachers are not trained to teach diverse student classrooms, so when they enter in-service teaching, they are not prepared to teach in diverse classrooms. Many new teachers make up the in-service population, so it is necessary to understand if teachers are prepared for their discipline and the needs of a diverse classroom in a multicultural society (Impedovo & Malik, 2016). Villarreal (2018) stated that "teacher quality refers to the teacher's ability to have a conclusive impact on students' academic achievement and social development" (para. 3).

### 1.1 Background

The United States has a long history of struggles over issues such as diversity and equality in educational opportunities (Spring, 2016). In order to protect the rights of all students and guarantee that every student has the same advantages, years of demonstrations, complaints, lawsuits, legal action, and legislation were required throughout our country (Kozol, 2012). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several minority groups (including African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) were stereotyped as stupid, dumb, and inferior to their White counterparts. Labeling minority groups created a stereotype against which many had to fight to achieve equal educational opportunities. The concept of CRP was developed in response to this key issue posed by Ladson-Billings (1990). When it came to minority students' abilities to learn, Ladson-Billings transformed the face of educational pedagogy by asking, "What is right with minority students?" instead of "What is wrong with minority students?" Ladson-Billings was able to uncover strategies to enhance the teaching profession by doing research on approaches that were shown to be successful in a variety of classroom settings.

During the study, three broad categories of teaching were found that could be used: “Academic achievement, cultural competency, and sociopolitical awareness” are the three dimensions of educator practice, according to the author (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75). Teachers in CRP engage with students to help them acquire the skills that are essential for academic achievement, and individuals’ differences are respected in the classroom environment. Teachers that use CRP aid students in achieving student excellence as well as personal development in a variety of settings. In their study, the researchers discovered a statistically significant relationship between observations of CRP and proactive efforts to regulate behavior (Larson et al., 2018). Christ and Sharma (2018) conducted research in which they investigated content selection in connection to CRP. The researchers were able to identify the difficulties and triumphs experienced by instructors who were attempting to integrate CRP into their classroom environments. According to their findings, there are four major obstacles to applying CRP: “resistance, a limited view of culture, a lack of knowledge about students’ cultures and identities, and a lack of opportunity for students to develop critical consciousness (p. 55).” When school management is supportive of culturally appropriate instruction, student results are successful. Implementation needs financial help as well as leadership encouragement.

### *1.2 Literature Review*

This qualitative interview study investigates the experiences of in-service teachers’ perception of their readiness to teach using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). The literature review, as a result, is centered on theoretical and empirical research relevant to CRP. Peer-reviewed journal articles published mostly in the United States form the basis of this study’s reviewed literature. Most of the relevant and peer-reviewed literature was gathered via academic search engines such as ERIC, SAGE journals, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a branch of the Institute of Education Sciences, was the primary source of educational statistics data (IES). Culturally relevant pedagogy, training pre-service teachers in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the implication of CRP, multicultural professional development of pre-service teachers in CRP, closing the achievement gap with culturally relevant pedagogy, and multicultural education for pre-service teachers were some of the key terms that were used to search for relevant articles. Additional searches for qualitative research methodologies and design were carried out via the use of the internet and other sources.

### *1.3 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Based on the Critical Race Theory (CRT), the CRP theoretical framework emphasizes race, social justice, and educational equality as the basis from which instructors may construct CRP methods (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Although it was developed by numerous legal scholars after the Civil Rights Movement, CRP is currently being used by many academics across a wide range of disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, and law (Kumar, 2014). Among the four major tenets of CRT are the following: (a) racism is the dominant form of inequality in the United States; (b) race, class, gender, and sexuality are the focal points of the analysis; (c) the experiences of minorities enduring racism are a source of knowledge; and (d) Whiteness can be seen as a form of property that can be owned (Stefancic & Delgado, 2000).

In the United States, race debates have risen in the wake of multiple incidents of police brutality recorded on video by members of the general public where police have killed unarmed African Americans. Conversations about the militarized police mindset in the United States and how the criminal justice system treats minorities have been sparked as a result of these injustices not only in terms of the treatment of African-Americans and people of color but also the argument that racism and racial inequality are closely entwined in the U.S. society and exist independently of the preconceptions of individuals claiming that institutions and practices are predominantly responsible for the persistence of racial inequality in the United States. A debate on how race and racism are institutionalized and sustained in academic programs is absent from the class discussion on diversity in teacher education (Sleeter & Grant, 2017). Therefore, more research using various perspectives is required to understand the importance of race and racism in educators’ teaching programs and, consequently, classrooms (Smith, 2020).

Innovative teaching practices, such as CRP, can help educators promote social justice as well as an understanding and raise awareness of how CRP strategies require educators to become more aware of their students’ cultural diversity to help students achieve their highest academic potential by incorporating culture into the classroom environment (Pappamihel & Moreno, 2011). Specifically, CRP incorporates curriculum content, instructional techniques, learning framework, classroom climate, classroom management, student-teacher relationships, and performance assessment. Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed CRP strategies in the 1990s because the researcher believed that the strategies promoted individual freedom and encouraged students to maintain cultural integrity based on shared knowledge and understanding while achieving academic success.

Rather than arriving at school with a fresh start, students of color bring their unique set of cultural experiences, values, assumptions, and worldviews to the classroom (Harding-DeKam, 2014; Nasir, 2002). CRP strategies were developed in response to this need and provide educators with a means to interact with students on all levels, such as political/social/emotional/intellectual (Harding-DeKam, 2014; Nasir, 2002). CRP was proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995) to achieve academic success through the incorporation of a culturally relevant curriculum that would ultimately foster integrity, individual freedom, and shared knowledge and understanding. The CRP model was a synthesis of 25 years' worth of research literature and assimilation of CRT tenets, which resulted in five themes, (a) identity and achievement, (b) equity and excellence, (c) developmental appropriateness, (d) teaching the whole child, and (e) student teacher relationships, from which to put CRP into perspective.

The primary premise of CRP is for educators to become cultural translators or bridge builders between a student's prior cultural knowledge and what is being taught in the classroom (Vescio, 2016). CRP enables educators to take a student's everyday lived cultural experience and made appropriate classroom connections through examples, comparisons, and contrasts to what needs to be taught. CRP strategies are transformational and incorporate teaching mechanisms that promote minority students' success while supporting their heritage, language, and cultural identity (Harding-DeKam, 2014; Nasir, 2002). By using these strategies, educators can minimize the achievement gap among minority students (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). According to Shevalier and McKenzie, applying CRP in the classroom is an effective teaching method because these strategies are designed to positively impact students by building communication and relationships with a caring approach. CRP has proven to be effective academically and has the power to promote students' social and emotional development (Byrd, 2016; Larson et al., 2018; Lopez, 2016). Hence, closing the achievement gap will require transformational change at the individual and classroom levels (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP strategies may provide educators the tools necessary to create this change by making connections between students' everyday lived culture/context with learning objectives within the classroom (Vescio, 2016).

#### *1.4 Achievement Gap Linked to Poverty*

Many studies have shown that poverty has a significant impact on the development of children (Howard et al., 2009; Williams & Crockett, 2013). Poverty has been linked to students' depression, poor health, and poor academic performance. According to research, 83% of 4th graders from low-income homes are unable to read fluently (Fiester, 2010; Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Williams & Crockett, 2013). Later, O'Hara (2006) discovered that children from households with greater earnings had a vocabulary of roughly 1,100 words by the age of three, but children from families in poverty only know about 525 words at the same age.

These children generally confront several structural impediments that may severely damage their life, including academic, financial, and social failure. They may be regarded as non-citizens, paid less, denied equal education and health care access, racially profiled, and viciously assaulted or murdered by law enforcement officers. Researchers have observed the focus on the school-to-prison pipeline and the extended silence of African Americans (Fletcher, 2017; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Sleeter & Grant, 2017). In order to better understand and support all children, particularly students of color, these areas/barriers must be thoroughly studied. Murnane (2007) postulated that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to drop out of school without the skills essential to make a good livelihood in today's rapidly changing economy. These adolescents are often impoverished, disenfranchised, and oppressed, according to many studies (Dozier et al., 2006; Janks, 2010; Kuby, 2013; Murnane, 2007).

Research shows that many pre-service and in-service teachers do not grasp the impact of poverty on their students' learning and even on their own teaching (Bennett, 2008). Thus, many educators use assumptions about students living in poverty as a basis for their teaching (Gorski, 2012). These preconceptions generally hinder students when it comes to power, privilege, and access to an equal education. Students' socio-economic position, disability, gender, religious affiliation, and culture are all representations of different types of learners, and educators in training should be aware of and prepared for them (Valeriu, 2017). So, the findings of this research support required learning standards reflecting the variety of students in today's classroom.

While being Black does not cause poverty, studies show that Black Americans have suffered more than White working-class counterparts and have less job/labor rights (Kropp, 2002; Moreno, 2006; Perea, 2011; Standing, 2011). Vulnerable social groups are marginalized in varying degrees, according to Fletcher (2017). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) motivates us to use oppressed people's experiences to solve oppressive organizations and systems. Current pre-service educational programs lack multicultural professional development and CRP strategies; thus, new educators may lack the tools necessary to facilitate minority student

learning (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018; Patel et al., 2016; Pierce, 2017). A lack of availability and effectiveness of multicultural professional development has contributed to the achievement gap by hindering teachers' ability to see their students through a culturally diverse lens (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018; Patel et al., 2016; Pierce, 2017).

Neglecting to incorporate effective multicultural education within pre-service professional development programs prevents educators from understanding the connection between culture and learning as well as in obtaining the skills necessary to connect with their students and their cultural identity, native language, and family life (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018; Patel et al., 2016; Pierce, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). As a result, students' academic needs become invisible to the teacher and result in a teachers' inability to fully unlock their students' academic potential (Gay, 1994; Yuan, 2017). The public education system has a significant achievement gap (Wagner, 2017). The researcher concentrated on the academic achievement gaps between White and Hispanic students, English Language Learners (ELLs), and disadvantaged socio-economic groups for this study. As a result, the articles in the next section will focus on the disparity in academic achievement between these three subgroups.

## **2. Achievement Gap-School Based Factors**

**Racial and Ethnic Minorities.** The percentage of Hispanic students in U.S. schools increased by 8% between 2000 and 2013, despite a drop in the ratio of white and black school-age children (5–17 years old) (Musu-Gillete et al., 2016). Because of this, the Hispanic population in the United States is the fastest increasing group in the country. From 1990 to 2013, the performance gap between White and Black students in fourth grade decreased by six points in reading and mathematics. By the time students entered 12th grade, the reading difference between White and Black students had increased by six points, but the mathematics gap had stayed the same. Mathematics and reading achievement gaps between Hispanics and non-Hispanics have not changed over the last 2 decades. Achievement gaps were also significant among 12th-grade students. Since 2005, the average mathematics score for White 12th-grade students has been higher than for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students. Asian students out-performed White students in 2015 by 1 point (Musu-Gillete et al., 2016, p. 67). At grade 12, the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks in reading was greater in 2015 (30 points) than in 1992 (24 points), but the achievement gap between Whites and Hispanics in reading was not substantially different in 2015 (20 points) (Musu-Gillete et al., 2016, p. 6). In elementary and high school, the achievement gap between Whites and Hispanics stayed unchanged. Because of their socio-economic status, minorities and ELLs are less prepared and equipped to apply, enroll in, or graduate from college than their wealthier counterparts (Musu-Gillete et al., 2016; Wagner, 2017).

### *2.1 Low Socioeconomic Status Groups*

The majority of minorities come from low-income or low-socioeconomic-status households (McFarland et al., 2018). Public school students, both charter and conventional, are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program (FRPL). This data is used by the NCES to estimate the proportion of a school's student population that is low-income, and then it is compared to the demographics of the student body as a whole. A high-poverty school is defined as (> 75% students eligible for FRPL), a mid-poverty school (50.1–75% students eligible for FRPL), and a low-poverty school (25% students eligible for FRPL); minorities predominate at schools with high or moderate poverty. In particular, 73% of Hispanic students and 74% of Black students were in the mid- and high-poverty school groups, whereas just 33% of White students were in these categories, according to the study. Low socio-economic status and underfunded education systems aggravate any racial/ethnic differences in academic performance that may exist.

### *2.2 English Language Learners*

Nearly half of the nation's K–12 public school students studied English as a Second Language (ELL) in 2015 (McFarland et al., 2018); also, 3.8 million of the participants were Hispanic or 78% of the total. Students from Asian backgrounds were the second-largest ethnic group to engage in an ELL program, followed by White students (5.5%) and Black students (2.5%) (3.5%: Musu-Gillete et al., 2016). There was a substantial Hispanic student population connected with disadvantaged socio-economic status and English language learners (McFarland et al., 2018). It was shown that the Hispanic student population has the most grievances related to race/ethnicity, low socio-economic status, and ELLs (McFarland et al., 2018).

### *2.3 The Academic Achievement Gap*

**School Based Factors.** A solution to the problem of academic achievement gaps will have to be multifaceted (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018). Out-of-school and school-based

variables and the psychological impacts of institutionalized racism and oppression are among the possible reasons for academic achievement disparities (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018). Out-of-school elements that negatively impact a student's general well-being, personal health, and academic achievement, and competence cannot be controlled by educators (Public-Impact, 2018). Race and socio-economic status have been found to have a significant impact on these variables (Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018). For example, a student's academic success is strongly influenced by factors outside of the classroom, such as parental involvement in the home (such as helping with homework or reading aloud together), the primary language spoken at home (such as exposure to English and its vocabulary), health and well-being (such as physical and mental health) and living conditions (such as overcrowding or unsafe conditions) (Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018). Educators may be able to address institutionalized racism by enhancing the traditional education paradigm by addressing school-based factors that lead to achievement disparities (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). A teacher's competence may influence students' academic progress and accomplishment, differences in students' learning, school policies, and students' experiences in the classroom (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018).

Race/ethnicity disparities in academic success have been linked to three school-based variables (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018). In particular, the cultural mismatch that hinders the effectiveness of teachers, the bias in the discipline that is perpetuated by school policies such as zero tolerance, and the experience of students of in-school segregation as it relates to classes with a higher concentration of White students than minorities (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Egalite et al., 2015; Glock, 2017; Mallett, 2015). Students from low-income families are also more likely to have underqualified or ineffective teachers, to be under-recognized for gifted or advanced courses, to be disproportionately diagnosed and represented in special education classes, and to have limited access to supplemental academic services, as a result (Grissom et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2016; Pezzetti, 2017; Public-Impact, 2018).

#### *2.4 Teacher-Student Racial Congruence*

Further, the current racial makeup of educators does not match that of the student body or the general public. Research findings on the effects of same-race teachers on minority and low-income students' academic achievement and retention rates vary (Banerjee, 2018; Egalite et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2018; Holt & Gershenson, 2015; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). A causal-comparative quantitative study conducted in 2015 concluded that an ethno-racial match between teacher and student increases academic achievement/performance in some minority groups in the short-run (Egalite et al., 2015; Holt & Gershenson, 2015). Using open-source data from a state-mandated standardized test called the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), researchers examined the reading and math test scores for public school students in third through tenth grade against their reported demographics and their teachers (Egalite et al., 2015). Data was collected for each academic school year from 2001–2002 and 2008–2009. Researchers employed student fixed effects to measure the teacher-student demographic match and academic achievement. Using this method allowed researchers to eliminate bias by calculating the coefficient within as opposed to between students.

The findings demonstrated a significant relationship between same-race teachers and academic achievement within all demographics except Hispanics. Researchers attributed this outlier to the heterogeneous makeup of the Hispanic ethnic group found in the state of Florida. Namely, people of Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Guatemalan descent all reported as Hispanic making it difficult to match teacher to student demographics. Similarly, two studies conducted on same-race teachers and minority students' absenteeism and frequency of suspension revealed significant findings (Gershenson et al., 2018; Holt & Gershenson, 2015). The 2015 study revealed a significant decrease in the number of days a student was absent from class and the number of suspensions acquired when teachers' demographics matched that of their own (Holt & Gershenson, 2015). Further, Gershenson et al.'s (2018) study revealed an increase in retention of Black students and an increase in their matriculation rate.

In contrast, a study conducted in 2017 concluded that same-race teachers (African-American teachers matched with predominantly African-American student classrooms) had no statistically significant effect on academic achievement in reading and math for minority students (Banerjee, 2018). However, the overall diversity of the teaching workforce does have a significant effect on how effective educators are in teaching minority students. This research study began in 1998 while participants were in Kindergarten and concluded in 2007 when the cohort entered the eighth grade. Data collected from the Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS-K) was sampled when participants were in Kindergarten ( $n = 19,680$ ), first, third, fifth, and eighth grade. During each stage of data collection, parents, teachers, and school administrators were asked to complete a survey. The final number of participants within the study by its conclusion was 6,350

students. The researcher employed cross-classified growth models to analyze the data.

### *2.5 Educational Disparities*

The academic achievement gap is prevalent within the public school system (Wagner, 2017). Although there are several groups from which an achievement gap exists, the researcher focused on the academic achievement gaps found between White and Hispanic students, ELLs, and low socio-economic status groups for the purposes of this study. Hence, the following section will consist of journal articles specifically examining the academic achievement gap for these three groups.

### **3. Closing the Achievement Gap**

Based on research findings, it is evident that the academic achievement gap in minority students exists and is maintained and perpetuated by traditional school constructs (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Banerjee, 2018; Gershenson et al., 2018; McFarland et al., 2018; NEA, 2018). CRP strategies are proposed to be a solution (Lopez, 2016). Although a great deal of research has been conducted on the need for multicultural professional development and educators' perceptions of it, few research studies have examined how the concept of CRP strategies are taught to pre-service teachers moving to full-time teaching positions; how in-service teachers apply CRP strategies within the classroom; and how the application of strategies affect student achievement and behavior (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Banerjee, 2018; Gershenson et al., 2018; Holt & Gershenson, 2015; Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

A correlational study conducted in 2016 proposed to examine the relationship between the implementation of CRP strategies within the classroom and its effect on student behavior and achievement in obtaining reading milestones within the Latino student population (Lopez, 2016). Research findings suggested a positive correlation between the implementation of CRP strategies and student outcomes (increased reading scores). Teachers reported a strong belief that the application of CRP strategies within the classroom had students with the highest increase in reading scores by the end of the year. A total of 244 students in third to fifth grade participated as well as 16 teachers. Achievement outcomes were measured by the collection of test scores from a standardized test used by the state to assess reading benchmarks. Hence, the research findings suggest a link between the implementation of CRP strategies and positive student outcomes.

Similarly, a quantitative study conducted in 2016 focused on students' perceptions of their teachers' use of CRP strategies within the classroom (Byrd, 2016). Researchers surveyed students on their instructor's constructivist teaching practices and cultural engagement, specific measures of school racial socialization, academic outcomes, and racial attitudes. Participants consisted of a random sampling of 315 students from the age of 12 to 18 years old using an online survey. Research findings suggested a positive association between greater academic outcomes, constructivist teaching practices, and promotion of cultural competence. Specifically, students reported being more interested in school and having a greater sense of belonging when instructors used constructivism (use real-life examples, videos, pictures, guest speakers as teaching tools) teaching practices and could learn more about their own heritage and culture at school (racial socialization). Hence, research findings suggest a positive association between CRP strategies and academic outcomes as it relates to the promotion of cultural competence and teachers' constructivist practices. Researchers concluded that constructivist practices allowed students to become comfortable within their surroundings, thereby facilitating higher engagement and peer connection. Ultimately, this teaching practice facilitated intergroup relations and reduced prejudice within the classroom.

Finally, a quantitative study conducted in 2017 found a positive association between implementation of CRP strategies and proactive behavioral management (PBM) within the classroom resulted in increased student engagement and positive behavior (Larson et al., 2018). Participants consisted of a total of 274 teachers (86% female, 80% white, 47% middle school teachers) from 18 different schools located in the same school district. The district was located in both urban and suburban areas. Researchers employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze their findings. Research findings from this study provided evidence that CRP strategies increase student engagement and, when used in conjunction with PBM, can help to augment biases in discipline practices of minority students. Researchers analyzed the observed behaviors of students and teachers within 248 classrooms against several self-reporting surveys. Researchers wanted to explore the relationship between teachers implementing PBM and CRP strategies and their effects on student engagement and positive behavior.

In conclusion, research findings suggested a positive correlation between the implementation of CRP strategies and student outcomes (Byrd, 2016; Larson et al., 2018; Lopez, 2016). Specifically, research findings demonstrated an increase in academic performance (increased reading scores), sense of belonging, student engagement, and augmentation of biased discipline practices (Byrd, 2016; Lopez, 2016) when CRP strategies

were used. Hence, the research literature on the implementation of CRP strategies indicated a strong positive outcome for minority students. However, since only three studies within the literature review supported the implementation of CRP strategies, more research in this area is warranted.

### *3.1 Gap in Literature*

A gap in the research has been discovered on in-service teachers' perspectives of how CRP implementation can benefit high school teaching (Larson et al., 2018; Vescio, 2016). The research problem for this study is that in-service teachers in diverse classrooms may lack the tools and support necessary to employ CRP strategies successfully and effectively. Incorporating CRP's multicultural views is critical for developing a supportive, student-centered approach that represents minority students and provides a diverse variety of learning activities to provide successful and meaningful educational experiences (Hernandez & Shroyer, 2017).

The research review's primary methodology was qualitative case studies that aimed to broaden new ideas and understandings by the use of in-depth interviews (Lambeth & Smith, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Samuals, 2018). The researchers examined their study issues using in-depth interviews and questionnaires. However, like with many other studies in our evaluation of the literature, the researchers did not conduct an appropriate survey of relevant stakeholders at several levels. Specifically, they interviewed just one source, despite the fact that they collected data from many sources (in-depth interviews and surveys; teacher educators, administrators, students). Additionally, many research studies focused on in-service and pre-service educators rather than on the student population, limiting viewpoints on this study issue (Grant & Jones, 2016; Samuals, 2018). Finally, none of the research identified included the perspective of school administrators.

Several variables are thought to contribute to the academic achievement gap within the literature review. Using the CRP framework as a lens from which to view the variables highlighted within this review, it is evident that the implementation of CRP strategies and CRP could reduce the academic achievement gap and create equity within the classroom (Byrd, 2016). Further, current research on how to implement CRP strategies within the classroom is limited. Hence, the current literature review supported examining how pre-service training programs educate pre-service teachers in multicultural professional development and how those teachings are implemented within the classroom.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this qualitative study was to investigate how in-service teachers perceived their preparedness to teach using CRP strategies. According to Bonner et al. (2018), A CRP teaching style supports every student's value and achievement in a diverse school population. It has been established that CRP methods applied in various situations have a good effect on student engagement (Vescio, 2016). Researchers discovered that teachers who adopted CRP were more likely to predict favorable results for their students' development by focusing on the unique requirements of their varied classes. Future educators and researchers may benefit from the experiences of educators who serve different groups in order to build successful implementation techniques for CRP.

The conceptual framework for CRP served as the foundation for this qualitative study (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The aim of this interview study was to explore the perceptions of in-service high school teachers teaching a diverse population of students located in the United States. The research explored how in-service teachers perceived the impact that CRP has on their preparedness to offer culturally diverse teaching within their lesson delivery. The inquiry addressed the following question: How do in-service teachers perceive their preparedness to teach using CRP strategies? United States classrooms are filled with students who come from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, and it is crucial to understand how current education programs are preparing educators for this challenge (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Wells et al., 2016). Researchers Flinders and Thorton (2004) stated that "multicultural education has not yet become a central part of the curriculum regularly offered to all students; instead, educators have relegated it primarily to social studies, language arts, and the fine arts and have generally targeted instruction for students of color" (p. 2). Flinders and Thorton also noted that issues exist among diverse student populations, such as language and cultural differences, which can create anxieties within the school. These issues have "profound implications for developing instructional programs and practices at all levels of education that respond positively and constructively to diversity" (p. 1).

Through the lens of a CRP theoretical framework, the purpose of the qualitative research study was to explore how in-service teachers perceive their preparedness to teach using culturally responsive practices strategies and the impact of CRP in the classroom teaching strategies. If teachers are well-prepared to implement these strategies, then teachers could exhibit characteristics related to their competence to use CRP within classrooms based on their perceived preparedness (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Further, the study explored how CRP translates

into in-service teachers' practice within their classrooms. In other words, the researcher explored how teachers perceive their classroom instruction and the implementation of a CRP approach in lesson design and delivery.

Further, because the current research literature does not outline the specific steps needed to evoke a CRP model, findings from this study can help highlight the teacher's perceptions of preparedness when it comes to using a CRP approach. Finally, in-service teachers' perceptions on how to implement what they have learned from their multicultural in-service courses were explored, thereby illustrating teachers' perspectives of how they implement CRP in the classroom. Participants shared feedback on their time as a pre-service teacher that was relevant to how they view CRP or how it should be emphasized more with pre-service coursework.

## 5. Research Question

How do in-service teachers perceive their preparedness to teach using CRT strategies?

### 5.1 Methods

#### 5.1.1 Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2017) stressed that the goal of qualitative inquiry in social environments was to find common themes in the responses of the study participants. The researcher's intent will be to assess and analyze the responses from the participants through their shared feedback and experiences. In qualitative research, Patton (2015) described the research process as an inquiry into the nature of a problem. A need to explore experiences is based on an interpretive perspective (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Some themes cannot be measured statistically; thus, qualitative researchers are more interested in learning about how individuals understand and experience their world.

#### 5.1.2 Research Population and Sampling

##### Target Population

A target population represents the study's population to which findings can be generalized. In qualitative research, the target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The target population was in-service educators teaching at a high school in a diverse community (i.e., Title 1 schools). Many of the teacher participants hold special certifications (e.g., special education, gifted education), master's degrees, or other specializations. Educator participants were not limited to core subjects, and educators represented many subjects taught in high school, including English, American History, Music, Mathematics, English as a Second Language, Spanish Language, Western Civilization, Civics and Government, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Table 1. Demographics of educator participants

	Total Count	Percentage
Female Teachers	17	85%
Male Teachers	3	15%

Table 2. Educator teaching experience

Teaching Experience (in years)	Percentage
1–10	29.41%
10–20	64.70%
20–30	23.52%

Teachers varied in experience from recently hired to well-seasoned professionals with many years of classroom teaching experience, including 29.41% of participants with 1–10 years of teaching experience, 64.70% of participants with 10–20 years of teaching experience, and 23.52% of participants with 20–30 years of teaching experience.

##### Sampling Method

Working in conjunction with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and school administration, the researcher used established professional educator social media groups, in which the researcher could recruit participants by posting a request for participants along with the research study purpose, specifics, and qualifications. Creswell (2014) maintained that purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research so the researcher can select individuals to study based on an understanding of the research problem and the central focus of the study.



Purposeful sampling is often used in case study research for the identification and selection of participants that have relevant experiences to the aspect of interest (Palinkas et al., 2016). For this study, the researcher identified study participants from the target population that met the selected criteria. The researcher aimed to have a teacher sample that was reflective of diverse student populations and covered a wide span of teaching experience.

Since the research study aimed to identify the perceptions of in-service teachers, convenient purposive sampling was employed to procure participants for the current research study (Etikan et al., 2016). Specifically, in-service teachers in secondary education from a high school located in diverse locations were recruited for participation. Furthermore, in-service high school teachers who participated in multicultural teacher training or workshops emphasizing CRP were also recruited. This study included educators who have had previous CRP exposure and training, as these educators understand what CRP is and how utilizing CRP is beneficial to students. The aim of the sample was to have a teacher ratio reflective of the school demographics and covers a wide span of teaching experience.

### Sample

Although at least 30 potential participants were willing to contribute to this study, since the researcher reached data saturation on the 20th interview, the sample only included 20 in-service teacher participants. The academic background of the participants included bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in education. Participants of this study taught at different school districts throughout the United States: New Jersey, New York, Washington State, South Carolina, Illinois, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, including large and small student classroom populations. The majority of the participants in this sample were Caucasian women. Teachers in traditional public schools are predominantly Caucasian, and educators in charter schools are more diverse than their counterparts (Taie & Goldring, 2020). In the United States, the teaching profession is still predominantly Caucasian women. The National Teacher and Principal Survey, conducted by the United States Department of Education, collected data on schools, administrators, and teachers and found disparities among teachers working in traditional public-school settings, charter school environments, and private schools (Taie & Goldring, 2020). According to the results of the 2017–2018 survey, 79.3% of public-school teachers are Caucasian, with 9.3% being Hispanic. In 2011–2012, approximately 82% of public-school teachers were Caucasian, with 7.8% of Hispanic teachers making up the rest (Taie & Goldring, 2020). These studies indicate that the majority of teachers in public schools are Caucasian. The sample in this study is representative since most participants are Caucasian women. Participants taught various students from diverse backgrounds, including undocumented students from different regions such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. As reported by the teacher participants, students represented diverse socio-economic backgrounds, lifestyles, and special needs, including homeless students, LGBTQ+ students, all-White student classrooms, Navajo nation students, and students with physical and mental disabilities.

#### 5.1.3 Instrumentation

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher provided consent forms and instructions about confidentiality to participants. Additionally, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that provided background information to the researcher. Background information is often gathered in qualitative research in order to have a deeper understanding of the participants (Smith & Smith, 2018). Interviews enable the researcher to get a better grasp of the participants' perspectives on the issue under investigation. The interview questions were a set of open-ended questions found in Appendix A. The interview consisted of questions that helped the researcher understand how in-service teachers perceived CRP incorporation into their lessons.

#### 5.1.4 Triangulation

Different methods of data collection provided the researcher with various information that can be triangulated. Triangulation of data improves the trustworthiness of a qualitative study as it includes multiple sources of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Triangulation can help researchers form understanding through the comparison of different sourced information that concerns the same topic of an event (Fusch et al., 2018). For this study, the data collected included information from the questionnaire, participant interviews, and notes taken by the researcher throughout the interview process. These three forms of data were compared during the data analysis to help the researcher gain a better understanding of the nature of the problem (Lambeth & Smith, 2016). Triangulation of the data from the questionnaire, interviews, and notes helped identify viewpoints that may not have been easily identified from one data source. Triangulation will help provide a broader and deeper perspective (Perone & Tucker, 2003) of how in-service teachers perceive their preparedness to teach using CRP strategies.

## 5.2 Data Collection

Before the research began, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided formal approval, and group administrators permitted access to the identified professional educator social media organizations. After posting the recruitment letter requesting teacher participation, 30 in-service teacher participants responded, and the interviews were scheduled. The researcher reached data saturation after the four last interviews, and there was no new data collected; therefore, twenty in-service teachers were interviewed, made up of 17 female teachers and three male teachers. The interviews were conducted within a month of the first quarter of 2020 pre-COVID19. These organizations consisted of groups that have been established just for educators, such as the New Jersey Teacher Network—Social and Professional Group, New Jersey Association of Black Educators, Teachers of New York City, Educators Network, and New Jersey Teachers and Educators are all professionally-based social media groups that have established members with discussions that are all focused on education. Recruitment was posted on the social media page, and potential participants that contacted the researcher privately were provided with a letter of consent and confidentiality that provided information on the purpose of the study and measures in place to protect the participants. A consent form was also provided to each participant to sign before any information was exchanged (Klenke, 2016). The data collecting process included a questionnaire, interviewing participants, recording the interviews, taking notes during the interviews, obtaining interview transcripts, and arranging all of the data to assist the researcher in acquiring relevant and useful information.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions allowing respondents to express themselves in their own words, while the multiple-choice questions were designed to collect information on participants' backgrounds. The first part of multiple-choice questionnaires with answers to select from and was administered to participants to gather background information (see Appendix A). Gathering background data before the interviewing started allowed the researcher to get a feel of the participants' experience. The questions included demographic information such as ethnicity, teaching experience, and teaching specialties. Codó et al. (2008) noted how useful questionnaires are for gathering biographical information in a user-friendly manner.

Interviewing educators provided insight into incorporating CRP into lesson design and delivery and how the lessons were perceived to be received by students. Participants participated in one interview session, which lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Interview questions were administered using open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express themselves in their own words.

Throughout the interviews, notes were taken by the researcher to later compare to the feedback from the participants. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) noted that throughout an interview, field notes taken by the researcher provide rich details to the study. Field notes taken during an interview allow the researcher to write down not only what they hear but also what they see. Visual cues can be important when conducting research. However, before and after COVID19, phone interviews were an option for interviewing instead of interacting face-to-face. There was no other method to conduct these interviews since all schools in the country were closed and students attended school online. It is important to acknowledge that phone interviews have a number of disadvantages, including the absence of nonverbal and visual cues. This research found that participants were more comfortable and able to provide sensitive information about their school districts' lack of resources and the lack of support from school administration in giving teachers the tools they need to teach.

## 5.3 Data Analysis

For this qualitative data analysis, the researcher synthesized the information collected from the review of the participant interviews (Taylor et al., 2015). As the researcher was synthesizing the data from the documents, the identification of themes or patterns was documented. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested steps for qualitative researchers to follow for data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six steps for data collection and analysis: (a) becoming familiar with the data that was collected, (b) coding, (c) identifying themes, (d) review of themes, (e) final themes defined by the researcher, and (f) results presented in a final report.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Research Findings

Teachers' perspectives about (a) Theme #1: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is, and (b) Theme #2: Supporting Teachers: The School and District's Help. The phone interviews were classified around these themes, which are analyzed in-depth below to include participants' responses that were used to collect additional information for each theme. The question focused on how in-service teachers perceive their preparedness to teach using CRP strategies. The following themes included (a) Teachers' Perspectives about What is Culturally Relevant Teaching and (b) Supporting Teachers: The School and District's Help address this question. The data

collected and analyzed from the phone interviews revealed three themes, as it is deployed in the Table 3.

Table 3. Themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis

Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme #1: Teachers' Perspectives about What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' ideas about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)</li> <li>• Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and the classroom environment</li> </ul>
Theme #2: Supporting Teachers: The School and District's Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and district support on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and social community</li> <li>• Resources and teachers' training to understand Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)</li> <li>• Support to create relationships with the students</li> </ul>
Theme #3: The Classroom Work Under Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class environment under a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) approach</li> <li>• Culturally relevant materials</li> <li>• Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Projects</li> <li>• Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) strategies</li> <li>• Teacher-student relationships and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)</li> </ul>

### Theme 1. Teachers' Perspectives about What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

This theme discusses the ideas and points of view that teachers have about what it means to educate following the CRP framework. Two sub-themes were used to help introduce and develop this theme. The sub-theme *Ideas about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)* refers to the opinions, thoughts, beliefs, points of view, and perceptions that the participants have about what CRP is and why it is relevant to educate students considering students' cultural differences in the classroom.

According to the perspectives of the participants, the researcher observed that the definition in-service teachers have about CRP is not the same; they do not share a common definition or were unable to offer a concrete definition of the CRP approach. Conversely, it seems that every participant has her/his own way of defining and perceiving CRP. However, all of the participants agreed that this approach is related to their students' cultural backgrounds. P. 15 stated, "I would describe culturally relevant teaching as teaching that recognizes the different cultures of the students in the classroom, including home environment, backgrounds and really adapting lessons or instruction to meet the needs based on their backgrounds and environments." Nonetheless, it is not enough to recognize that minority student groups come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but that in order to implement CRP in the classroom, it requires educators to have a familiarity and understanding of different cultures. P. 3 stated, "My ELL students are from Iran, various South American and Latin American countries, and let's see, I have two from Israel, so all over the world. And I need to meet them where they are and give them a choice whenever possible in choosing topics to which they can relate." In other words, educators must develop a relationship with each student from a perspective of respect and mutual consideration.

Although the concept of CRP is not widely embraced by all of the participants, it is important to note that the majority of participants identified CRP with specific instructional activities. Participants of this study spoke in detail about their classroom practices and their ways of integrating the diverse experiences of students, mainly developing values such as equality, sensitivity, self-identification, and engagement with the learning process. Whether the participant was teaching English or history, the goal is to include the cultural influences in the classroom in the pedagogical strategies. In respect, P. 18 stated, "I'm a history teacher, history and social studies. I center my focus when it comes to culturally relevant teaching on the stories of all people... I call it getting away from the rich white man story." A benefit of teaching according to the CRP model is the students' connection with the curriculum, which helps to strengthen their focus and engagement in the classroom activities and in their learning processes. For instance, P. 12 stated, "In my concept, it is being aware of who my students are and who my community is and trying to weave that into lessons and investigations so that students are able to see themselves as often as possible." In the context, P. 9 reported, "I describe culturally relevant teaching as teaching that connects with interests of students and students' cultural background... I'm an English teacher, and I tend to identify it by looking at student engagement in my own classroom." According to this in-service teacher participant, student engagement is a factor that indicates connections between activity, student, and classroom material. Teachers' perceptions about CRP appear to be directly related to their classroom application of pedagogical practices, books, and projects.

According to the respondents, all of the pedagogical materials are focused on showing the richness of the diverse cultures in the classroom, getting students acclimatized to these differences, and developing students' identities. For example, P. 1 stated, "I always try to make sure that I include as many different groups as I can. I teach

English and Social Studies. And so throughout, especially in my History classes, whenever I bring in supplementary material, I try to incorporate groups that are less represented in the actual books, as well as making a focus on students in my classroom.” It is not enough for in-service teachers to be conscious of the cultural backgrounds of their students, as it is important to prepare teaching and learning materials that encourage students to connect with the subject matter.

Equality is another element that participants identified as they perceive educational differences among students who come from economically and socially deprived backgrounds on their school grounds. P. 13 commented in this regard, “we’re focusing on equality ... it is just making sure that the races, the genders, the ethnicities, everything that is sitting in my class, that the texts that I’m using the students can see themselves in any of the books that we’re reading, or any texts that I’m using in the classroom.” Alongside equality, in-service teachers insist on developing awareness of others who are different and creating an atmosphere that nurtures empathy towards those who are different in many ways. Students who are sensitive to classroom inequalities were also listed as part of the way teachers perceive CRP in their classrooms. To support this idea, it is important to highlight a statement by P. 15, “And being sensitive to that and helping them to understand that each other, that all of them, come from different backgrounds and to be sensitive to each other’s different behaviors and responses to one another.”

The above examples demonstrate that in-service teachers have a clear understanding of the CRP practices and strategies, which can be applied to many pedagogical activities. Furthermore, participants of this study demonstrated that they have the willingness to develop their ‘culturally relevant teaching’ in mutual understanding with the students. From the teachers’ perspective, CRP implies the development of a particular work that exposes in-service teachers to acquire additional knowledge about different cultures. CRP is the mode used to implement pedagogical strategies related to the identity of the students in the classrooms.

The second sub-theme is titled *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and the Classroom Environment*. This code refers to the participants’ words regarding the impact of culturally relevant teaching in the inclusive classroom environment, i.e., the effect of considering such types of teaching activities and their influence on the students and their performances. Teachers agree to say that working under the CRP approach, they promote a classroom community environment, where the more critical factor is the comfort of the students. P. 8 stated, “For the classroom environment, I think it’s definitely a benefit; it makes the students feel more comfortable, feel like they have a voice, that their thoughts and ideas are allowed to be in the classroom.” Another teacher completes the last quotation by saying, “I try to make my classroom a safe and comfortable environment where everybody feels included and respected no matter what the person’s background is” (p. 1). The whole idea is to create a classroom community highlighting its multicultural nature.

In this regard, students must feel that they belong to a community where it is possible to take full advantage of the benefits offered by this learning atmosphere. P. 9 pointed out, “the class environment is here for students to learn... everything within the room I want to be accessible to students. So that means that instead of there being like you can’t touch certain things in the room, I try to have a lot of materials out for students to be able to access when they need things.” In other words, it is important to integrate students to a multicultural classroom environment as part of a whole community, stimulates the students’ awareness about the differences, “What I think culturally relevant teaching does for all students in the classroom is create greater awareness of cultures and ethnicities that people aren’t exposed to on a regular basis (p. 18). Regardless of the cultural differences involved, the CRP encourages the acceptance of other variations, like differences in gender, sexual inclination, or religion. These are notions that are gradually being incorporated into the classroom environment, “I’m uber aware of that right now and trying to get that inclusivity, and the equality and the fair representation in our classrooms... in my class it’s just try being that perfect book to go with that perfect child, whether it be a transgender child, whether it be an Asian child, trying to find those books, and those texts where they can see themselves in the stories” (p. 13).

This theme reveals the theoretical understanding that in-service teachers gain when using CRP to instruct in the classroom. This conceptual perception drives in-service teachers to be diligent in implementing relevant teaching strategies that take into account students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There are advantages related to student identity and values that can be taught through the integration of CRP practices and strategies in the classroom. In this study, teachers have acknowledged the development of principles regarding self-identification, differential sensitivity, and equality. Finally, in-service teachers have a clear perspective on CRP that encourages them to include classroom practices in a meaningful way and, as a result, teaches students’ focus and interest in the classroom lesson because they begin to feel connected and identified through these pedagogical practices.

## Theme 2. Supporting Teachers: The School and District's Help

This theme discusses the ideas and points of view that teachers have about the help and support they receive to understand and develop teachings following the CRP framework. Several sub-themes will help to develop the theme. The first sub-theme that emerged was the *School and District Support on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Social Community*. It denotes the different training that these teachers have received from the district and the school to understand the CRP approach. In this context, it is noted discrepancies between the participants' responses. Two aspects seem to emerge from the data: on the one hand, some interviewees have received training and developed resources and understanding on how to insert the CRP into the classroom' activities. However, on the other hand, the majority of the teachers interviewed have signaled the reduced support they have received. In the first aspect, some participants commented about the district's efforts made to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge on CRP.

In some cases, the training came under the notion of professional learning, "Our particular district, we've had training in CRP. It's not necessarily been under that name sometimes. Sometimes it's from different angles, but it's all under, some of it's under that vein" (p. 19). The professional development or professional learning has developed discussions about real situations that could happen in the classroom and concern the CRP, "We have discussions. We have articles. We plan professional development that is realistic. We have the kids tell us things that teachers have done or said that... or situations kids found themselves in that they wish teachers had handled differently. We present those scenarios in professional development studying. I don't know if that helps" (p. 12).

Another example was explained by P. 17, "the training themselves... usually consisted of workshop models... I remember vividly one of the activities, we're really trying to identify the microaggressions that as teachers might take part in the classroom. So it may be exposing that talking about a student who might have language that is a little bit more sophisticated and really identifying that as being that you're articulate and what that means for a student of color that we normally say that a student who is not of color when we identify them speaking." In addition, it is noticed that the professional learning was provided to the teachers using diverse channels, like the direct training sessions, speakers, and in some cases, online training sessions, "We've had some online training, as well as we're given the freedom to do some professional development individually. So, we have some choice in that" (p. 19). The particular help of other agents like editorials was also signaled, "they provide professional development days. We just had someone come in from, I think it was McGraw-Hill publishers giving a lecture on equality in our classrooms, and through teaching" (p. 13).

Participants also highlighted the reduced support or unexpected support that other teachers reported. Indeed, in some cases, they do not receive such support, and many of them rely on their own resources, research about CRP, and readings, "I don't know. I guess just my own reading and interaction with other teachers, like that County Teachers of the Year page that we met on" (p. 12). Other participants mentioned the support they receive from other colleagues at the school, "Our school district doesn't necessarily do a good job with that. Most of it is my own trying to discuss this and learn about it. I'm actually in the middle of national board certification right now. So, part of that national board discussion is making my classroom culturally relevant because I teach in that early college environment" (p. 2). Another participant, P. 7 shared her point of view about training. In her opinion, the district had other priorities. She said, "We had, how do they call it? PDs or culturally responsiveness, but still it's very general. And I don't think I had all the support that I should. It's like school districts and administrators, that are thinking in other things, like standardized tests" (p. 7). The last statement comes from P8, who also pointed out the lack of real support to understand the CRP framework and how to implement this approach in the classroom, "I would say my County hasn't done a great job of it once. They always push ... teach culturally relevant things, teach things that relate to your students, teach diverse texts, and they don't really give us a lot of tools to help us do that. We've been to some trainings, but they haven't been super useful. So, a lot of what I've learned about it has come from my own research and not from something that's happened at the County level" (p. 8).

Interestingly, some participants mentioned the help and encouragement they received from the school either through a central office or through the talks of qualified people on CRP, "other than professional development sessions, which there haven't been a lot on that topic... We have people we can use as resources at the central office as well as in the schools, but there hasn't been a lot of specific" (p. 15). Other noteworthy incident raises from the data analysis, like those comments about the participation of students as direct persons concerned to explain their teachers some culturally related issues, "We had a faculty meeting last year where students from the culture club after school came and spoke to us about how they feel in the school, how a lot of them feel isolated. It's not that they don't feel supported, it's just that they feel that there's not a lot of representation of different cultures, and it was eye-opening for me" (p. 16).

Turning the attention to the resources and materials, the next sub-theme named resources and teachers' training to understand CRP. It was noted that teachers had the opportunity to be in contact with particular attractive documents, like those mentioned by P5 coming from the district, "I know that again, our new supervisor with cultural proficiency has specifically reached out and she recently offered...Jostens, which...produce all these videos that have to do with cultural awareness and appreciating others and caring for others. At the district level, we have been given those kinds of materials and support to fit into our curriculum this year. Then the school improvement team has also worked on lessons related to kindness and appreciation of others for this school year" (p. 5).

Another participant mentioned the help she received through professional development, "They're doing professional development and during our plan periods, and they call it cultural sensitivity and things like that. Like we should accept papers that are written in slang because that's the way that they talk. And so that should be their voice, and we shouldn't penalize them for that because we don't understand. Things like that are happening" (p. 11). In the case of other participants, their personal interest leads them to read material related to CRP, "the resources that I think have helped me is reading novels, where the main characters live in different environments, come from different environments... most of the books that I have read have been suggested by people from our central office" (p. 15). Also, P. 12 signaled, "I don't know. I guess just my own reading and interaction with other teachers, like that County Teachers of the Year page that we met on" (p. 12). Participant P10 coincided with the above-mentioned quotations. She added, "No. I just read articles for about a week, I read a weekly ASCD" (p. 10). It should be noted that in the scope of this research, the researcher cannot offer a plausible explanation for the difference observed. More in-depth studies must be done to establish the real reasons for this lack of support.

The next sub-theme presents the *Support to Create Relationships with the Students*. It refers to the support that teachers have received to build healthy relationships with their students. In this regard, it is evident that some schools have developed mechanisms to supervise the relationship among teachers and students, "They [the school administration] constantly want us to build relationships with our students. Actually, administration recently send [*sic*] out a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with every student in the school and they wanted us to put a check next to the student's name if we had a connection somehow to the student because they want to reach out to the students who we don't have any adult influences at this school" (p. 16).

Another system to help and support the construction of relationships among students and teachers is the following, "We have a great system at my school of colleagues who really, we work well together. So, our student sees four of us a day, and as a team, we often talk about students and how we can better connect with them or get to know them. And if one of us isn't connecting to them, we find another adult in the building they connect to, whether it's a guidance counselor, or coach or someone. We work really hard to work as a team to find out how we can best support the student and talk to the student themselves to see how they can ... how they best learn" (p. 8). For some schools, the system/mechanisms developed are helpful in the sense of building those relationships. For instance, P. 1 explains how important the fact is to construct relationships with all the students, "In our school, our principal at the very beginning of the year, as really the first two weeks of school should be relationship and community building activities. At our school, that is very at the forefront of our philosophy, is having relationships with all students" (p. 1). However, other participants have mentioned a discrete and less elaborated school's support to build the relationships with her students. One of them pointed out, "No, I really can't. We had some professional development, and I remember one time seeing the video that helps understand how to deescalate... I vaguely remember a video of a student who didn't want to take his hood off, and he was, came in the class, with an attitude and how the teacher was very gentle and gave the student some space and eventually the student took his hood off. I thought that was helpful" (p. 10). Also, another teacher mentioned the reduced support she received, "I haven't. The only thing is within the classroom. You know, I'm supportive more with my students than anyone who is an administrator in that district" (p. 11). A final quotation from P. 6, leaves us thinking about the reasons for this discrepancy regarding the teachers-student relationships, "No, I build my own relationships. I've had seven different principals, so it's really hard for me to say like so-and-so helped me do this or so-and-so helped me do this" (p. 6).

## 7. Discussion/Conclusions/Recommendations

The academic achievement gap between whites and ethnic minorities, low-income groups, and English language learners persists and is pervasive (Hachfeld et al., 2015; McFarland et al., 2018; Musu-Gillete et al., 2016). A variety of school-based issues, such as conventional school structures that promote inequality, are to blame for this achievement gap. In addition, biased pre-service and teacher educators' perceptions on diversity and multicultural professional development and education, and teacher-student racial incongruence

(Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Murdock & Hamel, 2016; Pezzetti, 2017). CRP strategies taught through pre-service multicultural professional development are proposed to bridge this academic achievement gap (Lopez, 2016).

### *7.1 Limitations*

Limitations are inevitable in any study, regardless of design and method. This study had several limitations, including participant availability and researcher time constraints. This study aimed to interview several in-service educators, so availability was a limitation as in-service teachers have a busy classroom schedule, scheduled holidays, and intersessions, and they have limited time during the day to participate in the study. Because this research was authorized before COVID-19, recruiting in-service teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic was very challenging, attributed to school closures and the constant changes on a weekly basis. In addition, there was the possibility that in-service teachers may not have had CRP training in college. Thus, in-service teachers may lack professional knowledge and the tools required to implement CRP in their classrooms. This could limit in-service teacher participation due to the lack of understanding of the subject. Small sample size was also a limitation; as such, the findings are generalizable to or representative of all in-service teachers (Taylor et al., 2015). In addition, as the interviews progressed, the researcher took notes in order to compare them to the comments received from the participants afterward. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) stated that during an interview, field notes collected by the researcher are very valuable since they give rich information for further investigation and enable the researcher to record not just what they hear but also what they see. When conducting research, it might be helpful to have visual clues. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted the researcher's exposure to visual cues, the interviews for this study were performed over the phone.

### *7.2 Future Research*

Therefore, future research on how in-service teacher programs educate aspiring teachers on implementing CRP strategies within a diverse classroom is warranted. Several variables are thought to contribute to the academic achievement gap within the literature review. Using the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy framework as a lens from which to view the variables highlighted within this review, it is evident that implementation of CRP strategies and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy could be the solution to reducing the academic achievement gap and creating equity within the classroom (Byrd, 2016). However, current research findings on the effectiveness of multicultural professional development programs in preparing pre-service teachers fall short of training confident teachers able to instruct an ethnically diverse classroom (Lambeth & Smith, 2016). To eliminate the lack of awareness of in-service teachers, the literature review revealed that the root of the problem emerges from inadequate teaching preparation programs. Therefore, those programs need to prepare future teachers in implementing CRP that way, and they are prepared to teach multicultural classrooms once they become full-time teachers.

Further, current research on how to implement CRP strategies within the classroom is limited. Hence, the current literature review warranted a study examining how pre-service training programs educate pre-service teachers in multicultural professional development and how those teachings are implemented within the classroom. Unfortunately, the literature review revealed that current pre-service teachers' multicultural professional development programs are ineffective in producing teachers that are confident in their abilities to teach within a diverse classroom (Lambeth & Smith, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016). Further, although research findings purport positive student outcomes associated with the implementation of CRP strategies, research is limited. In addition, future research on student outcomes as a result of the implementation of CRP strategies should be explored. Future research is essential since these results from this study indicate the current perspectives of a group of teachers; however, more in-depth studies must be done to explain, for instance, the reasons why some schools are more supportive than others regarding the teacher-student relationships and the teachers' support to teach under the CRP approach.

### *7.3 Implications*

This research has ramifications for existing practices, including the addition of resources in special education classrooms and the modification of educators' instructional approaches in areas of high diversity. The findings of this research indicated that educators' perspectives differed according to their knowledge of CRP and the assistance they got from their districts. Participants who have worked in schools that supported CRP were aware of the support and connections required while working with different student groups. While the majority of participants were aware of CRP, many indicated a need for assistance and training in order to apply CRP practice effectively. School administrators should consider asking for additional support, training, and resources to

facilitate CRP implementation in diverse schools.

#### 7.4 Policy

Many participants recognized the importance of policies and procedures in securing support for CRP implementation. This will guarantee that students from a variety of ethnicities, religions, and lifestyles feel included and welcomed. Federal and state policies continue to evolve in support of student achievement, and more research on the advantages of CRP may assist policymakers in appreciating the need to support district and statewide implementation of policy.

#### 7.5 Theory

The findings of this research indicated that educators appreciate the use of CRP with students from diverse backgrounds. CRP served as the conceptual foundation for this study. Ladson-Billings (1994) defined CRP as learning that empowers students and challenges them socially, emotionally, and politically. The outcomes of this research support the three main pillars of CRP. Academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness are the three components. The majority of participants noted how CRP increases student engagement, their sense of belonging to the learning community, and their sense of connection.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

The following are guided questions that were used in individual interviews.

Introduction and Demographic Information:

What is your gender?

What is your age range?

21–29

30–39

40–49

50–59

60–69

69 plus

How many years have you been teaching?

What is your ethnicity?

Interview Question:

How would you describe and identify with culturally relevant teaching?

How do you perceive culturally relevant teaching in relation to your classroom environment and the local community your school serves?

How has the school or district prepared you with resources that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful to all students?

Describe how your district or school has supported or influenced your preparation for teaching the diverse cultures of students in your classroom.

Describe ways in which you have been supported in developing relationships with your students?

Describe resources and training that have helped you understand and utilize culturally relevant teaching.

What lessons, projects, or special events have you helped plan that demonstrate culturally relevant teaching?

What practices or strategies do you use to implement culturally relevant teaching as appropriate to the developmental stage of the students in your classroom?

Describe how you create an environment to encourage the success of every child.

How has culturally relevant teaching influenced how you develop relationships with your students?

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