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A Case Study Examining How Experienced Teachers Adopt Culturally Responsive Instruction through Participating in a Collaborative Inquiry Team

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Lara D. White, Ed.D.

University of Connecticut, 2017

Abstract

This participatory action research case study examines how experienced teachers build their understanding and practice of culturally responsive instruction through participating in a collaborative inquiry team (CIT). The nation's public schools enroll an increasing diverse student population. Culturally responsive instruction (CRI) has shown promise as a mean to raise student achievement, especially student populations from marginalized groups and cultures. This study examines whether and how participating in a CIT can support in-service teachers in developing their understanding and practice of CRI. Research questions were designed to identify the tools, resources, and processes of a collaborative community of educators that can shape teachers' receptiveness, understanding, and practice of CRI as well as, how teachers' racial identities shape their participation in the group and effectiveness of CRI. The study employs a participatory action research methodology and draws on interviews with individual participating teachers and field notes and transcripts of nine CIT group sessions.

I find that a CIT can create a safe space for teachers to authentically reflect on their practices and learn from one another. This can lead teachers to unpack their own cultural biases and develop critical consciousness. I also found that cultural proficiency is a prerequisite to being

Lara D. White, Ed.D., University of Connecticut, 2017

able to engage in this work. These findings have implications for developing effective peer-based professional development for culturally responsive instruction

A Case Study Examining How Experienced Teachers Adopt Culturally Responsive Instruction
through Participating in a Collaborative Inquiry Team

Lara Denice White

B.A., Columbia University, 2001

M. Ed., University of Vermont, 2007

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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at the

University of Connecticut

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2017

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Education Dissertation

A Case Study Examining How Experienced Teachers Adopt Culturally Responsive Instruction
through Participating in a Collaborative Inquiry Team

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A Case Study Examining How Experienced Teachers Adopt Culturally Responsive Instruction
through Participating in a Collaborative Inquiry Team

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

According to the National Center for Education statistics, by 2024, students of color are estimated to represent 55% of all students enrolled in US public schools (NCES, 2015). Only 17% of public school teachers, however, are teachers of color (SASS, 2012), a number that is not likely to change dramatically in the near future; 72% of high school graduates who took the ACT said they planned on pursuing a degree in education were white, even though white students represented only 56% of all tested students (Green, 2015). This marks a remarkable demographic gap between teachers and students that is taking place in our public schools, one that practicing teachers have longed noticed. This is not a recent trend, as Terrell and Mark (2000, p. 150) note:

Current and future teachers in the United States are and will be majority White, monolingual, and female: the demographic profile of students indicates that they are and increasingly will be children of color and second-language learners. This cultural and linguistic mismatch between teachers and students is a critical issue for teacher educators. This mismatch dramatically affects future teachers and their students.

This cultural mismatch between students and their teachers has serious consequences. In an article in *Education Week* (Maxwell, 2014), one New York City teacher surmised, “this disconnect, creates major cultural divides between students and their teachers that are difficult to bridge and that contributes to the difficulties students from disadvantaged communities have finding more success in school and beyond.” This teacher added, “People are too often on this colorblind kick that is really detrimental,” he said. “Kids respond better and connect better to

school and their education when the teacher in front of them responds to whom they are, and where they come from" (Maxwell, 2014).

The national trend is also reflected in Connecticut's educational landscape. For the 2013-2014 academic year, the Connecticut State Department of Education reported that 58.5% of the students enrolled in state K-12 public schools were white and 41.5% were students of color (CSDE, 2014). In contrast, 91.7% of certified teachers were white, while 8.3% were teachers of color. In addition, in 2010, *Education Weekly* listed Connecticut as having the largest racial and language achievement gaps in the nation (Gewertz & Robelen, 2010).

While this cultural divide is growing, federal educational policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Race to The Top (RTT) have placed increasing pressures on teachers to improve student achievement. Nationwide, teachers are under pressure to deliver higher achievement scores by implementing rigorous standards. These pressures are greatest in "failing" schools that currently serve large percentages of students of color and those living in poverty. Given demographic trends, all teachers will face increasing pressures to raise achievement among an increasingly diverse student body.

Purpose of the Study

I studied efforts undertaken by teachers in one suburban school district located outside of Hartford, Connecticut. The Vineyard Vines Public School district (pseudonym) is trying to find ways to improve the achievement of its increasingly diverse student body. Like other districts in the state and the nation, Vineyard Vines has seen significant demographic changes among the students it serves. Since the early 1970s, enrollment by students of color has increased from 2% to 38.6% of the student population (Thomas, 2014). Vineyard Vines thus faces a growing cultural mismatch between students and teachers. At the same time, the district's teaching force

consists of 92% white teachers and 8% teachers of color (Human Resources Database, 2015). This cultural mismatch is reflected in a district achievement gap between white students and students of color.

In response to these trends, the teachers in this study, of which I am one, co-constructed a professional learning community focused on developing their knowledge and skills enacting Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI). CRI is a pedagogical approach aimed specifically at closing the cultural mismatch between teachers and students and the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers. CRI considers learners' cultural values, knowledge, and ways of learning as resources to empower students to succeed in school and beyond. CRI has been shown to have a positive influence on student achievement. While CRI has the potential to help teachers bridge the cultural mismatch between themselves and their students while addressing pressures to raise a student achievement, enacting CRI effectively requires that teachers are culturally competent and have the "ability to recognize differences among students and families, respond to those differences positively, and to interact with others in a range of sociocultural environments" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003, p.5).

The Vineyard Vines teachers' efforts to build their knowledge of and skill enacting CRI is supported by the district administration. One of the professional development initiatives the district implemented in 2014 was to support teacher-created and -directed Collaborative Inquiry Teams or CITs. Since 2014, the district has dedicated one professional development slot each month to the CITs and has provided a Google site online space for educators to form, collaborate, and share their research and findings. According to the district's website, "Collaborative Inquiry creates opportunities for self-directed professional learning in support of individual professional learning objectives" (VVP Schools, 2015). The district's CIT initiative

allows teachers to self-select into teams, create shared objectives and collaborate with other educators in schools across the district.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does participation in the Culturally Responsive Instruction CIT support changes in teachers' understanding and practice of CRI?
2. What kind of changes in their understanding and practice of Culturally Responsive Instruction do the teachers make?
3. How do the teachers' racial identities shape both?

I address these questions by drawing on both the Communities of Practice (COP) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) theoretical frameworks. The former highlights the processes and practices through which teachers develop the knowledge and skills to enact CRI as they work together in their collaborative inquiry group (Wenger, 1998). The latter, illuminates how race shapes these processes. I also use the methods of Participatory Action Research (PAR). According to Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009), PAR affirms the belief that ordinary teachers can understand and transform their own practices through research, education, and action. PAR is particularly relevant to studying teacher collaboratives, like the CIT in this study. Like PAR, the CIT approach directly challenges conventional hierarchical structures of power between administrators and teachers and creates opportunities for teachers to develop innovative and effective solutions to the problems facing their schools and communities.

In the following sections, I first review the literature on COP and CRT to develop the conceptual framework for this study. I then present my research methods, design, and findings. I conclude by describing the study's potential contribution to both practice and research on teachers' professional development as it relates to culturally responsive teaching.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

My literature review examined publications and articles that focused on Culturally Responsive Instruction, Professional Learning Communities, and the theoretical frameworks of Communities of Practice and Critical Race Theory. There has been a significant body of research on learning communities as an approach for teachers' professional development and instructional change (Stoll, 2006). There is also a large body of literature on culturally responsive instruction, but it primarily focuses on pre-service teachers. There is scant literature that brings these bodies of research together to examine how professional learning communities can serve as vehicle for in-service teachers developing a culturally responsive practice.

Culturally Responsive Instruction

There is an established and ever-growing body of literature on Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI). I use the term CRI to identify an approach to teaching that fundamentally highlights and respects the relationship between culture, teaching and learning. This approach has been developed through work on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), cultural-based education (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010), multicultural education and equity pedagogy. This study drew largely upon the culturally relevant pedagogy work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). I also drew upon Ladson-Billings literature in my work with the participating CIT teachers. Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." (p.17). She posits that culturally relevant teaching rests on three propositions: "a) students must experience academic success; b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and c) students must develop a critical consciousness

through which they can challenge the status quo of the social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).”

Recently, Paris (2012) has extended culturally relevant pedagogy with the notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy extends culturally relevant pedagogy to incorporate students’ multiple identities and to acknowledge the salience of contemporary youth culture to students’ lives and learning. The teachers in this study similarly extend culturally relevant pedagogy to consider students’ multiple identities, which one participant explores through her interest in intersectionality. Ladson-Billings (2014) herself refers to culturally sustaining pedagogy as “culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0.” Though I acknowledge these various relatives and extension of culturally relevant pedagogy, I continue to use the term culturally relevant instruction as it is the term that we used to form and enact the CIT that I study here.

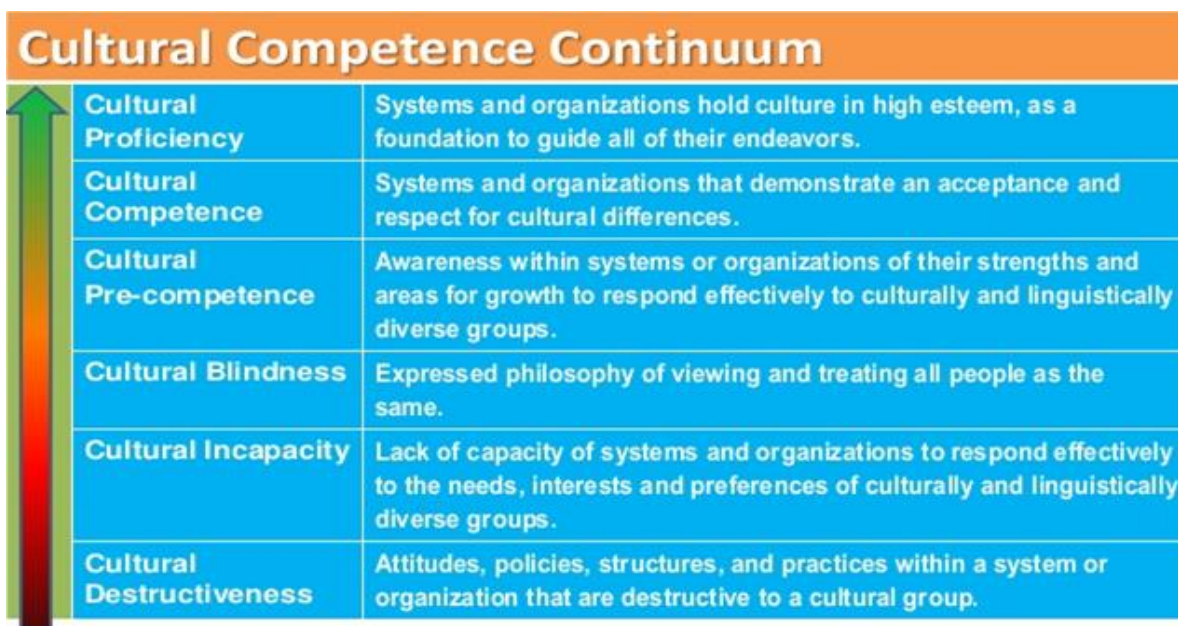
There is a limited body of research available that measures what types of impacts CRI has on student achievement. Doherty et. al. (2003) found that achievement gains for students of color in comprehension, reading, spelling, and vocabulary were greater for students whose teachers had transformed both their pedagogy and the organization of instructional activities in line with CRI than for students whose teachers did not. However, more research is required to provide insight into the relationship between culturally-based instruction and student achievement (Ledesma et al (2015). For example, in the Kamehamea School District in Hawaii, Kana’iaupuni et al., (2010) found a set of relationships linking the use of culture-based educational strategies by teachers and by schools to student educational outcomes:

First, culture-based education (CBE) positively impacted student socio-emotional well-being. Second, enhanced socio-emotional well-being, in turn, positively affected math

and reading test scores. Third, CBE was positively related to math and reading test scores for all students, and particularly for those with low socio-emotional development, most notably when supported by overall CBE use within the school. (Kana'iaupuni et al.,p.1).

The results speak to understanding what a potentially powerful tool that culturally responsive instruction can play in allowing teachers to be more aware, responsive, and effective in teaching students of color or students who are from a different culture than their own.

While scholarship on culturally responsive instruction has identified the different elements of this approach, the scholarship highlights the importance of teachers developing their own cultural proficiency in order to be able to enact CRI in a meaningful and effective way. If one goal of CRI is to foster and/or maintain students' cultural proficiency, enacting CRI requires that teachers build their own cultural proficiency. In comparing the difference between cultural competence and cultural proficiency, the key indicating difference would be that an individual would not only be knowledgeable of cultural differences, but in cultural proficiency, hold other cultures in high esteem. This implies, holding other cultures in equal standing and validity as one's own. Table 1 below was developed by the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University and shows how cultural competence is ever evolving over time as an individual or group acquires, processes, and applies information and knowledge of other cultures. On the continuum, cultural competence is defined as a demonstration of acceptance and respect for cultural differences, while cultural proficiency is when an individual or organization uses cultural competence to guide their actions. As both are used in articles and research on CRI, it is important to make the distinction between them and how I use them in this study.



National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC). Cultural Competence Continuum. Adapted from *Toward A Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume I*, Cross et al.

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Table 1: Cultural Competence Continuum

In her book on culturally responsive teaching, Geneva Gay instructs that, “Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. It is contingent on a set of racial and cultural competencies.” (2010 p. 31). Cultural proficiency is a foundational skill for teachers seeking to enact CRI. In , *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, Diller and Moule (2005) define cultural competence as “mastering complex awareness of, and sensitivities towards various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills, that taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching.” (2005, p.5). Effective CRI then warrants teachers who are first and foremost culturally competent and move toward cultural proficiency in order to apply the principles of CRI with fidelity. In a literature review of CRI in educational research from 2006-2014, Ledesma and Calderón (2015), note that, “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) must likewise engage

experiential knowledge in a critical manner. That is, experiential knowledge cannot be used without a pedagogical framing of the racialized contexts that give rise to experience.” (p.206).

Though there is a growing body of literature on CRI, a closer examination of the literature on how teachers learn and develop culturally responsive instruction indicates that this literature focuses primarily on pre-service teachers and courses located in college teacher preparation programs. Although a rapidly growing body of literature in educational research examines and advocates for teachers to enact CRI, there remains a large gap in articles or research on how experienced in-service teachers build their understanding of and skill in applying CRI principles in their instruction. Little exists on how experienced teachers learn how to implement CRI in their classrooms. Though we don’t know much about how experienced teachers become more culturally responsive, we do know that teachers are more likely to change their practice when they participate in communities of practice.

Professional Learning Communities

Over the past two decades, the development of teachers’ Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has become an integral part of teacher professional development research and practice. Vicki Vescio et al., (2007) completed a review of research on the impact of communities of practice on teachers’ professional learning. They reviewed 11 American and 1 English studies on the impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on participants’ teaching practices and student learning. Their review suggests that “Well developed Professional Learning Communities have positive impacts on both teaching practice and student learning” (2007, p. 90), though they admit much more research must be completed in order to substantiate a direct correlation.

The literature on PLCs can best be understood examining the theory and structures of Communities of Practice (COP) framework. As an extension of social learning theory and adult learning theory, COP could be an effective professional development approach in a variety of work environments including business, non-profits, and education. Etienne Wenger (1998) has written extensively about COPs as an organic organizational structure where groups of people join together to solve a problem or complete a task. He defines COPs along three dimensions, “What it is about, how it functions, and what capability it has produced” (1998).

Wenger’s work is frequently referenced in journal articles that examine COPs, including in education. Even though there is a significant body of research that examines the development, processes, and impact of COPs for teachers’ professional development, there are relatively few studies on the application of a COP approach for supporting teachers’ adoption of culturally responsive teaching. I was able to locate one study by Hollins et al, (2004) that specifically examined a community of practice comprised of African American teachers who wanted to create a more culturally responsive literacy program for their students. The case study focused on a group of teachers in California over a two-year period:

...the findings from this study suggest that the conversations among the teachers at the study-group meetings changed to be more positive about the children, promoting a self-sustaining learning community to make linkages between themselves and the culture the children bring to school, and to show enthusiasm for sharing their own strategies and engaging in public reflection, and collaborating in developing new instructional approaches (Hollins, 2004. p.256).

Hollins’ et al. (2004) study highlights how teachers’ conversations and peer-to-peer interactions helped to create individual shifts in thinking and practice among the participants and

assisted them in adopting new instructional, culturally responsive practices that supported student success. Hollins' et al. (2004) study thus points to the potential that a COP structure holds for supporting in-service teachers' development of culturally responsive instructional practice.

Theoretical Framework

To better understand and identify how the Vineyard Vines Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) could shape participants' understanding and implementation of Culturally Responsive Instruction, and the role that race-based prejudices and bias might have in preconceptions that teachers might have of their students and their aptitude for learning, I use the theoretical frameworks of both Communities of Practice (COP) and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Communities of Practice

A COP framework focuses on describing and understanding the significance of the types of interactions that take place between educators in their workplace. It analyzes how peer-to-peer learning takes place and builds on the social constructivist view that transformative and applied learning occurs through collaborative activities where the processes of "real life" emerge. COPs include three key structural elements, described by Wenger et al. (2002) as (1) domain, (2) community, and (3) practice. Though each element has a distinctive function, each also relies on and interrelates with the other elements. *Domain* defines a set of issues, while *community* represents those people who care about this domain and who develop and/or adopt shared *practices* in order to be effective in their domain. According to Wenger et al. (2002), the domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity legitimizing the community by affirming its purpose and value to the members. It inspires members to contribute and participate, guiding their learning and giving meaning to their actions. The community creates

the social bond of learning in that it fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect. This can result in more willingness on the part of members to share ideas, expose their ignorance, ask difficult questions, and be active listeners in the pursuit of developing a shared practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger et al. notes that when these three elements - domain, community and practice function well together, they constitute a COP, an ideal “knowledge structure – a social structure that can assume responsibility for developing and sharing knowledge” (Gunawardena et al., 2009, p. 6).

A COP framework is particularly helpful in understanding how CITs can facilitate teachers’ development of culturally responsive teaching. One of the key characteristics of the COP framework is that responsibility for learning is shared among group members. An administrator or facilitator is not expected to be the expert. Instead, a community of colleagues use their individual “knowledge and skills to contribute to the group endeavor. Not only are groups able to accomplish more, but it has been argued that this type of learning leads to deeper understanding of content and processes for the group members” (diSessa & Minstrel 1998, p. 158). Participants in COPs are bound by what they do together and by what they have learned through their reciprocal engagement in these activities.

While a COP framework highlights the role that teachers’ communities play in professional learning, it also acknowledges the importance of conflicts and contradictions within these communities to that learning. According to a COP framework, “Contradictions are not just inevitable features of activity.” They are “the principle of its self-movement and ... the form in which the development is cast” (Engestrom, 2011, p. 609). In other word, conflict and contradictions among group members in conversations and learning experiences are essential as

they provide opportunities to create innovative solutions. This in turn takes place in the form of invisible breakthroughs and innovations from below (Engestrom, 2011).

It is interesting to note that often in peer and professional collaboration, we seek to quickly reach group approval and consensus as if it is the primary goal. However, Freire (1993) reminds us that, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). The Community of Practice framework provides an ideal lens through which to understand the mission, purpose and outcomes of the Vineyard Vines Collaborative Inquiry Teams. The Vineyard Vines Collaborative Inquiry Teams are a districtwide form of professional development that is based on both the theoretical framework and methodology of COP. This is because the Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) share the three COP key structural elements (Wenger et al., 2002) of domain, community, and practice. Each Collaborative Inquiry Team shares a *Domain* that defines the focus or a set of issues that teachers want to address, while *community* represents the teachers who care about this domain and who will collaboratively develop and adopt shared *practices*. Vineyard Vines Collaborative Inquiry Teams are formed by teachers who propose areas for study and change seeking other likeminded individuals through online forums. The district designates one professional development (PD) per month for CITs to meet. At the end of the academic year, CITs report out to their peers, again using an online format. Teachers meet on various sites, but include vertical and cross building collaboration and research based on share interests or goals. The district’s CITs follow Wenger’s stages of development for a community of practice as identified in Figure 1 below.

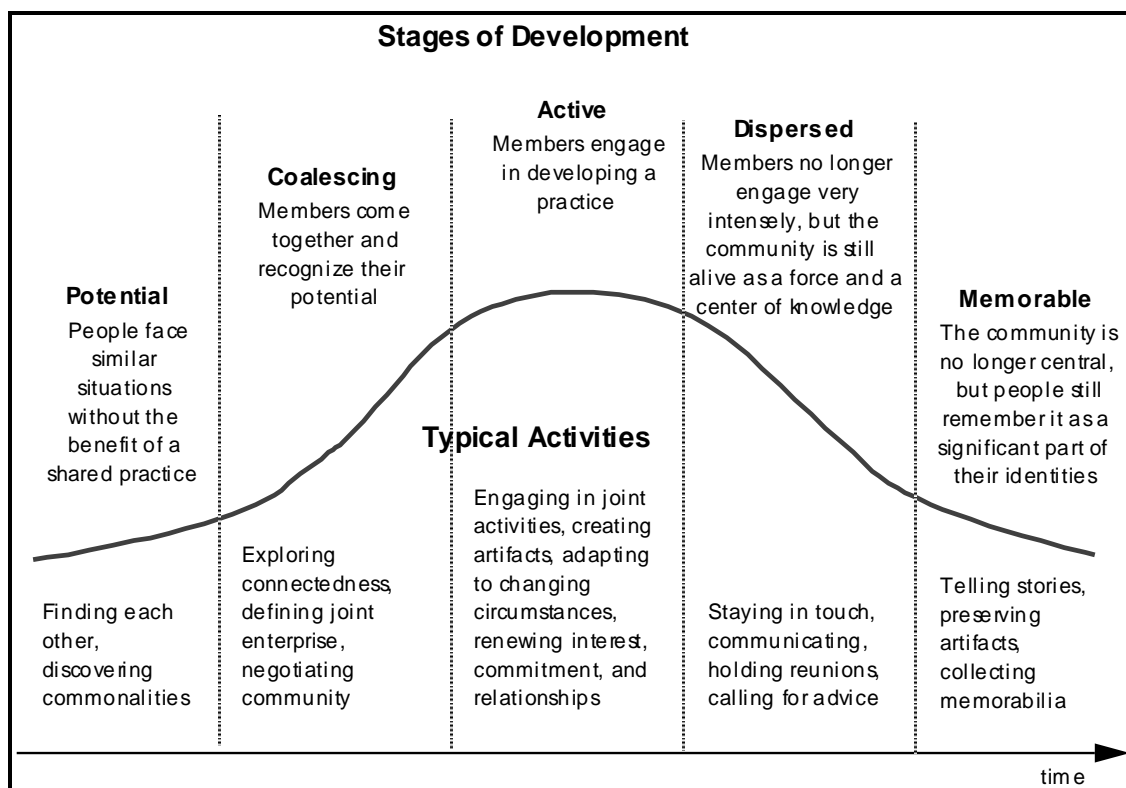


Figure 1: Wenger's Community of Practice Stages of Development, 1998.

Using a COP framework in this study, helps illuminate the processes through which the teachers in a CIT collectively identify goals and outcomes for their work, how a community of peers can support knowledge building, and the practices or processes the teachers use and create to do so. As Stoll et al (2006) clarifies, in COP feelings of interdependence are central to such collaboration: a goal of better teaching practices would be considered unachievable without collaboration, linking collaborative activity and achievement of shared purpose. This does not deny the existence of micro politics, but conflicts are managed more effectively in some PLCs, as Hargreaves (2003) goes further to note, “Professional learning communities demand that teachers develop grown-up norms in a grown-up profession – where difference, debate and disagreement are viewed as the foundation stones of improvement.” (p. 163).

Applying the framework in this study will allow me to better understand the actions, transactions, conflicts, and successes of the VV CIT by identifying the components that fall within and, perhaps beyond, Wenger's structures.

Critical Race Theory

A COP framework helps me to explore how participating in the CIT facilitates teachers' development and enactment of culturally responsive teaching. This kind of learning, however, requires that teachers not only participate in a community of colleagues. It also requires that they directly engage with intersection of culture, race, and power. Cultural proficiency embodies many of these aspects. In this case, it refers to teachers' knowledge of their own and their students' cultures, of how those cultures impact their teaching and learning behaviors and of how to negotiate these cultural understandings and use that knowledge to support their students' learning (Ikpeze, 2015, p. 61). If the goal of culturally responsive instruction is to raise the achievement for all students, improve teachers' and students' cultural proficiency, and engender teachers' and students' sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2001) and if this requires that teachers must first understand the role of culture in education, then teachers must first explore and understand their own privilege and biases. Critical Race Theory (CRT) can provide a better understanding of cultural proficiency and CRI as both are the practical application of this theory. CRT helps teachers and researchers understand how teachers' own racial identities, perceptions, and biases about race or culture shape their participation in COPs and how they enact culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed out of legal scholarship. According to Ladson-Billing (2012), CRT argues that racism is normal and systemic in U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It uses narratives, or more accurately counter-narratives, to weave legal truths

in fanciful and oppositional ways. Since its inception, CRT has been applied to many disciplines. Yosso (2005, p. 70) argues that, “CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses.” Gloria Ladson-Billings’ research applies CRT to issues in education, including the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy. CRT as explained by Ladson-Billings, “begins with the notion that racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’ (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (1998, p. 9). CRT helps to illuminate the nature and impact of the cultural mismatch between the largely white teaching force and the increasingly racially diverse student body in our schools. Yosso (2002, p. 73) argues for a Critical Race Curriculum (CRC) in education because:

...racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination shape the experiences of People of Color very differently than Whites (Bell, 1986; 1998; Essed, 1991; Baca Zinn, 1989). Still, the popular discourse in the US, as well as the academic discourse, continues to be limited by the Black/White binary. CRT adds to efforts to continue to expand this dialogue to recognize the ways in which our struggles for social justice are limited by discourses that omit and thereby silence the multiple experiences of People of Color.

Critical Race curriculum is the approach to understanding curricular structures, processes, and discourses, informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to the five tenets of CRT a Critical Race curriculum would:

- (1) acknowledge the central and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination in maintaining inequality in curricular structures, processes, and discourses; (2) challenge dominant social and

cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, objectivity and meritocracy; (3) direct the formal curriculum toward goals of social justice and the hidden curriculum toward Freirean goals of critical consciousness; (4) develop counter discourses through storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family histories, scenarios, biographies, and parables that draw on the lived experiences students of color bring to the classroom; and (5) utilize interdisciplinary methods of historical and contemporary analysis to articulate the linkages between educational and societal inequality. (p. 98)

To acknowledge and understand the significance of these elements, exposes the intercentricity of race and racism and layers of racialized subordination based on social categorizations. By applying a CRT lens onto educational practices, white privilege can be defined and exposed within educational environments and how it often controls the narrative, embedding racist ideologies that aid in supporting that privilege (Nieto et al, 2011). This is the connection between CRT and cultural proficiency. A culturally proficient teacher has a “cross-cultural understanding based on four levels of cultural knowledge: 1 personal knowledge, awareness of ones’ own cultural beliefs and practices. 2. Popular knowledge, awareness of the dominate culture; 3. School knowledge, awareness of institutional decisions, such as choice of textbooks; and 4. Transformative knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, and culturally responsive interaction.” (Ikpeze, p.10).

A culturally proficient CRT practitioner is committed to social justice and has a way of exposing racial privilege and institutionalized racism that undermines the capabilities and capacity of people of color. CRT also acknowledges and attempts to include the “alternative” or

counter narratives of groups that have been traditionally silenced. Because of these functions and application, CRT goes beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism in any particular situation or learning environment. Having cultural competency would be a key prerequisite for participants to have in order for them to be receptive, understanding, and apply the principals of CRT. Without doing so according to Schmeichel (2012, p. 219), creates and promotes, “concerns circulating in the discourse about the complexity of using cultural knowledge to inform classroom practice. Additionally, the illumination of difference without an accompanying critique of social inequalities was identified as a problematic way of preparing educators to teach students of color.”

Each of these components of Critical Race Theory is important to understanding how teachers participate in the CIT and how that participation shapes their understanding and enactment of culturally responsive teaching. First, Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) is derived, in part, from CRT as it places culture and race at the center of the curriculum and of classroom interactions. Second, participants come into the community of practice with their own bias and buried stereotypes about different ethnic groups and the students that they teach. CRT can lend an understanding in how race operates in and through these biases and stereotypes. Third, CRT provides a focus on understanding how teachers can engage in difficult conversations about racial injustice, bias and stereotyping, and move into action for change. A component of this process will be teachers’ sharing of stories or narratives, especially of the counter narratives about the historical realities of people of color who have been oppressed. CRT seamlessly integrates a focus on culturally responsive instruction within a COP.

An essential step to successfully create CRI lessons or materials is for educators to gain cultural proficiency by examining their own bias and unpack their racialized baggage. Giles and Hughs (2009, p. 690) refer to this phenomenon as a:

...call to context' a focus on particularism and concrete personal experience.

Issues of social capital and privilege find relevance in racial discourse.

Communities of color possess self-agency, cultural capital, and community cultural wealth that is often overlooked, ignored, or relegated to deficit thinking by some stakeholders across educational settings.

As teachers struggle to create culturally responsive lessons and materials, they can familiarize themselves with those alternative narratives and powerful cultural resources that can enhance and authenticate an inclusive learning community in which all members are recognized and given a voice. In this way, teachers and students can connect with one another and have the potential and ability to “bridge” cultural and class differences. CRT can assist in revealing the dominant narrative of most curricula and teachers’ implicit bias about race and class. It can provide an invaluable lens, exposing how race and institutional racism are embedded in many of the source materials used which alienates many students from engaging in learning. Applied in a community of practice, CRT then can encourage and support both cultural proficiency of individual participants, but also peer to peer conversations about the role of race in student learning, teachers’ own lives and experiences, and what CRI could then look like for each participant.

Finally, using CRT as a lens to examine the individual and collective conversations and experiences of teachers within a community of practice focused on culturally responsive instruction can provide some understanding on how a well-intentioned teacher’s individual racial

identity or cultural point of view influences their participation in the group. These lenses will provide a better understanding of the actions, transactions, and conflicts within this community of practice.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Methodology

Qualitative Participatory Action Research Case Study

Drawing on both the Communities of Practice and Critical Race Theory frameworks, in this study, I used Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology to explore and capture how Vineyard Vines teachers participate in the CRI CIT and how that participation shapes their understanding and enactment of culturally responsive teaching. Some of the key features of PAR include a focus on collaboration, incorporation of local knowledge, a multi-disciplinary, multi-casual, case orientation, and the view of results as an emergent process that links scientific understanding to social action (Greenwood et al, 1993).

PAR methodology stems from a family of social constructivist research that focuses on engaging in research in the natural environments where the “action” takes place, here, the CIT and participating teachers’ classrooms. In PAR, “people under study participate actively with the professional researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the presentation of results” (Whyte et al, 1989, p. 4). PAR is a form of action research in which the researcher works in collaboration with the various participants within a specific context in order to support action and change in that context. PAR allows me to uphold the principles of a community of practice as my role is that of a facilitator who can bring relevant expertise, yet allow and support the peer-to-peer learning process (Whyte et al, 1989). More importantly, PAR provides a process that can achieve results with current benefits to participants and lead to rethinking and restructuring of goals, resources, or approaches in real time. (Greenwood et al., 1993). It is a great example of double looping in research (Whyte et al, 1989).

Study Site

Located next to one of the largest cities in Connecticut, the Vineyard Vines Public School district had a student population of 9,800 in 2014, with 60% of them white students . Table 2 reports on the demographic breakdown of Vineyard Vines’ students. I have slightly altered the numbers to protect the anonymity of study participants.

	Count	District % of Total	State % of Total
Female	4800	49.0	49.0
Male	4900	51.0	52.0
American Indian	n/a	n/a	0.2
Asian	1200	11.0	5.0
Black	800	8.0	13.0
Hispanic or Latino	1500	16.0	22.0
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	0.0
2 or more races	340	3.5	2.5
White	600	61.0	57.0
English Language Learners	550	6.0	6.0
Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals	2,000	22.0	38.0
Students with Disabilities ¹	1,100	12.0	13.0
1 Students in this category are students with Individualized Education Plans only. This category does not include students with 504 plans.			

Table 2: Based on the CSDE’s District Profile and Performance Report for School Year, 2014-2015

Overall, all students have consistently achieved above state averages in the Connecticut Mastery Tests. As of 2014, the district had roughly 40% % students of color with the highest representation being Latino (16%). The district supports over 18 schools, including three middle schools and two high schools. It has two magnet schools and a strong pre-kindergarten program. In the 2014-2015, the district employed over 750 Full time certified teachers, over 90% of them were white and roughly 10% were teachers of color (CSDE District Profile and Performance Report, 2016).

The district's Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) meet at least 9 times throughout the school year. Participants and facilitators decide on site locations since many CITs include members from various grade levels or school buildings. Since participants in my CIT group were all from the same high school, we decided to meet in our building location and the CIT meetings primarily took place in my classroom. Participants were given a choice in where they wanted to conduct the one-on-one interviews and all but one selected my classroom.

Participants

This study was open to district secondary school teachers who could have participated in the CIT during the 2016-2017 academic year and who would give their consent to be included in the research study. These could have been secondary teachers from either the district's middle or high schools. The teachers could then have represented a variety of content and certification areas, as teachers were able to self-select this CIT online in October based on their own interests. Potential participants could have represented a convenience sampling of educators from across the district and a variety of schools who had selected the group as part of their CIT experience and who provided their consent to participate in the research as well as the learning community. This particular CIT was capped at 10 participants total. The participants who selected this CIT

and participated in this case study were social studies teachers who work in the same department at the same high school. They included three women and one male teacher. Two self-identified as White, one as Black, and one as East Asian (Pakistan). They represented a broad range of years of experience and time spent working at the same school. Table 2 reports this information.

Teacher *	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Experience
Abby	Female	African-American	5
Bee	Female	White	2
Cee Cee	Female	White	12
David	Male	Southeast Asian	2

Table 3: CIT Participants

*Pseudonyms assigned

All participants self-selected this Collaborative Inquiry Team (CIT) to join for the school year. All the participants, except one, had participated in at least one other CIT in the same district. Prior to the CRI CIT, none had been on a previous CIT together. Unlike the focus of the other district CITs for the 2016-2017 school year, the focus of this CIT was not about student achievement or academic performances, but teachers' adoption and implementation of Culturally Responsive Instruction. The CRI CIT met nine times in the 2016-2017 school year. Meetings lasted about two hours each. A typical meeting started with reviewing group norms and previously discussed topics or items, and then providing each participant twenty minutes per meeting to talk or share.

In terms of topic familiarity, all participants had experienced the start of the school year district professional development workshop on Culturally Responsive Instruction. This workshop was a district wide meeting of upper school teachers. It took place at one of the district's high schools and included university speakers and breakout sessions with designated facilitators. I was one of the facilitators selected by the district to lead a small group discussion on identifying the components of cultural proficiency and how it translates into Culturally Responsive Instruction. None of the CIT participants were in the district PD small group discussion that I led. In addition to this district PD, on a building level, all participants attended three professional development workshops focused on the stages of culturally responsive instruction in the 2016-2017 academic year. These sessions took place in the school's library and all educational staff from the school attended. I was one of the facilitators of these PDs and assisted administrators in planning each of the three sessions. In all, participants were familiar with the basic concepts of Culturally Responsive Instruction prior to selecting the CRI CIT in October 2016, and received additional exposure through the building's PD sessions. This included key components of cultural proficiency coupled with cultural consciousness, responsiveness, and advocacy. This means, prior to the CIT that they selected, participants had already been exposed to the basic definitions and applications of Culturally Responsive Instruction. In addition, participants were all familiar with one another as they worked in the same department and already had a working relationship with me.

After the first two CIT sessions, I selected two participants to focus my study on because of their attendance at every meeting; the types of contributions they made, and the clarity of their responses during the interviews. These two case studies helped to answer my primary research questions about how teachers' participation in a CIT can shape and change their understanding of

and practice of CRI, build their awareness of and ability to speak to the influence of their own identities and influence their growth in cultural proficiency and culturally responsive instruction.

Abby

Abby was one of the participants whom I selected for a case study. This was because of her ability to communicate how her personal experience and identity influenced her understanding and enactment of CRI, as well as her ability to reflect on the types of changes she had made to her instruction because of her participation in the CRI CIT. Abby could easily empathize and connect with her students drawing from her own multiple identities; demonstrate awareness of areas she wanted to improve on, and begin to establish critical consciousness among her students. Abby self-identified as African-American with six years of teaching experience at the time of the study. She had received an undergraduate and master's degree in Social Studies Education and had only taught in the Vineyard Vines district.

Bee

As a white, middle class female, Bee is part of the cadre of new teachers that dominate American classrooms. I felt that capturing her narrative, motivations, and perceptions would be key to sampling and understanding how an educator can progress towards cultural proficiency without sharing the experiences or identities of her students of color. As a case study, Bee also captures the experiences that many less experienced teachers face when trying to juggle instructional proficiency in their content areas while trying to adopt culturally responsive instructional strategies and bring a more conscious lens to examining the content that they teach.

Research Positionality

By using participatory action research as my methodology, my positionality is not that of a traditional outside researcher, "What makes practitioner action research unique is that the

practitioners/researchers are their own subjects or informants. They are insiders, not outsiders, to the setting under the study (Anderson et al., p. 8). As an “insider” I occupied a set of complex roles and relationships with the other participants (Anderson et al., p. 9). I am an experienced teacher with twelve years primarily teaching students of color and those who live in poverty. I received my Masters of Education from the University of Vermont and began my teaching career as a Middle School Language Arts teacher in a small rural K-8th grade school in an economically depressed area of northern Vermont. I am a woman of color who identifies as African-American who is now middle class. I grew up in New England moving between my parents’ households. One parent lived in poverty, the other was middle-class. I attended Columbia University as an older student and obtained my Bachelors of Arts in History with a concentration in Anthropology and American Studies. Prior to and while being an EDLR candidate at the University of Connecticut, I taught primarily students of color and poverty in a regional magnet school and then again in a neighborhood school located in Hartford, CT. My interest and experience with CRI have been extensive as both a learner and ongoing practitioner. I was hired by Vineyard Vines the year before the study. My research took place in my second year of being a social studies teacher in one of the district’s high schools. It is important to add that I am also a mother and was married to a Korean-American who had a more recent American immigration experience.

All of these intersectionalities and experiences have directly helped to formulate my ideas, processes, and practice of CRI as well as my relationships with my students and peers. My role as facilitator was based on peer to peer collaboration and in my relationship and interactions with peers, there is a horizontal exchange as I am not an administrator or evaluator. This made it easy for my role to be more of an “insider” and a contributor in our CRI CIT and my secondary

role as a researcher and facilitator had a less dominate influence on my interactions with the other participants.

As a facilitator, I was responsible for making the CRI CIT proposal to the district for the 2016-2017 academic year. I was also responsible for setting up the initial group, defining the mission or purpose, documenting progress, and writing up the results at the end of the year. Facilitators must write proposals to submit for district approval in the summer before the academic year. Within PAR, my role is that of researcher, colleague, and facilitator in the study. There are pluses and minuses of that positionality. This approach aims to blur the lines between the “researchers” and the “researched” (Hagey, 1997) and attempts to transform the theories and practices of researchers, practitioners, and participants whose perspectives and practices may help to shape the conditions of work (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). Using this approach and capacity, my goal was to increase the comfort level of participants and bring a critical awareness of factors that affect teachers’ perceptions and practices that impact their students’ experiences in order for them to make responsive actions. However, using PAR methods (See Appendix A Table), my goal was to gather information about participants and facilitate their critical thinking about the topic of CRI. By sharing knowledge and asking questions, I could facilitate and document their progress or lack of progress in real time, make recommendations, and use findings to improve this program. At the same time, as a researcher, I would also be able to adapt and make changes in the CIT, in real time, and to my facilitation to meet the needs of participants. As Whyte et al. explains (1989), in PAR, the consultant/facilitator acts less as a disciplinary expert and more of a coach in team building and seeing to it that as much of the relevant expertise as possible from all over the organization is mobilized.

In September 2016, the district emailed clear guidelines on the expectations of the role of facilitator that included the following:

The role of a facilitator IS to guide the group forward, ensuring that members of the group accomplish their goals. An effective facilitator...

- assists group in creating and reinforcing norms
- uses time and space intentionally
- helps keep the group focused and on track
- thinks beyond activities to outcomes
- guides group in coming to decisions
- arrives on time
- prints sign-in sheet and sends to Curriculum Office
- invites group members to add items to agenda prior to each session
- non-judgmental of a variety of opinions and ideas

(District Collaborative Inquiry Team Guidelines, 2016)

In the first session, I reviewed these district expectations with my colleagues so that it was clear that I was simply their colleague in a non-evaluative role and so that they knew what would and would not be submitted to the district as documentation of our work. This distinction was important to have a more successful community of practice as most studies on improving teacher performance, show that the focus needs to be on teacher-dependent, rather than external expert-dependent approaches. (Hollins et. al, 2004). In addition, I was careful to delineate the difference between the documentation required by the district and the voluntary documentation that I would collect as part of the participatory action research (PAR) case study.

I was confident that using a facilitator approach would help me address assumptions or feelings on the part of the participants that I was assessing them for an alternative motive during the CIT. Having previous professional and collegial relationships with and among participants helped establish an environment of trust rather quickly. I also provided each participant with a clear protocol and outlined goals. Also, by using the PAR framework, I was very transparent about the intent, progression, and initial findings with participants so that they could use this information to enhance their own individual or group progress. As I played a dual role of peer

facilitator and academic researcher, I was more mindful of how my opinion and roles could have a positive or negative impact on the overall study. I tried to identify leading questions and responses during the interview process. I met with the participants during a designated time for CIT, but will also met one of the teachers in their own classrooms for individual interviews.

Data Collection

I used a variety of methods to collect data that include audio recordings of interviews and CIT meetings.

Interviews and CIT Sessions

For the purpose of the PAR, I interviewed each participant twice. I conducted the first interviews near the start of the CIT to establish a baseline of goals, ideas, and understandings for each participant. I then interviewed each participant again after the fourth CIT meeting, to capture any changes in these goals, ideas and understandings. With the participants' permission, these interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions for these interviews focused on basic demographic information and prior instructional practices. This interview also provided an opportunity to ascertain participants' understanding and goals of culturally responsive instruction. Participants were asked to participate in a second interview after attending several CIT sessions. This interview's aim was to capture teachers' experiences with the CIT and whether their conception of CRI changed with these experiences as well as, to explore how the CIT impacted teachers' ideas about and practices of CRI, their own bias, and if they felt the process was beneficial or not. I completed the first initial interviews to establish individual participant baselines by January 10th, 2017. These interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. I completed the second round of interviews by April 4th, 2017. They ranged from 22 to 40

minutes in length. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Only one interview was not able to be transcribed because of file corruption issues. Parts of this interview were salvaged. In addition, I took notes on what I could hear from the audiotape and also used the field notes I had created during the interview to assemble a final non-verbatim transcript of this interview. In addition, in May 2017, three participants Abby, Bee, and Dalton completed a reflective questionnaire in which they responded to four questions about their experience in the CIT. For each interview, I used a standard semi-structure, open-ended interview protocol (Creswell, 2007). Each participant was asked the same open-ended questions in order to gather information about their preconceptions and experience of the CIT and permit them to authentically voice their own opinions and responses. Interviews were recorded on digital audio and then transcribed into written form. These transcripts were coded and analyzed. Participants' interviews allowed me to capture their understandings of culturally responsive instruction and whether there was a change in their mindsets and practices because of the CIT.

For each of the nine CIT meetings, I recorded the sessions with the participants' awareness and permission. After the first CIT, the participants were at ease with this process and would even stop and remind me if I seem to have turned off the recorder. I took very few notes during the actual CITs as I, myself was a participant. I found the act of taking notes more intrusive on the discussions verses simply recording the conversations. Furthermore, many teachers associate note-taking as a procedural tool during evaluations by administrators. I transcribed three of the six sessions, (10/18/16, 1/10/17, and 2/7/17), archived the other audio recordings and took notes upon reviewing them at home. Each CIT meeting lasted about two hours and took place in my classroom. As a group, we usually ordered food and often ate during these sessions. I found that this actually helped to lend a familiarity and relaxedness for the participants as we shared a meal

during our discussions. Food was purchased by pooling together our contributions, so as the facilitator, I was not responsible and did not influence participants by buying them lunch as a reward. Table 4 below details the types of data collection, timelines, and how the data was analyzed.

Data	Timelines	How the data was analyzed
Interviews: past knowledge, experience, classwork about race, privilege, bias, or culturally responsive instruction.	1 interview at start of CRI CIT 2 nd interview and final interview at the end of the experience.	To capture how teachers' racial identities shape their participation in the group and effectiveness of CRI. How does a teacher's individual racial identity or cultural viewpoints influence their participation in the group and the group processes and work?
Audio Recordings and transcripts of CRI CIT Meetings	9 meetings scheduled 2016-2017	Identify teachers' initial understandings of CRI, what materials did they used before i.e. lesson plans or books. To capture teachers' ongoing perceptions of bias and inclusive practices and if they change over time. How does their conception of CRI change with collaboration and the activity? How does it shape their teaching?

Table 4: Data Collection Table

Analysis

Using my research questions, I created codes that focused on aspects of CRT, COP, and CRI in order to identify and locate themes in the data collected. Coding was an important tool to identify specific types of preparations, perimeters, and support structures necessary for a teacher-directed community of practice to have productive and transformative conversations about race

and privilege. In addition, I created codes and sub codes to identify the tools, resources, and processes of a collaborative community of educators, how racial identities shaped participation or created conflicts in the group, and if cultural viewpoints influenced participation, group processes and outcomes. This included, but was not limited to participants' perceptions of CRI, bias, privilege, and interactions and shifts that occurred throughout the CIT. The code table below was the one I developed using the research questions to create specific terms or keyword indicators in the software program *Dedoose*.

Code	Definition	Example
Admin expectations for implementation	How the Building Admin expects teachers to implement the curriculum	The principal She told me that she expected fidelity in lesson delivery.
Building Admin expectations of curriculum	Building specific Admin statements on what the curriculum should do for teachers and students	If we teach the materials as instructed, student achievement will go up.
Collaborative Inquiry Teams	Community of Practice that includes CIT experiences and effectiveness – domains/topics, community/participants, and practice/application	I really get good ideas from my peers.
Conflicting messaging	When the message between district, building admin are conflicting with one another.	It was weird that in the same meeting, they were saying two different things about how I taught the lesson.
Critical Race Theory	A critical examination of society and culture, to the intersection of race , law, and power.	The importance of finding a way for diverse individuals to share their experiences
Cultural Responsive Instruction	Instruction that attempts to align the instruction and materials used with the demographics of the learners.	The characters are the same age as most of my students and are facing similar issues.

District expectations	Goals and expectations from district about the curriculum and how it should be implemented.	Raising students' scores or enrollment in AP classes
District Professional Development	The district PD for Culturally Responsive Instruction	Guest Speakers at high school
Experiences with Racism	Subjected to or a bystander of racism	I was expected to speak for all black people
Modification	Whenever the teacher modifies the lesson or materials from curriculum	I had to change the way the writing assignment was planned.
Professional Development Opportunities	Professional development or workshops provided for information, support, or materials.	I attended one workshop last June for the curriculum roll out.
Participatory Action Research	Teachers understand and transform their own practices through collaboration, research, education, and action	Participation in the CIT is giving me a lot of good ideas
Student needs	students reading, writing, or skills levels	My students' needs are not being met.
Teachers needs	Teachers needs more preparation time or space to create materials or lesson plans	I never have enough time
Teacher Preparation Programs	University or college experiences	

Table 5: Coding Table

I used an online software program called *Dedoose* to create codes because it enabled me to identify patterns and trends in the data I coded. Dedoose also provided a way for me to quickly sort through a lot of data for analysis and create graphic tables or matrices to support conclusions drawn from materials and sources. Dedoose allowed me to cross compare different participants' responses and artifacts to identify any patterns or shared issues that might not be addressed by

the CIT approach and enabled me to make direct interpretations or recommendations for further inquiry or research (Creswell, 2007). Throughout data collection, I reviewed the data I collected to understand and keep track of when and how the participants' understanding, awareness, and self-reported instruction mirrored or diverged from CRI indicators. Table 6 below reports the different codes that emerged from my coding of the transcripts and how often they occurred in the participant interviews and CIT session transcripts.

	Totals
Admin Expectations for Instruction	9
Collaborative Inquiry Team	26
Community	44
Domain	15
Impact of CIT on Instruction	11
Practice	12
Conflicting messaging	10
Critical Race Theory	26
Culturally Responsive Instruction	76
District Professional Development	9
District Supports for CRI	7
Experiences with Racism	12
Group Goals	6
Participatory Action Research	19
Perceptions of Diversity	8
Professional Development	13
Student needs	19
Teacher Preparation Programs	27
Teacher as Advocate	48
Teacher's individual experience or background	9
Teachers needs	22

Table 6. *Basic Code Occurrence from all interviews and three transcribed CIT sessions.*

Limitations

It is important to note that this CRI CIT took place in one school with colleagues who taught in the same Social Studies department. The participants' education, experience, and content areas gave them an advantage in understanding social systems, racism, sexism, and other narratives as social constructs. Some had taught sociology, US History, World History, Human Rights, and AP level courses in all of these areas. In many ways and because of their professional backgrounds, these participants would not be a good representation of other educators, even in the same building. These content areas vary from department to department and there would have been a different level of conversation and understanding say if the participants were from the Math department, as Social Studies content prepared the participants with giving them the vocabulary and content knowledge to jump into conversation about racism or sexism. In addition, these participants had established professional relationships that had been positive previous to collaborating with one another in the CIT. Three of them had worked together for two years and this department has a reputation for collegiality and peer support. This study then has limited insight for teachers from other content areas in degrees of expertise or understanding of different cultures, cultural proficiency, and social structures of institutions that may limit access of resource or power to marginalized groups.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Findings

In this chapter, I discuss key findings related to my three research questions:

1. How does participation in the Culturally Responsive Instruction Collaborative Inquiry Team support changes in the understanding and practice of Culturally Responsive Instruction by teachers?
2. What kind of changes in their understanding and practice of Culturally Responsive Instruction do the teachers make?
3. How do the teachers' racial identities shape both?

These research questions were formulated through the application of the theoretical frameworks of both Community of Practice and Critical Race Theory, as discussed in Chapter 2. In COP theory, establishing goals and norms to support teachers' understanding of CRI would fall under establishing a *Domain*. Creating participant generated rules and norms for the CIT meetings helped establish and maintain *Community*. This would in time lead to peer to peer influence in sharing knowledge and supporting changes in their *Practices*. This resulted in a CRI CIT that quickly established common ground and a sense of common identity that legitimized and reinforced the community of participants, by providing purpose and value to them. This further resulted in a willingness for participants to share ideas, expose their ignorance, ask difficult questions, and be active listeners (Wenger et al., 2002). Critical Race Theory offered key concepts for questions 2 and 3 as it provided a framework embedded in the interview questions that were used to theorize, examine, and challenge the participants' understanding of how race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). I found that Cultural proficiency awareness played a role in developing critical consciousness in two of the participants and that the two case studies demonstrate that cultural proficiency is an important prerequisite to support teachers' ability to provide CRI with more

confidence and fidelity. In these case studies, I also found the significant role that individual racial/ethnic identity can play in shaping teachers' understanding and practice of CRI.

Within each finding section below, I provide individual case analyses on how participation in the CIT support changes in teachers' understanding and instruction of CRI. In section two, I will specifically examine how the role of cultural proficiency and racial/ethnic identity have in shaping the teachers' understanding and practice of CRI.

Finding 1: COP/CIT can create a safe space for teachers to authentically reflect on their practices and learn from one another. This can lead to teachers developing cultural proficiency for themselves and their students.

In the following section, I will depict the goals of the CRI CIT. This will help me explain how establishing a clear domain supported the processes and resources that helped shaped teachers' receptiveness to and understanding and practice of CRI. One of the key processes used to launch and facilitate this Culturally Responsive Instruction Collaborative Inquiry Team (CRI CIT) was establishing clear goals and defining what CRI was. This process helped ensure that all participants had a comprehensive understanding of how Culturally Responsive Instruction is defined. Ensuring that all participants understood what CRI is and isn't was key to actually know where individuals were starting and to help them shape their own instructional goals.

Following the COP framework, at the first meeting of the CIT, one of my goals as the facilitator was that the group establish the goal or set of issues that the teachers wanted to explore. Doing so, would provide a shared domain. At the first meeting in October, I asked the group to formulate our CRI CIT goals. This is a common instructional practice as a teacher in that before we dive into a new topic or formulate essential questions, teachers ensure that their

students first understand key words or concepts so that we can agree on what exactly we are “talking about” (Marzano, 2007, p. 31). After taking care of logistics, I asked each participant present how they would define CRI. Each of us took turns explaining our understanding of CRI:

I guess. I would say, well, first, curriculum and resources and materials and lessons that reflect my student population and, even if my student population wasn't diverse, having the same curriculum because, you know, it's still incredibly important to learn about what's going on with different groups of people because we're so intertwined and globalized and we have so many current issues happening that's so important.

(Bee, CIT Meeting, October 26, 2016)

...culturally responsive teaching is when you take into consideration the students that you're working with and their background. You use that to inform your teaching. What am I coming with? What are my students coming with? What are their interests? Their backgrounds? Who are they? And what are ways that I can incorporate it into my classroom so that what they're learning is interesting to them, but it's also they see themselves in the lessons and they see the relevancy of it.

(Abby, CIT Meeting, October 26, 2016)

Knowing more about different cultures of my students. Would like to be able to include more materials that are multicultural in teaching.

(Dalton, CIT Meeting, October 26, 2016)

Based on their responses in that CIT session, both Abby and Bee demonstrated cultural proficiency as they both mentioned using their students' backgrounds and cultural diversity as a

means to guide instruction, content, or activities. Bee reflected this understanding when she said, “first, curriculum and resources and materials and lessons that reflect my student population...” Abby’s statement also reflected cultural proficiency as she noted, “what are ways that I can incorporate it into my classroom so that what they’re learning is interesting to them, but it’s also they see themselves in the lessons and they see the relevancy of it.” I was intentional in having the participants define for themselves and each other what culturally responsive instruction was to gauge where they were at on the cultural competence continuum (See Table 1). Doing so, would help us create a baseline of how they understood CRI as a concept and a practice. It was only after allowing participants to define what they understood CRI to be and a chance to hear one another’s’ perception of CRI, that I then posted on an overhead, Ladson-Billings’ (1995) definition of CRI and its indicators:

1. Teachers ensure that students experience success.
2. Teachers provide opportunities for students to develop and/or maintain cultural competence.
3. Teachers provide opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness.
4. Teachers construct bridges between:
 - The curriculum & students’ lives and interests
 - School and home
 - School and community

After sharing out our understandings of CRI, the group collaborated in creating a CIT goal that attempted to reflect both individual goals and a consensus of understanding what CRI would look like in practice:

If we collectively and supportively change our instructional practice, become more culturally responsive, our students will be better at acknowledging accepted multiple perspectives and points of view. Students can look at issues in our country today for more lenses and will help build capacity to all students in my class so that they have confidence to contribute and self-advocate.

(CIT Meeting, October 26, 2016)

This goal was emailed to each member and revisited at the other CIT meetings to start meetings and provide focus. Applying the COP framework in the initial structuring of our CIT was important because according to Wenger et al. (2002), the domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity, legitimizing the community by affirming its purpose and value to the members. It inspires members to contribute and participate, guiding their learning and giving meaning to their actions.

Another important element of the COP framework used to support participants' receptiveness, understanding, practice, and risk-taking of CRI CIT was *Community*. The community creates the social bond of learning in that it fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect. This can result in more willingness for members to share ideas, expose their ignorance, ask difficult questions, and be active listeners. The practice is a shared pedagogy, ideas, and materials that the community develops and shares (Wenger et al., 2002). In our CRI CIT, this was realized by establishing early interactional practices as a mechanism to establish a safe space for reflection that could lead to real transformation of practices and mindsets. Having time of any form for teachers, is often considered a luxury most cannot afford. The CRI CIT provided an established, consistent venue for teachers' learning with a total of nine meeting dates throughout the academic year, while teachers were "doing the work." In the first

meeting, the group established protocols for sharing and confidentiality. Collectively, we decided that each member would always have 20 minutes of speaking time that they could use or give to another member. This was a way to ensure that every participant, including myself, had the space and opportunity to speak or share. In addition, we added a “what is said here, stays here” rule. This was key; because of this rule, participants could more openly reflect on their own practices in order to elicit constructive criticism or instructional strategies from their peers. In the CRI CIT, establishing a culture of reflection and collegiality, became very important to the progression and openness of the participants. Abby stated in the first CRI CIT the importance of confidentiality:

I think that there needs to be a certain level of trust because no one's going to be comfortable and – I did this, it's easy-to-admit, I do this, and I think it's really great, but it will be harder to admit where you struggle, and where you need help if you're worried about as soon as we leave this room – like Bee is going to go and be like – I can't do that – and then like I'm never going to say anything again because now my department thinks I'm incompetent. I was just trying to be honest, checking feedback.

(Abby, CIT Meeting October 24, 2016)

Abby's explanation during the first meeting was essential to creating a community in which participants felt that they could talk openly without fear of reprisal or judgement. By establishing a community based on trust, the group was creating a more therapeutic environment in which we would then be able to share, take risks, and open ourselves up to receiving encouragement or criticism from one another.

Our sense of community grew around these established norms during the course of a year. This allowed for participants to gain an “accumulating weight of understanding and new

experiences” and provided them with the ability to share out in a caring environment that would allow them to “adopt alternative perceptions and reactions” (Rosenheim, 1990, p. 25). In her second interview, Bee provided a clear example of how the CRI CIT functioned as a mechanism that established a safe space for authentic collaboration and reflection when she explained in her second interview how this kind of COP environment allowed her to examine, collaborate, and expand her understanding, intentions and practices:

I think it's just the general rules of this as a collaborative environment, so we're not here to judge each other. For me, it would be being afraid of being judged as inexperienced because I am. Compared to the other teachers, I am. But just the general rules of listening openly, being willing to help each other, not judging, giving each participant equal amount of time to talk, which for the most part has been what's happened, but maybe not every meeting, and that's okay because nothing's perfect. But that has been helpful, as opposed to in a traditional PD, you have zero minutes to share out and ask questions and talk. Normally, it's just a general sweep of the room. "Does anyone have any questions?" So, I think that that has definitely created an environment where teachers can learn from each other because we're not afraid of being judged or having to put on a specific persona because we're in admin or this or that.

(Bee, Interview 2, March 22, 2017)

In this second interview, when asked how the structures of the CIT allowed her to participate or voice her opinion, Bee could articulate that the general norms of listening without judgement and giving each participant equal time to talk were some of the structures put in place that created an environment where “teachers can learn from each other” in a space free from judgement or evaluation. Intentionally applying the COP framework of Domain and Community,

resulted in peer to peer influence in sharing knowledge and supporting changes in the participants' *Practices*. These changes in practices will be explored in the next section.

Finding 2: Cultural proficiency is a prerequisite to being able to provide effective CRI.

In this section, I connect the theoretical framework of COP practices with that of cultural proficiency. The outcome of establishing topic understanding or domain, in the first meeting and using the norms for strengthening community in the subsequent meetings, allowed our CRI CIT to then focus on *Practices*. Practice is defined by Wenger et al. (2002) as pedagogy, ideas, and materials that the community develops and shares. It was through this process of sharing and development, that I realized as a researcher the important role that cultural proficiency plays in teachers' ability to provide CRI with fidelity. It was in the initial conversations at the first CIT meeting and subsequent interviews, that Abby and Bee could articulate the key elements of cultural proficiency.

Abby

Initially in the first interview, Abby described CRI as:

I think it's when you take your students into consideration and you are taking all of the culture and identities and just everything that they come with, and you're making a conscious effort to make that a part of the culture of your classroom in an authentic way. So, it's not just like, "Hey, you have this name. You must be from this place. So, when we get to – you have, I think, a Chinese name. So, when we talk about China, I'm gonna ask you how you feel about it, call you out." It's like, what are some real ways to keep your interest, and make you feel included? And by identity, it could just be – like at the beginning of a class, I ask students, "How do you learn best? What are your interests? Okay, you like this. I'm going to make a conscious effort to include music, or art into my

class; or theater. Because that is something that you are interested in. That's something that's gonna help you learn this material better." So, I think it's just being, again, more reflective about your practices and the specific population that you have in your classroom

(Abby, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

Abby's initial understanding of CRI incorporated many of the key components of cultural proficiency, which proved to be a key prerequisite for participants to be receptive to, understanding of, and applying the principals of CRI. Without cultural proficiency, teachers could simply overlook the complexity of using cultural knowledge to inform classroom practice and of illuminating difference without an accompanying critique of social inequalities (Schmeichel, 2012). Abby's intent on constructing a bridge between her students' lives and interests with that of the content so that her students felt included demonstrated her cultural proficiency. Abby's understanding of CRI changed over the course of the CIT and her understanding of the complexity of CRI shifted more towards developing opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness. In her article, *Culturally Relevant Teaching*, Coffey (2017) explains that based on Ladson-Billings' ideas:

that culturally relevant teachers 'engage in the world and others critically,' and to do this, 'students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. Simply having individual success is not engaging in citizenship, and Ladson-Billings suggests that providing opportunities for students to critique society may encourage them to change oppressive structures. (p.3).

For Abby, reflection on her growth and practice as a CRI teacher, meant that it was important to provide opportunities for students to develop this crucial consciousness:

Well, I think I generally have a good relationship with my students, but I think I've just become a little – again, I'm comfortable with my colleagues, but I'm also more comfortable with my students. I have a transgender student, [Charlie]*, and I don't know a lot about that, but I've had some conversations with Charlie. Like, "Oh, you know this? That's really impressive," or, "Do you mind sending me –," I've even asked students like, "Can you send me an article about that?" Or, "Hey, Charlie, I started learning about the lavender scare," which I had no idea about. "Oh, you know about the lavender scare, miss?" "Yeah. Do you know? Can you send me some stuff with that?" Even little things that I didn't think were important that were in like, "Oh, I'm not really sure if I should tell a student this –," I had a conversation with Charlie. We were creating posters, and there was rainbows on one poster, so Charlie was like, "Yes." It was like, "Oh, they just wanted a rainbow because they needed to take up space. It's not that." Charlie was like, "I always associate that with LGBTQ rights," and I was like, "Oh, you should go to Stonewall, because there's tons of flags all out, and I went out there last year," and my student's like, "You went to Stonewall? Why would you go there?" I was like, "Because I'm a history nerd, and it's a part of –," and then just like, "You think that that's a monument, and you think that that's important?" Usually, because I was like, "I went during my bachelorette party. Yeah, but you know how you don't wanna overdo something by being like, "I went to the Stonewall, and I'm for LGBT rights, and blah, blah, blah," but it was something that – Felt organic, and it was like, "I can't say that I went to a gay bar." I really think that's a part of history. Before, I think that, maybe, I

might question myself a little bit. I don't wanna be too much. Because we had had conversations before about how I was really trying and like, "Can you send me things if you find them?" I felt like it was an organic conversation. It was just like, "That's really cool that you think that that's important and that you acknowledge that." I think I've always had good relationships, but I think it's just strengthening, and I'm more comfortable. Just tell me what you know. Tell me what you would like to talk about or even saying like, "Honestly I don't know a lot about that, but when I do know, I'll be happy to have a conversation with you about it. Or, if you know more than me right now, tell me what you know."

(Abby, Interview 2, April 5, 2017)

In Abby's retelling of this exchange with her student, it becomes clear that her confidence in allowing her students to become experts in topics, can be an empowering experience for both her and her students. Taking the risk to admit what she didn't know, allowing her student to be her authentic self, encouraging her student to research more on a topic in order to provide information to the teacher, can create the opportunity for the student to find and use that information for self-agency and provide the link between cultural proficiency and critical consciousness. Knauss (2009, p. 137) argues in his article, "Shut up and listen: applied critical race theory in the classroom," that in order to support student achievement:

Educators must remember how students live before, during and after school. To fail to consider students' personal context is to ensure that what we teach is irrelevant to their daily survival. Indeed, I argue that in a democratic society, educators have no greater task

than to equip youth for speaking the realities they see so that we can then begin to address, with youth, these realities.

Abby's development and growth as a CRI instructor, allowed her to take such a risk and incorporate her student's personal context as a means to address the realities that many students face and help them build self-agency to change that reality. Reviewing Abby's interview data, I found several examples of the differences between her practice of CRI before and after participation in the CRI CIT. Even prior to participating in the CIT, Abby realized that the actual content she was using to teach an African-American history class was limited to a dominant narrative of black males. In her interview, she recounted how:

And then I also started thinking about the women's movement and how black women were experiencing the same thing. They were trying to help out and get rights for all women but there was racism in that movement. So, I wanna take a look at the racism in the women's movement and the sexism in the civil rights movement, and how that's led to an idea of black feminism and what that means and how it's different.

Abby, Interview 2, April 5, 2017)

Abby raised this issue in my interviews with her and raised it again in a CIT meeting looking for further ideas for resources or activities for her peers. It was her participation in the CRI CIT that allowed Abby the ability to reflect on intersectionality more and to develop ways or ideas to authentically address it in practice. After attending three CIT sessions, Abby was developing a more comprehensive understanding and practice of CRI. She reveals this in her second interview:

There are times where I – like I said, I feel like I'm good at culturally responsive teaching, but there are just certain aspects of it where I didn't even encompass it into the

definition of it. Now, I'm starting to expand more and realize I don't know that. You need to step up your game in this area.

Again, I think that I'm just trying to be more inclusive of different groups. Even with our research paper, I've told my students – and I've always done this, but I've really emphasized it. Like, if you have something that you're interested in, this does need to be historical, but please tell me what you are interested in, and I will try to find some way to connect it back to history because I want you to tell me something that you are passionate about and go out and learn about it and then bring it back to this class.

It's really, really made me want to try to include all of my students so that they realize that it isn't a coincidence what's going on, and we really do need to fix a lot of the problems by – I think that you can educate people, and if you tell them not just when they were horrible in society but all of the great things that they've done or the ways that they've tried to overcome some of those horrible things, I think that that's a step in changing viewpoints. And, also, getting my students to understand that, when we talk about certain groups, it's not that they are lazy or stupid, but there are real things that were put in place that have really kept them from achieving even today.

(Abby, Interview 2, April 5, 2017)

What Abby articulated in sharing this exchange she had with her students is how her thoughts and perspectives have been enhanced because of her participation in the CRI CIT. Her participation in an environment with a clear domain and community supported her ability to

expand her practice. More importantly, as she developed her own critical consciousness, she was able to then help her students develop their own critical consciousness.

What is interesting in this specific example is how Abby's change came in part out of a direct conversation in the February CRI CIT Meeting. In this exchange, Abby was talking about trying to bring in more perspectives and different narratives about the Civil Rights Movement.

This led to the following exchange between Abby and myself as the facilitator:

Facilitator: You were doing intersectionality.

Abby : Wait what?

Facilitator: Okay. And I say that last article about Bayard Ruston, and I didn't know how much you knew about him as a figure or not.

Abby Oh, yeah, I remember

Abby Oh, I'm sorry.

Facilitator I've studied a lot about him, and that intersection of like working on – because he, even from the '20s had – he was like an early civil rights figure. But because he was openly gay, and he became a Communist, it's like he worked with Martin Luther King. He reached out to Malcolm X. He was very instrumental in making sure the March on Washington happened. Bayard Ruston. And he was instrumental in making it happen. He knew Eleanor Roosevelt. He was a huge figure, but he couldn't be the poster boy because he was a Black Communist, gay Black Communist. So, it, just again, this figure that everybody knew, that he drove, he influenced, he taught, he mentored, he did this. But he wasn't allowed to wear the mantle of leadership. Because he refused to be closeted, he refused to make excuses. And it was really kind of crazy that a man – that he would do that during that period. But it was also, like he was just so modern in so

many ways. So, he's just this amazing figure. And he was brilliant. And he wrote volumes. And you start realizing how much he did mentor Martin Luther King. He mentored a lot of these leaders. And teaching them non-violence. He's the one who brought non-violence. He's the one who introduced them to Gandhi. He's like, yeah, so. And there's a documentary about him. And then there's a lot – and the queer thing, he loves him. Because, again, this is part of this history that they're more familiar with. Again, another figure, and important figure that was sidelined because of queer politics, so.

Abby: Can you send me something on him later?

Facilitator: Yes.

(CRI CIT Meeting February 8, 2017)

Our exchange shows how important it is for teachers to have the opportunity to really engage in deeper reflection of their practice with their colleagues. It was through answering questions in her interviews, discussions outside of the CRI CIT, and participation in conversations with her peers in the CRI CIT meetings, that Abby became increasingly focused on developing her students' critical consciousness as a means of understanding of how various identities can intersect in content and instruction. Abby was introduced to the term intersectionality and how it applied to the work she was already doing with her students. In addition, she learned about an important Civil Rights leader who has been left out of the narrative in the textbook she has been using. This allowed her to gain more knowledge on the intersection between black and queer politics.

This exchange also illustrates my role as both facilitator and colleague using PAR approach. Instead of being a transcribing bystander and simply listening to Abby raise questions or needs, I was able to provide on the spot advice and information that would allow Abby to gain more knowledge to support her students. Directly adding the critical consciousness component would allow Abby's students to identify and address the "real things that were put in place that have really kept them from achieving even today" and providing them with greater opportunities to not only be able to identify structures or systems in place that might hinder achievement, but also enable them to become agents of change.

Bee

The other participant I selected as a case study was Bee. Bee's experiences during the CRI CIT exemplified the important link between knowing what exactly CRI is and the necessity of being a culturally competent educator in order to practice CRI. At the start of the school year, Bee used high expectations and accountability for all her students and this is an important component of CRI, as Gay (2012) notes:

...caring is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive teaching for ethnically diverse students. It is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human values, intellectual capacity, and performance responsibilities. Teachers demonstrate caring for children as students and as people. This is expressed in concern for their psychoemotional well-being and academic success, personal morality, and social actions, obligations, and celebrations, communality and individuality, and unique cultural connections and universal human bonds. Teachers who really care for students honor their humanity, hold them in high esteem, expect high performance from them, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations. (p. 48)

Throughout her participation in the CRI CIT, Bee's expectations for her students to succeed was unwavering. However, as Bee became more culturally competent, she became aware that her expectations were not always based on the norms or values of her students. In recognizing this and then applying CRI, Bee was able to grow more confident in differentiating her classroom management to meet the needs of her students:

...in her ESOL classes or Abby talking about some of her co-taught classes, allowing students to be themselves is also a part of cultural – huge part of cultural competence, but how they behave, and me going through the process of, okay, I need to be really good at classroom management. I'm new. That means everyone has to sit in their seat and be quiet all the time. That's not it. You can have a great classroom that doesn't look like that. And that's not gonna fit all of my students.

So, hearing some of you talk about how you handle students who express themselves differently and how that oftentimes relates to their background and their families and their traditions and how they normally express – just them as an individual, that you know that about them. Yeah, or I know that about them. So, I have a couple students in Period 7 where my classroom management has actually improved because I let them – and this is the part that was difficult is we've had to establish a relationship of trust. I'm going to trust you to not overstep my bounds, if you trust me to let you express yourself a little bit. So, I have classes that are a little bit more noisy, but that doesn't mean that they're not behaving. They're just – they just wanna Yeah, and that's okay. So, cultural competence doesn't just have to be about race or ethnicity or gender or whatever. It could

be also about – Or content. It could be about the kid and how they act every day, so that's been cool. That's been more of a recent discovery though.

(Bee, Interview 2, March 22,)

Bee's willingness to become even more culturally competent and move beyond her "normal" comfort levels, have led to higher participation and achievement for her students. The way she thought about students and their behaviors led to direct shifts in her instructional practice, including being more adaptive and responsive to the needs of her students. She stopped looking at certain behaviors like "loudness" or noise as disruptive to learning, and allowed her students to express themselves and ideas in a more authentic way. The role and influence of the CRI CIT on Bee's conscious choices to change her instruction underlines the role peer to peer collaboration can play in transforming pedagogy and allowing more meaningful reflection to take place to support those changes. Bee noted in her second interview that she tried a new type of classroom management because she listened to her peers and how they managed their classrooms in a way that was more culturally responsive.

Bee's development as a CRI teacher initially came out of her own efforts to be a more culturally competent teacher and through district and building professional development. In her first interview, Bee defined Culturally Responsive Instruction as:

I guess. I would say, well, first, curriculum and resources and materials and lessons that reflect my student population and, even if my student population wasn't diverse, having the same curriculum because, you know, it's still incredibly important to learn about what's going on with different groups of people because we're so intertwined and globalized and we have so many current issues happening that's so important.

And not just the curriculum, but how you teach it, so how respectful you are. Are you willing to ask students about their culture to, you know, learn about it? And then – yeah, so curriculum, me the teacher, and then the other students in the room, making sure that they're learning and being respectful and valuing it, too, which is really difficult sometimes to get that to happen. So, I would say all of that.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

Again, using Ladson-Billings' criteria of the essential components of CRI, Bee's focus was on her ability to "build a bridge" between the curriculum, the students' lives and interests, and the larger community. As a second-year teacher, Bee's focus had been becoming more familiar with the curriculum map and content for United States and World History. However, she demonstrates cultural proficiency in her ability to be aware of what and who was not being included in the curriculum or content. In time and through listening to her peers in the CRI CIT and reflecting on her own practices, Bee's practice of CRI deepened to include opportunities for students to develop and maintain cultural competence. In her second interview, Bee explained this change in her practice of CRI as:

...just thinking about sort of non-traditional ways to teach, ways that are student-centered, and for me, I'm becoming more and more comfortable with that. My first two years of teaching, I had a very hard time doing that because I was so focused on making sure they were learning the content. So, I spent so much time re-teaching everything and direct instruction because it was my own way of trying to make sure that I was doing my job correctly.

And now, this year and also this CIT and some examples that people have talked about, I've been able to sort of like, oh, okay, I can give this to them and see what they do with it, and that is where they get the power to connect to the content, to question it.

And I think just other opportunities as well, like choice – for my World War II unit, I'm gonna ask if anyone can help me with – I'm gonna create a project where students can look at a specific group of people and how they experienced the '40s. And some students might choose the ethnic group that they belong to, and some students might not.

And I have come across issues where students think that I expect them to pick the ethnic group that they're a part of, and I had to make it clear that I don't expect that. Just because you're Asian doesn't mean I expect you to pick to learn about how the Chinese or Japanese experienced World War II. Just because you're African-American doesn't mean I expect you to pick that group.

So, even just making that statement to my students was something that I didn't think about until after this CIT, after our conversations –

(Bee. Interview 2, March 22, 2017)

Through her interactions and caring conversations with peers in the CRI CIT, Bee was able to move toward critical competence. This is a critical step in CRI. Geneva Gay (2010) stresses that cultural proficiency is important to culturally responsive instruction because this type of instruction uses, “The cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and

effective... It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (p.31). Bee’s intention to broaden the type of activity she can do in one of the World History units reflects her attempts to broaden and be more inclusive of more diverse narratives and invites her students to explore their own identities or cultural narratives within the context of historical events. Geneva Gay (2010) speaks to this critical understanding on the teachers’ role as “cultural organizers” that, “teachers must understand how culture operates in daily classroom dynamics, create learning atmospheres that radiate cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate high academic achievement for all students” (p. 32).

Like Abby, Bee also noted that as a newer teacher, the CRI CIT enabled her to move past practices that included creating lesson plans and focused more on quality and inclusivity. Having the space and time to talk to her peers and gain insights and materials that she could directly use in instruction of her classes was critical to this change.

Oh, this is totally more comfortable – like better. Because you can ask questions.

You can gear the, the CIT to what your needs are and what you want. Like, we can be direct with each other in the smaller setting and – provide more, like specific feedback and get feedback.

A lot of it in those big rooms, it feels like they're just trying to fill time. With this being a little bit more individualized it didn't – at the very least you were getting – and sitting down and talking to your colleagues about classroom stuff, which even if it was away from the topic, or what the purpose was, that's still really important to have those conversations. It just helps as a teacher, as – to be happy in your work environment, but to get other ideas and to talk to other – you know

it just – it, it helps facilitate that type of work relationship that's very beneficial to the overall –

(Bee, Interview 2, March 22, 2017)

For the participants of this CRI CIT, establishing a clear domain and community provided the space and safety for real reflection and helped them deepen their understanding and practice of CRI. However, the participants' journey of cultural competence and reflections while in the CRI CIT were highly shaped by their racial identities and experiences. These identities and experiences influenced their participation in the group in what they would share with one another and the impact it would have on their peers.

Finding 3: Teachers' own racial identity and experiences influences and shapes their practice of CRI.

In the interviews with all of the participants, I asked a question that was based on Critical Race Theory. In the first interview, I asked participants:

How do you think your racial identity shapes your teaching?

How do you think your students' racial identity affects your teaching?

Both Abby and Bee demonstrated an ability to reflect and communicate on their own attitudes, motives, and understandings as teachers and how they were influenced by their various identities and experiences. This provided a window to understanding how a teacher's racial identity and personal experiences influenced their practice of CRI.

Abby's multiple identities as a black, middle-class, straight woman directly influenced her practice of CRI. Abby's development towards critical consciousness included, "uncovering the

particularity and contingency of her knowledge and practices to generate advances in them”

(Schmeichel, 2012). In her first interview, Abby shared her background and experiences:

I grew up in an urban area; I went to a larger high school. I (fourth through eighth grade) I went to a private school, and I made the decision that I wanted to go to a public school, just because – in my school – the same 40 kids, we kind of followed each other, and I was always “the black girl.” Well, there were four of us, so we were like – we were “the black girls.” So, it was even like, “We’re gonna talk about slavery; we’re gonna watch “Roots. AA, how do you feel? Reyna, how do you feel?” And it was assumed that we would all be friends, and we were all close. Not saying I didn’t like fourth through eighth grade – it was great. I was like, “This can’t be the world.” That’s seriously what I said to my mom. It was like, “We live in Waterbury. This is an urban area. There are so many black people, so many Latinos, so many different groups overall. Even different groups – when I went to high school, I realized you could be white, and you could be so many things. And it’s like, “Can I just not be ‘that one’?”

My school was pretty diverse – especially compared to middle school – but diverse, again, meant a lot of black and Latino students. In terms of class, it was middle class, and lower income students, which is very different from here. So that was an adjustment, when some students are like, “I’m going island-hopping.” And I was like, “Island-hopping, like World War II?” Like, “No! Island-hopping – my family has a yacht, and we’re going from island to island.” I was like, “That’s a thing that people do?” Alright, they talk about, “I went to Paris!” I was like, “I went to Paris for the first-time last year! You’re 13!”

I know I definitely didn't learn any of this in my U.S. history classes, which are the classes that I enjoyed the most, and English. I took AP U.S. and English classes; they were my strongpoint. A lot of the history was just people that were in positions of power that were telling the histories, and even the books that we read, they were very traditional, like you're going to read this because it's required in high school. The high school that I went to, they didn't really start incorporating things until recently. I know that because my mom works there and I'm still in touch with some of my former teachers, and they're trying to reflect more of their student population now. That definitely didn't happen while I was in school.

(Abby, Interview 2, April 5, 2017)

This passage illustrates the way that Abby's own experience as a black student in a predominantly white school and then again as a black teacher in a more privileged high school, might influence her perception of what is or isn't missing in the curriculum or instructional materials that she would use for her students. In her own experiences, Abby learned little about African-American history and as an adult, she finds herself teaching a student population that includes very privileged students with access to more resources than what she had grown up with. After attending three CIT sessions, in her interview, Abby connected her personal experience to the experiences of her students:

I think even the things that we teach. It's assumed that we're going to talk about, for lack of a better word, white men in history. But if you want to teach – I teach African American history. It was kind of a struggle to get that. Not with our current department head, but I was told the first time “We don't have the interest” or “That's too specialized

to take it.” So, I think it’s even the curriculum; it’s an assumption that it’s another or it’s an elective. Our students aren’t interested in it.

The way that I’ve thought about it is just very much from a teacher perspective and the idea that we, meaning education, is largely a part of the problem. Again, we’re denying whole groups of people their history and their culture, and we’re treating it as if it’s not important. How can we be surprised when we go out into a society and kids are told that they aren’t important if we aren’t doing it here? So, it’s just made me think about what I teach and the value that I put in certain things that I teach.

The way certain students are treated and situations are handled, and even the curriculum and what’s being taught of certain students and the histories that we – I’m speaking specifically about history because I’m a history teacher – the content that we think is important. I don’t think a lot of students are seeing themselves in school so they’re not interested in what they’re learning.

(Abby, Interview 2, April 5, 2017)

In order to create CRI lessons or materials, educators must examine their own bias and unpack their racialized baggage. In Abby’s case, discussing her own experiences as a black student, in her interviews and sharing with her peers in the CRI CIT, allowed her to focus on her own concrete personal experience. Giles and Hughes (2009) point out the importance of this type of reflection as “issues of social capital and privilege find relevance in racial discourse. Communities of color possess self-agency, cultural capital, and community cultural wealth that is often overlooked, ignored, or relegated to deficit thinking by some stakeholders across

educational settings” (2009, p. 690). As Abby created CRI lessons and materials, she intentionally stepped outside her area of “expertise” and proactively familiarized herself with additional narratives that might reflect the needs of her students and embedded powerful cultural resources to create an even more inclusive and diverse narrative in her classroom.

My initial interview with Bee revealed what is unique about Bee; she is aware and focused on developing her own critical consciousness, understandings, and motivations around issues of race and class. When asked if she felt that the current education system was equitable for all students, Bee has a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be a critically conscious teacher. For example, in her first interview she stated:

Well, it's in part the education system and it's in part, again, like just the history of, you know, all the red lining and redistricting. You know, the movement of industries out of big cities. And that's why we have, you know, a majority population in inner cities of "people of color" who are lower class, who, you know, are more vulnerable to crime and other things because of where they live and how crowded it is and everything else. And then that plays a part in the access to their kids' education and that whole connect.

So, education directly, you know, there still is, I think, a part that racism plays. There are still teachers who are not even close to culturally competent. There are still teachers who say inappropriate things to students of color. There are still students who don't get how some content we teach is going to affect other students or what their privilege is. But I think we're doing a lot better with teaching that, teaching privilege, and teaching all of that. That's a huge question.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

In tackling the role that privilege has played historically, Bee is moving toward building her students' critical consciousness by improving and exploring her own awareness of her own identity. In her first interview, Bee spoke about how her white privilege, individual identities, and cultural background influenced her understanding and practice of CRI:

It depends – honestly, it depends on the content I'm teaching and the kids. So, you know, I see myself as, you know, I'm in a power position. I'm a teacher and, you know, I'm white, and I'm a woman, and that's a power position in itself. We don't think of it that way in that we can influence what our young males think of women. So a lot of what I talk about and share should do with letting my kids see me as a white person, check my privilege, and talk about it. And when we talk about, I mean, there are horrible things that come in history that we have to mention, things like, you know, horrible things that have been done to women. Things like rape, things that, you know, just the history of exploiting and oppressing women, that – you know, definitely I remember when I was a young student, it affects you personally. It makes –

You have to find about it. Maybe it connects to something that's happened to you in your life or your family and it gets your heart racing and you get, you know, you get upset. And to be able to convey to my students that, listen, this has happened, we need to deal with it. It's not okay, right? We need to respect each other. It affects my teaching a lot, especially when we get into horrible stuff like genocides and all of that. And then as a working-class person, or I guess previously, you know, I make sure to share with my kids, because not all of my kids are affluent and have money, you know.

I have a good amount of kids that come from the kinds of families that I grew up in. So, to let them know that their teacher used to be them, to me, is huge. Because I used to not feel good enough because I always thought that my teachers grew up in fancy homes and fancy families, went to fancy colleges, and it's like, no, you can do it, too. So that definitely affects my teaching a lot. And how I explain things like, you know, the industrial revolution and how people lived or, you know, in American history, those sort of themes, too.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

As a teacher attempting to be culturally responsive to students, Bee reached a critical understanding of cultural consciousness in that she acknowledged how her own background can influence her perspective and relationship with the content she is teaching. She speaks openly and honestly about how her gender and class identities and background allows her to use her social identities to establish and strengthen relationship with her students. Unlike many other teachers who might share her background, Bee is very aware of the differences between her own and her students' backgrounds, but also identifies areas of intersectionality or shared experiences and identities between them.

One of the dangers of the demographic gap between teachers and students is, without such reflection or understanding of one's own identity or bias,

...white guilt blocks critical reflection because whites end up feeling individually blameworthy for racism. In fact, they become over concerned with whether or not they 'look racist' and forsake the more central project of understanding the contours of structural racism. Anyone who has taught racial themes has witnessed this situation.

Many whites subvert a structural study of racism with personalistic concerns over how they are perceived as individuals. (Leonardo, 2004, p.4).

Even though CRI has the potential to help teachers bridge the cultural mismatch between themselves and their students while addressing pressures to raise all student achievement, enacting CRI effectively requires that teachers have the “ability to recognize differences among students and families, respond to those differences positively, and to interact with others in a range of sociocultural environments (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). One of Bee’s strengths as an educator, is acknowledging that the work of being culturally competent is a continuum, that there is always more to learn and practice. She noted in her last interview, “I am nowhere near done with this topic” (Bee Interview 2, March 27, 2017). This shows that despite her growing confidence as a new teacher, Bee understands that this type of understanding and instruction is beyond simply “good teaching.” Gay (2004) notes that unlike Bee, “few teachers have adequate knowledge about how conventional teaching practices reflect European American cultural values. Nor are they sufficiently informed about the cultures of different ethnic groups” (p. 22). Alternately, CRI teachers like Bee who come from identities or groups different from their students, understand that, “the structure, assumptions, substance, and operations of conventional educational enterprises are European American cultural icons” (Gay, 2004). Additionally, in the article *Good Teaching? An examination of culturally relevant pedagogy as an equity practice*, Schmeichel (2012) cautions that:

The belief that children of different racial groups were inherently different from each other rested on the assumption that white, middle class behavior and attitudes were typical or normal. Researchers were particularly concerned with the cultural difference of the white, middle class, female teaching corps and the students of color in their

classroom. The interactions between teachers who expected ‘the norm’ and students who were not ‘the norm’ were described as problematic, and as contributing to the academic failure of the students of color. For example, Gordon and Wilkerson (1966, p. 57) argued that ‘when a teacher understands how the disadvantaged differ from herself and from the children she may have previously taught, she becomes aware of the degree to which her own middle-class values inhibit her positive perceptions of and relations with these children’.

Even though Bee is a member of the “white, middle class, female teaching corps,” she is developing her critical consciousness that includes self-identification and how it relates to her students. Bee also appreciates and values the diversity of the student body. In her first interview she noted:

Without it being a magnet or charter school. That’s why I think it's diverse. And also it's, I mean, diversity isn’t just ethnicity, either. It's, you know, religion. We have a lot of students of different denominations. And we have diversity in students of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We have a lot more economic diversity than people think in Vineyard Vines, which kind of annoys me when they think, oh, all you teach is rich white kids. It's like no, no, no, no, not at all.

Wonderful. Smart. I would say diverse. Eager. And then sometimes frustrating and annoying also. Difficult. Overall, respectful. Like they have a really great overall culture, like school culture, that they all are part of.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

What becomes clear in her conversations about her students, is how Bee looks at the diversity of her students as a strength and not an obstacle. In addition, Bee expects excellence in her students both academically and behaviorally as she noted:

I think to a lot of them I'm – I don't know how to say this. Well, not as much here as in other districts, but I'm like the accountability person. Like, okay, let's get it together here, how come this isn't completed. And part of it is because of the skills class I teach. I'm the supporter, I think, to a lot of them. I emotionally support them. I notice when they're upset or when they're off. I hope that to my female students I'm a role model and to my male students, you know, there's been some instances where I've had to talk to them about their behavior and how that's not respectful to female students or teachers.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

As a researcher and peer Abby and Bee's cases helped me understand the role that personal identities can play in shaping the motivation, understanding, and practice of CRI. Abby's identities and experiences motivate her desire to find more areas of intersectionality in content and instruction. This led her to explore LGBTQ narratives and issues within African-American history. Bee brings a fairly nuanced understanding of how her own social identities help and hinder her from developing relationships with her students and in teaching in ways that foster their own critical consciousness.

Comparing the Two Case Studies: What can we learn?

These two case studies provided me with insight and understanding to start answering my research questions. In both cases, I found evidence that a COP/CIT can create a safe space for teachers to authentically reflect on their practices and learn from one another, that cultural

proficiency is a prerequisite to being able to provide effective CRI, and finally that teachers' racial identities influence and shape how they understand and enact CRI. Abby and Bee make interesting case studies because even though they work in the same high school, in the same department, and have collaborated on a content team before, they demonstrate just how different the experience can be for a teacher to adopt CRI based on what their identities and backgrounds are and how many years of teaching experience they have. Both teachers attended a university program that prepared them for certification. However, as preservice teachers, each of them had a different level of exposure to the basic ideas and concepts of CRI.

In comparing their case studies, Abby and Bee provided examples of how an experienced teacher and a less experienced teacher can change their instructional practices and understandings of CRI through participation in a CIT. What is unique about both teachers is their commitment and high level of understanding of what CRI is and an ability to monitor their own critical consciousness without being specifically asked to. Abby and Bee's case studies are a good start to begin examining how effective a CIT that has a clearly established domain and community can provide the safe space, reflection time, ownership of identity, and willingness to become "woke" in order to become effective practitioners of CRI and provide insight on how experienced teachers can truly change mindsets and practices.

The cases also show how teachers' racial and other identities shape their practice of CRI. Abby's experience as a student and her instructional approaches as a teacher reflect one of the key components of Critical Race Theory by, "creating the structures through which voice can emerge, students can begin to develop their own understandings of knowledge to contradict the negative impacts of learning through a White-dominant form of knowledge that denies

experiences that do not fit” (Knaus, 2013, p. 142). For Bee, her background as a white female from the working class influenced her mindset and focus in the classroom:

So, you know, I see myself as, you know, I'm in a power position. I'm a teacher and, you know, I'm white, and I'm a woman, and that's a power position in itself. We don't think of it that way in that we can influence what our young males think of women. So a lot of what I talk about and share has to do with letting my kids see me as a white person, check my privilege, and talk about it. And when we talk about, I mean, there are horrible things that come in history that we have to mention, things like, you know, horrible things that have been done to women.

(Bee, Interview 1, January 4, 2017)

Bee's ability to be aware of her positionality with that of her students, gives her a more sophisticated understanding of what cultural proficiency is. Culture is not just about race, but also about other identities like class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Bee demonstrates an awareness of this complexity and how she can use her power and address her privilege in order to include more diverse narratives in her classroom.

CHAPTER 5: SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

Significance and Implications

Implications for Professional Development and Practice

This study has implications for districts' approaches to professional development and the adoption and implementation of Community of Practice models as a more productive approach to providing Culturally Responsive Instruction training. In addition, the study reinforces the continued need for districts to provide long-term professional development for cultural proficiency. In doing so, districts would encourage and support CRI and help lead to systemic changes towards cultural proficiency and equity-oriented schools. In the section below, I will discuss recommendations related to each of my findings.

Recommendations

Finding 1: COP/CIT can create a safe space for teachers to authentically reflect on their practices and learn from one another. This can lead to teachers developing cultural proficiency for themselves and their students.

1) District and building level professional development should be based on Collaborative Inquiry Models. COP/CIT provide a more authentic, non-evaluative environment for teachers to communicate in a more authentic way, have higher participation, and disclose areas of weakness or failures that they would like to change. COP/CIT when implemented with fidelity, can offer safe spaces for educators to constructively question their practices while receiving ideas and best practices from peers. Thus, district and school leaders should plan professional development time so that CIT has more time to meet during designated PD days and fewer mass meetings that entail an administrator or expert talking at teachers. Districts and building administrators can provide frameworks, training, and expectations using a

PARC model as a more authentic way to capture participants' responses without the need to "evaluate" teachers while identifying specific needs, resources, bias, or expectations that can aid or impede that growth.

Finding 2: Cultural proficiency is a prerequisite to being able to provide effective CRI.

1) **Cultural Proficiency training must be provided prior Culturally Responsive**

Instruction. Cultural proficiency or even cultural competence is not a given for any teacher.

Even teachers with experience or commitment to social justice issues or inclusion do not always appreciate the complexities or intersectionality of their own identities and by extension, their students' identities. As Gay (2008) points out, Culturally Responsive instruction is more than simply good teaching, and it is not identical for all students, settings, or circumstances. Cultural proficiency is a continuum in and of itself as student population and needs change from classroom to classroom. The work is ongoing and requires continual reflection and review of practices by teachers to understand how their own unrecognized bias can obstruct even their greatest intentions. It would then be a grave mistake for any district to provide professional development on CRI without first providing ongoing PD on cultural proficiency. CRI cannot be enacted with fidelity without a foundation of cultural proficiency in order to guide those actions or activities.

With trained teacher facilitators, districts must build the capacity to facilitate, provide opportunities, and time for teachers to be introduced to, process, and reflect on their journey on the cultural competence continuum. The topic requires process and requires time beyond one traditional professional development meeting. This kind of training must take place over time and be revisited. Teachers' more authentic knowledge of the cultural competence continuum would enable them to be better practitioners of culturally responsive instruction.

Finding 3: Teachers' own racial identity and experiences influence and shape their practice of CRI.

1) **A teacher's multiple identities and their own experiences as a student or as a colleague, will influence their practice of Culturally Responsive Instruction.** Teachers tend to teach what they know in the instructional style that they themselves experienced as students. Therefore, a teacher's multiple identities or their own experience in the education system would guide their adoption of content, activities, or strategies to teach their students. In a recent study, Cherng and Halpin (2016) examined this phenomenon and noted, "A growing body of comparative and quantitative work that examines preservice and early teacher multicultural beliefs finds that Latino and Black teachers are more multiculturally aware than their White peers and that higher levels of multicultural awareness are linked to better classroom environments" (p. 416). However, what is often ignored is how a teacher's identities and experiences can influence interactions with peers or administrators. This supports the efforts and understanding of how important it is to recruit and retain teachers of color. These experiences can be positive or negative, depending on the biases or assumptions being made about a teacher's identity, qualifications, or motivations based on their perceived identities. Pittman (2010) explains:

While all women faculty experience sexism in their interactions with male colleagues, especially if they express a feminist perspective (Ropers, Huilman and Shackelford 2003), women of color report dealing with both gender and racial oppression in their peer interactions. Specifically, black women negotiate the mothering-yet-obedient "mammy" stereotype (Moses, 1997; TuSmith and Reddy, 2002), Latinas deal with the presumption that they prefer to focus on home and family (Nieves-Squires, 1991), and Asian and

Asian American women grapple with the stereotype of being passive (Hune, 1998).

Women faculty of color must also contend with their white peers' assumption that they are affirmative action hires (Agathangelou et al., 2002; Ballerina et al., 2004; J. W. Smith and Calasanti, 2005; Medina and Luna, 2000; Moses, 1997) and, thus, not legitimate scholars and teachers (p. 185)

These types of experiences for teachers of color can provide them with a reminder of the systemic nature of bias that not only affects students, but can also undermine a teacher's efforts or legitimacy as they themselves experience stereotype threats or stereotype tax within the same educational environment.

Significance

With an ever-growing demographic gap between teachers and the students that they provide instruction to, more effective and long-lasting ways to address the achievement gap must include efforts to develop teachers' Cultural Proficiency and Culturally Responsive Instruction. Given the sensitive nature of examining bias or reflecting on one's own experience of identity, this also shows that professional development around these topics should not be hierarchical instruction or "banking style" education for educators. Instead, educators should be given the opportunity to be involved in the planning and implementation, and gain the benefits of peer to peer communities of practice. As a woman and educator of color, I have personally benefited from the opportunity to conduct this PARC study and act as a facilitator for my peers. It has exposed me to multiple narratives that I was less familiar with and this has resulted in my ability to be more aware, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of my students and peers.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Baseline Questions		
Background Questions	COP/ PD Experience	CRT/CRI Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender 2. Age 3. Ethnicity 4. Town/place you grew up 5. Socio-economic class growing up? 6. Education-highest degree? 7. Where did you go to university? 8. What was your major? 9. Did your academic program include a multicultural or social justice class requirement? If so, what class (es) did you take? 10. What made you want to become a teacher? 11. How and why did you apply to Vineyard Vines? 12. How many years have you been teaching? 13. How are the students in Vineyard Vines similar or different to your classmates in school growing up? To other students who have taught? 14. How would you describe your students to me? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What has been your favorite PD as a teacher? 2. How was that PD presented? 3. Who presented it i.e. administrator, district staff, outside agency, or colleague? 4. Did you immediately apply what you learned to your classroom instruction? 5. How long did you use the strategies of knowledge gained by this PD? 6. What are your goals for being in this CIT? 7. Who develops curriculum? 8. What are the major goals of curriculum? 9. What do you want to take away from it? 10. What do you think will be a challenge? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define what Culturally Responsive instruction is? 2. What is it that you hope to learn or gain from culturally responsive instruction? 3. Do you feel that our current education system is equitable for all students, why or why not? 4. While you were in school K-12, do you remembering learning about the different cultures that exist in the US, what can you recall? 5. Do you think that race or racism still plays a role in our education system, how so? 6. Give me an example of your experience with CRI like a lesson or activity? 7. What type of role do you feel that you have played in advocating for your students? 8. Why do you want to implement or improve culturally responsive instruction? 9. What type of impact do you think this will have on your students? 10. How do you think your racial identity shapes your teaching? 11. How do you think your students' racial identity affects your teaching?
Mid Study Interview Questions: Tracking and capturing areas that were identified in previous interview, group sessions, online		

posts, and correspondence		
Background Questions	COP/ PD Experience	CRT/CRI Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you feel about this learning format? 2. Do you feel more comfortable learning more in a CIT rather than in a traditional PD facilitated by an administrator, why or why not? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the format and environment of this CIT help or hinder your progress in creating CRI materials? 2. Are there structures in this CIT that allow you to participate or voice your opinions? 3. Were the materials or readings helpful in your understanding of CRI and for making actual lesson plans or materials? 4. Has participation changed your understanding of CRI, how so? 5. Has your colleagues' conversations, comments, or feedback help or hinder your confidence in implementing CRI? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you feel that your relationships with student have changed since you started participating? If so, how? 2. Has your understanding of systemic racism changed or develop since the start of this CIT, how, to what do you think has led to this change? How has the CIT contributed to this change? 3. What types of changes if any, have taken place between you and your students since the start of this CIT?
Questions for the end of the study:		
COP/ PD Experience		CRT/CRI Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the tools, resources, and processes of a collaborative community of educators that can shape teachers' receptiveness, understanding, and practice of CRI? 2. How does a teacher's individual racial identity or cultural points-view influence their participation in the group and the group processes and work? 3. Are there any challenges or deterrents as a teacher that you feel you could address by additional training/coaching/support? 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do teachers' racial identities shape their participation in the group and effectiveness of CRI?

4.Do you feel that you need more raining, coaching, or support in understanding and meeting the needs of your students?	
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