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**Accelerated Growth: A Case Study of Teacher Beliefs and Instructional Strategies That
Promote Achievement for Students of Color**

By

Astein K. Osei

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Educational Doctorate Degree
in Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota**

October 2022

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

Accelerated Growth: A Case Study of Teacher Beliefs and Instructional Strategies That Promote
Achievement for Students of Color

Astein K. Osei

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's
committee:

Dr. Melissa Krull, Advisor

Dr. Bernadeia Johnson, Committee Member

Dr. Timothy Berry, Committee Member

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**ACCELERATED GROWTH: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHER BELIEFS AND
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE ACHIEVEMENT FOR
STUDENTS OF COLOR**

ASTEIN K. OSEI

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for students of color in a suburban Minneapolis district. The research aimed to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that lead to traditionally marginalized populations of students in grades 2-5 demonstrating growth on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. The study affirmed that teacher beliefs and instructional practices matter when attempting to create academic growth for traditionally marginalized groups of students. During the study several themes surfaced in relationship to the importance of educator beliefs and instructional practices.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In all of my personal and professional experiences in the field of education, I have maintained a passion for changing outcomes for students. As my critical consciousness has increased, my sense of urgency has been amplified as I continue to uncover implications for students of color and Indigenous students if we stay on the same trajectory of student achievement in this country. The trajectory of public education for students of color and Indigenous students is similar to the trajectory of a speeding semi-truck with no brakes headed into a crowded intersection. There is such a thing as being too late, and as a country we are rapidly approaching a crowded intersection where our inequitable educational practices are going to collide with a democratic society that needs its countrymen to be educated in order for survival. Edmin (2016) suggested that a new approach is required to educate urban youth.

The work to become truly effective educators in urban schools requires a new approach to teaching that embraces the complexity of place, space, and their collective impact on the psyche of urban youth. This approach is necessary whether we are talking about preservice educators about to embark on their first year of teaching, those who have been in the field for a while, or the millions of people who have been drawn into the dysfunctional web of urban education as a parent, policymaker, or a concerned citizen. (Edmin, 2016, p. 23)

Background of the Problem

In today's high accountability era of public schooling, students of color and Native American students are lagging behind their White peers in almost every proficiency measure. These predictable and persistent gaps are compounded by the lack of relationship, relevance,

rigor, and realness that students of color and Native American students experience in classrooms across this country. In most cases, the predictable and persistent gaps that exist are contrary to the district missions and vision statements of the districts in which the students attend. Hillard (1995) raised some imperative questions regarding the negative perceptions of African-American children, the invalidation of their culture, and the failure of the educational system to recognize and authenticate these differences (as cited in Sampson, 2008, p. 1). These gaps are so predictable and persistent that it has led many states, including the state of Minnesota, to introduce legislation to interrupt this pattern.

In 2013, the state of Minnesota passed the World's Best Workforce bill (School District Process for Reviewing Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Achievement; Striving for the World's Best Workforce, 2013). The bill was created to ensure every school in the state of Minnesota was making progress on increasing student performance. Under this bill, school districts are required to develop plans that address student performance in five areas: (1) all students graduate from high school; (2) all children are ready for school; (3) all third-graders can read at grade level; (4) all students are ready for career and college; and, (5) all racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

According to the Ciresi Walburn Foundation for Children, Minnesota's 2016-17 graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students placed Minnesota 50th among the 50 states. Minnesota's graduation rates for Indigenous students ranked 49th out of 50. While this achievement gap is manifesting itself in E-12 educational systems across the state, Minnesota also has some of the most significant disparity between Blacks and Whites in unemployment, health care, incarceration, and homeownership (Guo, 2015). The state is also developing serious problems with racial disparities and segregation, issues that its equitable-growth policies have

done little to fix (Guo, 2015). The achievement and employment gaps are compounded by the state having one of the fastest-growing populations of students of color in the country.

While Minnesota's population is aging and 70% of the jobs in the state require at least a high school education, there currently are not enough qualified candidates to fill the positions (Guo, 2015). The World's Best Workforce bill is attempting to address the persistent and predictable gaps in many of the key indicators used to assess student success. This requires school districts to be strategic in their planning and align their resources to accomplish the goals identified by the state through this legislation.

There has been a significant amount of research conducted in the five goal areas of the World's Best Workforce legislation. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE, 2004) reported on a three-year school readiness study that involved 49 elementary schools in the state. In addition to reporting the results of the assessments conducted during the research, the study also included a definition for school readiness. The MDE identifies school readiness as the skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments that children know and can do as they enter kindergarten in the following areas of child development: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, cognition and general knowledge, and creativity and the arts.

The World's Best Workforce legislation specifically focuses on third-grade reading proficiency because of the correlation between third-grade reading proficiency and school dropout. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (Education Digest, 2010) has studied the link between high school graduation and students' ability to read by the third grade. A 2010 KIDS COUNT Special Report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation suggested that reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development. Failure to read

proficiently is linked to higher rates of school dropout, which suppresses individual earning potential. It also negatively impacts the nation's competitiveness and general productivity.

High school graduation has been linked to students being college and career ready. According to a Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education study in Minnesota (2013), between 2008 and 2010, 49% of younger adults (aged 25-34) had at least an associate's degree, compared to 42% of older adults (aged 45-54). Even with the compelling need for a strong workforce and research that shows a correlation between third-grade reading scores and high school graduation, school districts across the state have not been able to level the playing field.

In this state and in this country, race has historically been an indestructible force that determines access and opportunity. Due to the permanence of racism and how race is lived in the United States, racial achievement gaps, which are referenced in the World's Best Workforce Legislation, are commonplace in many school districts across the country. So why is this the case? Why are students of color and Native American students across this country lagging behind their White peers in proficiency measures? Dr. Derrick Bell (1992) described racism in his book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* as an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society. Ferri and Connor (2005) similarly asked, "As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown* decision, the question naturally arises: what progress has been made towards integrated education? Recent statistics are not altogether encouraging and suggest that many gains have actually been lost" (p. 453). Ladson-Billings (2000) and Delgado-Bernal (1998, 2002) have asked: Whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted?

The culture of the classroom is important for student learning. Just as important is students having access to learning experiences that are relevant to who they are racially and

culturally. Students seeing themselves in the curriculum on a daily basis and learning about each other's culture are intended outcomes of multicultural education. Zhang (2011) suggested that the intent of multicultural education is to create an intercultural model that advances a climate of inclusion where individual and group differences are valued. Most often the culture that influences pedagogy and policy is the culture of the dominant social group, which is White culture in the United States. Multicultural educational practices have focused on the superficial cultural differences like food or fashion and have ignored underlying issues of racism and cultural conflicts that need to be addressed in schools (Haar & Robicheau, 2008, p. 5). This form of programming has been coined *heroes and holidays*. While there is a place for the celebration of heroic individuals in history, this form of multicultural education is not sufficient in creating a learning environment where students see themselves in the curriculum on a day-to-day basis. Weisman and Garza (2002) stated, "Some [educators] understand multicultural education as a largely technical enterprise, which requires them to use multicultural literature to accommodate different learning styles, or include international holidays" (as cited in Ullucci, 2010, p. 140). The process of learning and teaching has to be more than a technical endeavor for educators if they wish to connect to students' racial and cultural lived experiences.

The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy often eludes public school educators. Ladson-Billings (1995) found in her research that making curriculum culturally relevant did not require an intricate formula or specific steps for instruction. She identified culturally relevant teaching as routine strategies that are a part of good teaching. The difference is that in order for the instruction to be culturally relevant, the teacher must be intentional in engaging students and identifying content that is rigorous, real, and relevant to students. Good teaching can only be considered good teaching if it impacts students and influences them to engage and learn. This

often occurs through relationships and an understanding of the needs of the students in a class. Bartolome (1994) criticized the search for the *right* teaching strategies and argued for a humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice.

Noguera (2007) explained that our schools are expected to educate the neediest children and are blamed when they do not do as well as the most privileged students in this country. Schools had to develop systems to account for these disparities, and because of that we have seen a disproportionate representation of students of color in certain special education categories.

Ferri and Connor (2005) suggested that

White privilege and racialized conceptions of ability have allowed some parents and educators to use certain special-education categories as a tool for continued racial segregation. Children of different races have been classified into different categories, with Black and Latino students most likely to be overrepresented in the majority of categories, and placed in a more restrictive setting. (p. 455)

Special education is viewed as a tool of exclusion, placing students of color and American Indian students in the most restrictive learning environments.

Ladson-Billings (1995) explained in one of her studies that fundamental to the teacher's beliefs about teaching was that all of the students could and must succeed. Consequently, the teachers in her study saw it as their responsibility to guarantee the success of each student. The students who seemed furthest behind received the most attention and encouragement from the teachers. In public education systems, students that seem furthest behind are students of color and Native American students. This is the case not because students of color and Native American students do not have the intellectual ability to learn, but instead because they have

limited connection or no connection to their epistemology in the learning environment. Milner and Laughter (2015) stated, “We have found teachers usually feel much more efficacious discussing and conceptualizing content and teaching practices focused on poverty and socioeconomic status than they do race” (p. 342). The problem with race is that it does not operate in isolation of other factors. Poverty is a valid indicator when assessing student learning, but the implications of poverty are compounded when race is added to the equation.

Students of color and Native American students demonstrate a great deal of resilience. “Resilience has been recognized as a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events but also draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Students of color and Native American students dream about their possibilities in life regardless of the motivation or lack thereof in their E-12 educational experience.

Yosso (2005) identified aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resilience is evident in those who allow themselves and their children to dream possibilities beyond their present circumstances. Every student that enters a classroom enters with a set of hopes and dreams for the future. The ability of a teacher to identify a student’s hopes and dreams and use that as positive motivation to engage a student in the learning environment is what makes the curriculum relevant. Lynn and Dixson (2013) offered that professors, teachers, and scholars desiring to sharpen their pedagogy would benefit from multiple perspectives and voices outside of their profession (p. 32). Sampson (2008) identified that incorporating a diverse curriculum allows teachers and students to examine racial attitudes and behaviors while addressing students of color and Native American students’ needs.

Bathey and Franke (2015) suggested that “the focus is to support teachers and gather counter-evidence to challenge dominant deficit narratives about students of color” (p. 433). Identifying and engaging the lived experiences of marginalized groups of students creates space for a multiple perspective and understanding of students. Relationships are essential in creating culturally relevant learning environments. Understanding the lived experience of students helps to strengthen relationships and foster the creation of meaningful learning experiences.

Unfortunately, teacher preparation programs do not always teach teachers how to align the interest of the students being served with the interest of the educational system. So often it is framed as ‘this or that’ as opposed to a *this and that* mindset. Gillborn (2013) stated that “it is surprising that so much attention has focused on interest-convergence (which describes an exceptional set of social and political conditions) rather than its reverse, the much more common position, where racial interests are assumed to diverge” (p. 479). In the matter of culturally relevant instruction, it appears school districts across the United States have continually come to a place of interest divergence. Gillborn (2013) describes interest-divergence as a situation where White people imagine that some benefit will accrue from the further marginalization and oppression of racially minoritized groups. The interest-divergence explained by Gilborn in many instances hides in plain sight for people of color and Indigenous people in this country. This is compounded by the belief that the *American Dream*, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, is equally accessible to everyone in this country. Pine and Hilliard (1990) assert that “the problem of racism demands the attention of all educators. As American society rapidly grows more diverse, we must give top priority to ensuring that all students receive their birthright of educational equity” (p. 1). The inequity in access to culturally relevant instruction for students of color and Indigenous students perpetuates the divergence.

Over time educators have developed a deeper understanding of the need to be inclusive and utilize diverse curriculum. While educators have increased consciousness in this area, there are still challenges in implementing the curriculum. There is a knowing and doing gap, as Barth (1997) explained: “Little is known about the effects of different professional development models. Wouldn’t analyzing their impact on teachers’ ability to grow student achievement be an improvement over the current guessing game?” (p. 2) Educators understand the need but are unable to employ the appropriate strategies to bring their knowing to doing.

Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that there is a need to know much more about the practice of successful teachers for African-Americans and other students who have been poorly served by our schools. We need to have an opportunity to explore alternative research paradigms that include the voices of parents and communities in non-exploitative ways (p. 163). Much attention has been given to the literature on parents of color and Native American parents’ involvement in their child’s education. There is a deficit frame as it relates to these parents and their desire to be a part of their child’s educational experience. Parents of color and Native American parents can offer a window into the most effective ways to engage their children in the classroom. Just as the students feel disconnected to the school environment, parents feel disconnected and oftentimes choose not to engage in school events.

Haar and Robicheau (2008) explained that a challenge for educators in multicultural inclusive classrooms is to understand the educational ramifications of teaching children who live in multicultural environments (p. 5). If my epistemology is connected to my culture, the absence of an acknowledgment of my epistemology during the learning process could cause me to disengage and question the teachers’ belief in me and/or care for me. Ullucci (2010) suggested that expanding teachers’ perspectives just may be the most important job of teacher educators.

The ability to build understanding through hands-on experiences in the community is important to interrupting a person's beliefs or ways of knowing. Sampson (2008) explained that "all students and teachers can bridge the cultural disconnect and rise to meet these current challenges through relevant curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 5). Ladson-Billings (2010) found that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: a) students experiencing academic success; b) students developing or maintaining cultural competence, and c) students developing a critical consciousness.

If all students and teachers can bridge the cultural disconnect as it relates to creating culturally relevant learning environments, why is it not occurring and why do we have significant and persistent gaps in E-12 education in this country? Barth (1997) explained that research now demonstrates unequivocally that such children can achieve if highly effective teachers teach them. There needs to be an examination of where value is placed in public education settings as it relates to teacher quality and preparedness. Race et al. (2002) suggested that "very often, this lack of preparation on the part of the teacher was also associated with not regularly attending the instructional sessions of the program" (p. 7). Culturally relevant classrooms are not born in a vacuum, and the need for collaborative environments is essential in creating positive learning environments for our most marginalized students.

In thinking about culturally relevant classrooms, school leadership is an important component in bringing this to life in a school setting. Haar and Robicheau (2008) identified school leaders as essential to evaluating basic beliefs and determining how to affect instruction for all students, especially students with diverse backgrounds. In most districts, schools follow the goals of clearly articulated strategic plans. These plans outline the vision and priority work of the school district. In many instances, these plans address the persistent and predictable gaps

that exist by race in achievement and other indicators. In a Center for Collaborative Education (2001) research study, it was found that “how a school shapes and organizes its use of time, its allocation of financial and other resources, and its way of grouping adults and students have a powerful effect on teaching and learning” (p. 15).

Leadership is essential in creating the conditions for effective instruction and it is also important in setting the culture of a school. Leaders in the ever-changing business world have led changes similar to those that need to occur in public education. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) observed that “mobilizing an organization to adapt its behaviors in order to thrive in new business environments is critical. Without such change, any company today would falter” (p. 124). Just as organizations need to adapt to the times, school districts need to adapt to meet the needs of their ever-changing student demographics. What we are seeing today with the persistent and predictable gaps in student achievement is an example of school districts not changing at the mental model level, which is necessary for transformational change to occur.

Leaders need to create a culture of achievement through the use of collaborative data teams. According to Huggins and Scheurich (2010), “professional learning communities have been found capable of helping schools that have historically struggled with creating student success for students from low-income families” (p. 166). The use of collaborative teams helps set the culture of high expectations and support. The Center of Collaborative Education (2011) suggested that the practice of collaborative teams involves teachers and teams in continuous collaborative work and planning to ensure that learning for all students is rigorous, purposeful, and related to the real world. The work of creating culturally relevant learning environments is hard work and challenges the beliefs and values of the adults in front of students on a daily basis. Heifetz (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997) defined this work as adaptive when our deeply held beliefs are

challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge.

Problem Statement

The previous discussions have established that providing culturally relevant pedagogy and effectively preparing collaborative teaching teams are challenging. However, some schools and districts have overcome these challenges and experienced success. A suburban school district located in the suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota, has been recognized as a leader in the area of racial equity. Examination of the beliefs and racially consciousness practices of teachers is necessary for replication in other school districts across Minnesota and beyond.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for students of color. The research aims to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that lead to traditionally marginalized populations of students in grades 2-5 demonstrating growth on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment.

Research Questions

The following questions address the larger qualitative idea that encompasses my desire to do this study:

- What are the beliefs or mindsets about race and culture teachers must have to successfully educate students of color and Indigenous students?
- What is the relationship between beliefs, strategies, race and culture when successfully educating students of color and Indigenous students?

Significance of the Study

The World's Best Workforce (2013) bill is relatively new. It was passed in 2013. The bill was designed to ensure every school district in the state is making strides to increase student performance. The bill requires school districts to pay closer attention to their strategic plans to ensure they are designed in a manner that will help schools accelerate student growth and achievement. Specifically, the plan calls for achievement gap reduction, forcing districts to evaluate the strategies they are using to meet the needs of students of color.

The legislation has not solved the problem of racial and economic achievement disparities in the state of Minnesota. Minnesota still has one of the largest racial achievement gaps in the country. Problems associated with the social construction of race and its byproduct, racism, cannot be legislated away. School districts will have to engage in adaptive work with adults who are responsible for changing outcomes for students. This work will have to address the mental models that are holding up the systems that are currently not working for students of color. The mental models will have to be flipped in order to produce learning environments that are responsive and relevant for students of color.

As the state examines its ever-changing racial demographics, political leaders must understand that if the state wants to see long-term future success that schools will have to start educating students that have been marginalized in this state for many years. According to MDE (2015), the fastest-growing segment of the state's future workforce are students of color. This demographic in the state of Minnesota currently has the lowest graduation rate. Gillborn (2013) suggested that policy is re/made through a process that balances the interests of White elites against the dangers of pushing minoritized groups to the point of rebellion. Critical race theorists would identify this legislation as interest convergence. The needs of marginalized students in this

state have been unaddressed for many years. Now that there is a need to sustain the workforce, the dominant social group is applying legislation that will benefit students of color and benefit their personal interest, a sustained thriving state economy.

The policy requires school districts to develop plans that address student performance in five areas: (1) all children are ready for school; (2) all third-graders can read at grade level; (3) all racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed; (4) all students are ready for career and college; (5) and all students graduate from high school. On the surface, the legislation appears to be focused on student achievement, graduation, and college and career readiness. A focus on college and career readiness will ultimately help improve several of the measures that are disproportionate in the state (employment, health care, homeownership, incarceration). If this legislation can produce its intended purpose, the state could move from being one of the worst states for Black people to live in to one of the best.

The intent of this legislation is commendable, and with appropriate and visionary leadership at the school district level districts could have significant impact on student achievement. A critical flaw in the legislation is that it requires the closing of racial and economic achievement gaps, but does not require school districts to provide professional development on race. A system cannot fix a problem with the same mindset that created the problem in the first place. In order for this to occur, the state will have to legislate racially and culturally-relevant school environments. Creating racially and culturally relevant learning environments is hard work and challenges the beliefs and values of the adults in front of students on a daily basis. Heifetz (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997) defined this work as adaptive: “Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge” (p. 124). In

addition to the policy implications, this study will be significant because when a teacher seeks to understand and utilize a student's culture in the learning process, it validates their lived experience and epistemology.

The beliefs, values, and strategies teachers use to influence and engage students are integral in the learning process. A student's culture cannot be invisible in the learning process. Yosso (2005) noted that race is often coded as cultural difference in schools. Culture influences how society is organized, how school curriculum is developed and how pedagogy and policy are implemented. Exploring belief systems that treat students of color as gifted and identifying instructional strategies that bring the experience of students of color from the margins to the center will be necessary if we as a state and country are going to ever close the persistent and predictable gaps that exist in public education between students of color and their White peers. As educators we must learn from the lived experiences of students of color and the teachers that successfully teach them so that we can develop an educational system in which students of color thrive and are able to achieve their dreams.

Definition of Key Terms

Achievement gap. For the purpose of this study, this phrase refers to the observed, persistent disparity in measures of educational performance among student groups.

Anti-racism. The active process of identifying and eliminating racism in schools by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably and students learn at high levels and have their spirit energized and enhanced.

Critical race theory. For the purpose of this study, this phrase is used to describe a theory that analyzes law and legal traditions through the history, contemporary experiences, and racial sensibilities of people of color in the United States of America.

Mental model. For the purpose of this study, this word is used to describe an individual or group's beliefs.

Permanence of racism. For the purpose of this study, this phrase suggests that racism is a permanent part of the American landscape.

Race. For the purpose of this study, this word is used to describe the classification of humans into groups based on skin color.

Students of color. For the purpose of this study, this phrase is intended to encompass all non-White students, emphasizing common experiences of systemic racism.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Dr. Asa Hillard (1995) once said he had never encountered any child in any group who was not a genius. He did not believe there was a mystery on how to teach them. Dr. Hillard offered that by treating them like human beings and loving them, educators could create the conditions necessary for them to be successful. There are many factors that contribute to our students not feeling like geniuses on a daily basis in classrooms all across the United States. There are historical challenges, ethical considerations, policy issues and a lack of culturally relevant practices that contribute to the gaps that exist between White students and students of color.

Historical Challenges

The nature of the fast-approaching collision between society and the inequity in our schooling systems has been documented over and over again through the personal narratives of people of color and Indigenous people regarding their experience in E-12 public education. The documentary *American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013) offered these narratives in an up-close and personal view into the lives of two Black male students in Brooklyn, New York. The documentary provided a personal, local, and immediate observation of the students' E-12 lived experiences. Edmin (2016) offered that “urban youth who enter school seeing themselves as smart and capable are confronted by curriculum that is blind to their realities and school rules that seek to erase their culture” (p. 13). The documentary shined a light on the challenges Black male students experience in both public and private E-12 educational institutions.

Delpit (1995) noted that if we plan to survive as a species on this planet, we must certainly create multicultural curricula that educates our children on the different perspectives of

our diverse population. Delpit went on to explain the problems we see exhibited in school by African American children and children of other minoritized races can be traced to this lack of a curriculum that reflects who they are and how they see the world (p. 177). Our schools are expected to educate the neediest children and are blamed when students whose basic needs for housing, nutrition and healthcare are not met and do not do well as more privileged children. What is it that we truly expect from our public education systems and do those expectations align with the expectations we have for other areas of American society? From the beginning of time, children have learned what it means to be productive and to contribute to society. This learning has been facilitated in many different ways throughout history. Often times the learning structure or system involved an adult(s) who cared about the child and believed in their capacity to be a positive contributing member of society.

Sadly, the experience of the two students in *The American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013) is an experience that is all too often realized by Black male students across this country. The truth of the matter is that we can go into almost any school in this country and interact with multiple Black male students struggling with some of the same challenges illuminated in this documentary. Students need their voices elevated and validated in the educational process. Edmin (2016) highlighted this when he explained:

If one feels like what they have to say is of value in a particular place, they are more apt to transform the place into a community and partake in activities that are valued within it. But in urban classrooms, valuing voice means providing students with an opportunity to have their thoughts, words, and ideas about the classroom and the world beyond it heard and incorporated into the approach to instruction. (p. 59)

Prior to the landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the two students in the documentary would have experienced a segregated learning environment based on skin color. Hooks (1994) described the change following *Brown*:

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds into beings that had characterized teachers in their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. (p. 3)

The social construction of race based on skin color has been a tool used in this country to determine access and opportunity. Mukhopadhyay and Henze (2003) note that “unfortunately, racial ideology traps us into a discourse about racist biology rather than looking through the lens of cultural construction” (p. 175). The concept of race is about creating social divisions within society, about social categories and identities, about power and privilege. It has been and remains a particular type of ideology for legitimizing social inequality between groups with different ancestries, national origins, and histories. The legitimizing of these social inequities has the tendency to lead educators down a trap of blaming students, particularly students of color and Indigenous students, for their lack of achievement in White cultured and predominately White education systems. Edmin (2016) offered that what is needed to counteract these predominantly White spaces of learning is a co-constructed learning environment.

Reality pedagogy isn't an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf. It focuses on making the local experiences of the student visible in creating context where there is a role reversal of sorts that repositions the student as the expert in his or her own teaching and learning, and a teacher as the learner. It was that the teacher is the person charged with

delivering the content, this tune is the person who shapes how best to teach the content.

Together, the teacher and student co-construct the classroom space. (p. 27)

To understand the current crisis, we have in E-12 education systems across this country, it is first important to recognize the long history of racism and segregation in the United States. The foundation of this country's economic success was created on the backs of dead Indians and African slaves. This notion of legitimizing social inequality is a tool that has been used for centuries to justify human exploitation and marginalization. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (2016) in his book *Stamped from the Beginning* highlighted that even in Aristotle's era, 284-322 BC, humans were classifying and creating justification to exploit differences. Kendi shared:

For [Aristotle], the enslaved peoples were by nature incapable of reasoning and live a life pure sensation, like certain tribes on the borders of the civilized world, or like people who are diseased through the onset of illness like epilepsy or madness. (p. 17)

Even with the desegregation of schools, the racist stereotypes that had been used for centuries in the United States still impeded student's access to a proper education. Hooks (1994) explained:

When we entered racist, desegregated, white schools we left the world where teachers believed that to educate black children rightly would require a political commitment. Now, we were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. (p. 3)

While there have been many attempts over the years to interrupt the inequitable practices and laws that were used to perpetuate systemic racism, the critical race theory tenet of the permanence of racism continues to hold true in this country. Hiraldo (2010) explained that the permanence of racism suggests that racism controls the political, social, and economic

components of American society. From a critical race theory perspective, racism is regarded as an inherent part of civilization, privileging White people over people of color. There are many examples of this throughout American history in the public education system, including the court system that has played an instrumental role in privileging White people over people of color. One example is the 1973 decision in the case of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*. Lynn and Dixson (2013) explained:

In *Keyes*, the court concluded that an unconstitutionally segregated school system was not one where the students attended racially identifiable schools, de facto segregation. Rather it was one where the racially identifiable schools resulted from intentional conduct by school authorities directed toward segregating the schools. Thus, many de facto segregated schools were not unconstitutionally segregated. (p. 10)

During the documentary *American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013), similar to the experience of many other students of color in education systems across the country, the students experienced both explicit and implicit bias frequently throughout their schooling process. These experiences had an impact on how the young men saw themselves and impacted their confidence in their ability to succeed. Often times people think that in order for racism to damage the confidence and drive of an individual it has to be blatant and audacious in nature. The social construction of race and its offspring racism are critical components in the way culturally responsive instruction is received, provided, and viewed by educators. Bell (1992) stated that racism is a permanent component of American life (p. 13). If racism is a permanent part of American life, it undoubtedly impacts all facets of American society, including public education institutions. To accept this view would require a realist perspective, one that would

not allow us to look away from a societal structure that is designed to benefit some and disadvantage others.

Noguera (2007) explained that American schools have never been expected to educate our children or eliminate racial disparities and achievement. This belief suggests that when public school districts use the word “all” in their mission statements, that “all” does not mean all. Gay (2000) explained:

too many students of color have not been achieving in school as well as they should for far too long. The consequences of these disproportionately high levels of low achievement are long-term and wide-reaching, personal and civic, individual and collective. They are too devastating to be tolerable. We must insist that this disempowerment stop now and set into motion change strategies to ensure that it does.
(p. 1)

If “all” meant all, there would not be the persistent and pervasive gaps that exist in achievement on the basis of skin color. The absence of the expectation to educate all children creates an “othering” effect. DeClair and Dixson (2004) stated that such structures allocate the privilege of Whites and the subsequent othering people of color in all arenas, including education. It has often been thought that students are not succeeding or achieving at high levels due to their personal life circumstances or their desire to learn. It has also been stated that students have motivation, engagement, and effort issues, therefore impacting their ability to succeed in school. This view perceives students through a deficit lens and not their virtuosities. Delpit (1995) suggested:

We must first decide upon a perspective from which to view the situation. We can continue to view diversity as a problem, attempting to force all differences into

standardized boxes. Or we can recognize that diversity of thought, language, and worldview in our classrooms cannot only provide an exciting educational setting but can also prepare our children for the richness of living in an increasingly diverse national community. (p. 66)

The recognition that all students bring value to the learning environment influences the pedagogical approach of the teacher. Coates (2015) shared, “I was a curious boy, the schools were not concerned with curiosity. They were concerned with compliance. I loved a few of my teachers. But I cannot say that I truly believed any of them” (p. 26). The recognition that students bring value to the learning environment helps to create classrooms where students trust and believe what their teachers tell them. Bartolome (1994) has decried the search for the “right” teaching strategies and argued for a “humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). In *American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013), it appeared that when the teacher connected with students at the human level and created space for learning by minimizing the mental models they held and made room for the needs/beliefs of the students they served, the students had a different experience. This connection at the human level allowed for what bell hooks (1994) described as engaged pedagogy. Hooks shared:

education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. In a class that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered by the process. (p. 21)

If we intentionally create schools that are segregated (de facto), we are contributing to the predictability of academic disparities in certain schools. The argument I have heard from this

viewpoint is that racial balance is necessary to offset the challenges and high needs associated with schools that predominantly serve students of color and school dependent children.

Hammond and Jackson (2015) assert:

While the achievement gap has created this epidemic of dependent learners, culturally responsive teaching is one of our most powerful tools for helping students find their way out of the gap. A systemic approach to culturally responsive teaching is the perfect catalyst to stimulate the brain's neuroplasticity so that it grows new brain cells that help students' thinking in more sophisticated ways. (p. 15)

This ideology creates disequilibrium because it assumes students of color and Indigenous students need White students or even White culture to achieve, which implicitly suggests that their own culture or community is insufficient. Edmin (2016) suggested that "if we are truly interested in transforming schools in meeting the needs of urban youth of color who are the most disenfranchised within them, educators must create safe and trusting environments that are respectful of students' culture" (p. 27). While that may not be the intention of such desegregation plans, this is often the feeling or belief that students and families of color are left with. Duncan (2002) explained:

much of the research literature technically constructs black males as a strange population and contributes to widespread perception about their place in school is unremarkable: the dominant storyline suggests that black males are too different from other students, and oppositionally so" (p.133).

This ideology has been commonly accepted by educators, which has led to the notion of a "student achievement gap." This phrase is used to describe the achievement gap between White students and their peers of color. This concept of the achievement gap reinforces Declair and

Dixson's (2004) notion of the othering of people of color and highlights the permanent component of racism in American life.

Mukhopadhyay and Henze (2003) explain "racial labels delude people into thinking that race predicts such other outcomes and behaviors as achievement in sports, music, or school; rates of employment; pregnancies outside of marriage; or drug use. Race was historically equated with intelligence and, on that basis, was used to justify slavery and educational discrimination; in later provided that rationale that supported the genocide of Jews, Blacks, Gypsies, and the other 'inferior' races under Hitler" (p. 675).

There is also a belief that students need to be in a nurturing supportive environment that understands and can relate to the racial and cultural challenges students face on a daily basis.

Edmin (2016) stated:

the effectiveness of the teacher can be traced directly back to what the teacher thinks of the student. If the teacher does not value the student, there's no motivation to take risks to engage with the student. It is easier and safer to remain in the traditional model-even though that model has failed the student. (p. 207)

There are some people who believe schools should be designed to build up students' identity, confidence, and pride about who they are as racial beings. Educators who fail to design instruction in a manner that is affirming of students and their race and culture can cause students to resent their educational experience. Coates (2015) explained:

the streets were not my only problem. If the street shackled my right leg, the school shackled my left. Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave your body now. But fail to comprehend schools and you gave your body later. I suffered at the hands of both, but I resent the schools more. (p. 25)

Educators must also work to understand all the aspects of student identity. One such aspect that plays a role in a student's experience is the role of linguistics in the classroom. Delpit (1994) suggested:

first, they should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is 'wrong' or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family. (p. 53)

Delpit was not suggesting that there is not a need to have access to and understand the dominant dialect, standard English; she is just suggesting that linguistics are a part of a students' identity.

Predominately White schools are often seen as places that do not recognize the full potential of students of color, outside of athletics and strip away students of color's identity, confidence, and pride. Gay (2000) described a lack of complete synchronization among schools' various ethnic groups and school cultures: "These discontinuities can interfere with students' academic achievement, in part because how students are accustomed to engaging in intellectual processing, self-presentation, and task performance is different from processes used in school" (p. 12).

The matter of all children achieving at high levels is an ethical and moral issue. If public education is the key to a successful democratic society, as educators it should be our moral imperative to ensure that each child develops knowledge, skill, and will to be positive contributing members of society. Jackson (2011) asked the question, when students are not motivated, what is the antecedent of their lack of motivation? What is being done to engage them and focus their attention? To do nothing would be educational malpractice. Delpit (1994) suggested that "teachers must not merely take courses that tell them how to treat their students as

multicultural clients. . . . They must also learn about the brilliance the students bring with them in their blood” (p. 182).

Ethical Dilemma

Hammond and Jackson (2015) explained that the “brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful events. If we want to help dependent learners do higher-order thinking and problem-solving, then we have to access their brains’ cognitive structures to deliver culturally responsive instruction” (p. 22). The ethical lenses of critique, justice, care, and profession require investigation to fully understand the challenge of creating racially and culturally equitable environments for all students in E-12 educational systems across the country. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) suggested that the ethic of critique is intended to awaken us to our own unstated values and make us realize how frequently our own morals may have been modified and possibly even corrupted over time. This ethic aligns well with the need for culturally responsive practices because if we are ever going to change the trajectory of the E-12 experience for students of color and Indigenous students, as educators we are going to have to interrogate our beliefs and morals and be honest about how the educational system we have designed is harmful to students that fit into these socially constructed categories. The ethic of critique attempts to connect us to our own unstated values and helps us see how our own morals have been compromised over time. This ethic is based on critical theory, and in most cases individuals who see the world through this theory are seen as activists and spend their time interrogating inequities. This theory creates a window into the inequities and issues facing society. The ethic of critique causes us to question what is happening around us as it relates to power, privilege, and oppression. Rawls (2009) offered that existing societies are seldom well ordered in this sense, for what is just and unjust is usually in dispute.

In many ways, the easy part is recognizing and taking responsibility for the system that has been created. The hard part will be moving from consciousness to conviction and then commitment. The commitment will be in the actions taken by school districts across this country and not just their words. Jackson (2011) stated, “I have learned many lessons from my time in what I call ‘Gifted Land.’ My research and professional experiences have taught me about the pedagogical approaches and expectations that bring out the best in students labeled gifted” (p. 86). The type of commitment necessary to change outcomes for students starts with our beliefs of the students we are serving and the desire to use pedagogical approaches that have been too often reserved for “gifted students.”

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) explained that the ethic of justice focuses on rights and law. This ethical lens can be applied to the concept of neighborhood schools, which in many ways is a symptom and contributing factor to the disproportionality we see in student achievement across this country. This ethic often serves as a baseline for legal principles and ideals. The ethic of justice has the capacity to take on a wide variety of issues. Seeing the world through the lens of justice allows for the interrogation of rules, laws, and concepts such as fairness and equity. Rawls (2009) suggested that for this reason, the ethic of justice denies the loss of freedom for some as being made right by a greater good shared by others. The ethic of justice does not permit for the sacrifices that are imposed on a few to be outweighed by the larger sum of the advantages enjoyed by many.

Duncan (2002) shared:

No one really listens to the powerless or, in those cases when they are granted permission to speak, they are rarely understood by others. In the latter cases, the stories of

subjugated group members are often incorporated into dominant narratives with which they are incommensurable. (p. 134)

In many ways, it is a cycle that starts with a strong education because when you have education it opens up doors to employment and improved outcomes in other quality of life areas.

Hammond and Jackson (2015) observed that “over time, many students of color are pushed out of school because they cannot keep up academically because of poor reading skills and the lack of social emotional support to deal with their increasing frustration” (p. 13).

The required shift to move towards gifting all students starts with hearing students and their families and believing them when they share a narrative that does not align with the lived experience of people in the dominant social group. “Caring is the way that we generate the trust that builds relationships. You have to not only care about students and the general sense but also actively care for them in the physical and emotional sense” (Hammond and Jackson, 2015, p. 73).

It is important to note that the challenges and implications associated with matters of disproportionality in education will not and cannot be solved by E-12 educational systems alone. Delpit (1994) noted that “appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture” (p. 45). This is a much larger societal issue that has to be addressed at every level of government. According to Hooks (1994), “there must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community” (p. 8).

According to Shapiro and Stefkovick (2016), the ethic of care often leads to discussions about the concepts of loyalty and trust. The ethic of care is a foundational ethic because it

addresses the concerns and needs expressed by others, and has oftentimes been associated with utilitarianism. This ethic is aligned with the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. Kohn (1998) shared that what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. The ethic of care is critical because generally people do not care what you know until they know that you care. Noddings (2013) explained that as human beings we want to care and to be cared for by others. The notion of caring for oneself and others is foundational in this ethic and serves as a bridge to create trust and loyalty.

Shapiro and Stefkovick (2016) stated that the ethic of profession is said to fill the gap where the ethics of care, critique, and justice fall short. This ethic has supported the development of setting professional norms that are designed to promote student success and well-being. In addition to education, professional organizations use this ethic to create principles that govern how members treat each other and stakeholders. Similar to the other ethics, this ethic helps to provide direction when faced with complex or moral decision-making. Moral principles in education permeate classrooms across the country and help transform the learning environment. Hooks (1994) suggested that “making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute should be the central goal of transformative pedagogy” (p. 39). Teachers and administrators work tirelessly to impart knowledge to students that they believe will help the students turn into positive contributing members of society. Often times the moral lessons or principles being taught by teachers and administrators are the same moral principles they learned as students. Many educators hold a belief that if something worked for them when they were a student, it should work for the students that they serve on a daily basis.

Hammond and Jackson (2015) maintained that “the brain needs to be a part of a caring social community to maximize his sense of well-being. Marginalized students need to feel affirmed and included as valued members of a learning community” (p. 47). It has been my experience that morality in schools is taught through a variety of mechanisms, everything from character education classes to positive behavior intervention practices that outline expectations for students. Often times the moral lessons that occur in E-12 schools across the country are absent of reality or any connection to the lived experiences of the students they are designed to influence. To Edmin (2015), “the work for teachers becomes developing the self-reflection necessary to deconstruct the ways that media messages, other teachers’ negative stories, and their own need to be the hero affects how they see and teach students” (p. 43). It has been my experience that teachers and administrators always circle back to the mental model that if it worked for me when I was their age, it should work for them as well.

Delpit (1995) suggested that “to provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the cultural power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (p. 28). Schools have the power to modify the social order. Education is the key for many students to a better life for themselves and their families. While there are certainly systemic structures at play that promote the socioeconomic and racial disparities we have in this country, I also know that education has been a tool that has helped countless students change their socioeconomic trajectory. School and education influence the social order of the world we live in through creating opportunities for inquiry and discovery. Jackson (2011) stated, “High Operational Practices for school dependent students elicit high intellectual performance from them and cultivate their self-directed learning and self-actualization” (p.87). There have been many

inventions that have made this world a better place to live. If it had not been for schools and educators cultivating self-directed learning opportunities, inspiring students to do more and think differently, some of the luxuries we have become accustomed to may not exist.

This ethic tends to go beyond the theories of justice, care, and critique to engage at a more holistic level of moral decision making. Rawls (2009) noted that many different kinds of things are said to be just and unjust, not only laws and social systems. We also call the attitudes and dispositions of persons just and unjust. Professional ethics require the individual to assess and reflect on not only what the profession expects of them, but what all the stakeholders of a given community expect of them. As Edmin (2016) concluded:

I understand the pressures teachers are under and the challenges they face meeting high standards for success on measures that seem insurmountable. The current landscape of urban education, which holds teachers accountable for student outcomes while failing to equip teachers with the tools to meet these outcomes, is paralyzing. However, the key to getting students to be academically successful is not to teach directly to the assessment or to the curriculum, but to teach directly to the students. (p. 40)

This is critical because stakeholders enter into communities with diverse perspectives and lived experiences. Noddings (2013) elaborated on the idea of multiple perspectives by stating that multiple perspectives offer something that will disturb his own core reality and that he must see others' reality as a possibility for his own.

While each of these ethical theories hold up mental models that focus on a particular area of moral decision making, they all are designed to challenge individuals' thinking and orient their moral compass. Noddings (2013) suggested that we are doubly mistaken when we approach moral matters in this mathematical way. Like most things in life, there is no one magic bullet or

approach that will solve all ethical dilemmas. The questions that each ethical theory prompts are different in nature, but all of the ethical theories support improved outcomes, trust, loyalty, legality, and power dynamics.

At the heart of these ethical theories is an analysis of social class and inequities. On a daily basis, it is important for educators to work to increase their consciousness so that they are not blind to how they are supporting inequitable practices in their school districts. Gilligan (1982) organized the concept of achievement motivation into two components, a motive to approach success and the motive to avoid failure. It is becoming more and more clear to me than ever that we will not solve all of the world's challenges by approaching the challenge with an avoid failure motive. "Too often, culturally responsive teaching is promoted as a way to reduce behavior problems or motivate students, while downplaying or ignoring its ability to support rigorous cognitive development" (Hammond and Jackson, 2015, p. 16).

The matter of all children achieving at high levels is an ethical and moral issue. If public education is the key to a successful democratic society, as educators it should be our moral imperative to ensure that each child develops knowledge, skill, and will to be positive contributing members of society. If we are going to change the trajectory of disproportionality in this country, public schools must teach morality to end this vicious cycle. The moral education I am referring to does not necessarily need to be done through a textbook, but through the actions and modeling of the adults in the lives of students. This can also be done by creating opportunities for students to engage in relevant real-life experiences that will prepare them for the world around them. A student should have the same opportunities and be judged by the same standard in the school as adults in the wider social life to which they belong. This can only be done creating relevant real-life experiences for students. The schools have a responsibility to

teach morality as do store clerks, professional athletes, politicians, armed servicemen and women, and any and every one that comes into the life of a student.

Policy Impact on Student Achievement

In chapter 1, I provided some background on the problem and shared some information about the Minnesota legislation called World's Best Workforce. This legislation, like many other policies enacted by elected officials, influences the mental models that directly drive the decision making of the adults in front of students on a daily basis. As previously mentioned, in 2013 the state of Minnesota passed the World's Best Workforce Bill School District Process for Reviewing Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Achievement; Striving for the World's Best Workforce). The bill was created to ensure every school in the state of Minnesota was making progress on increasing student performance. Under this bill, school districts are required to develop plans that address student performance in five areas: (1) all children are ready for school; (2) all third-graders can read at grade level; (3) all racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed; (4) all students are ready for career and college; and, (5) all students graduate from high school.

There has been a significant amount of research conducted in the five goal areas of the World's Best Workforce legislation. The Minnesota Department of Education identifies school readiness as the skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments that children know and can do as they enter kindergarten in the following areas of child development: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; cognition and general knowledge; and creativity and the arts.

The bill requires school districts to pay closer attention to their strategic plans to ensure they are designed in a manner that will help schools accelerate student growth and achievement.

Specifically, the plan calls for achievement gap reduction, forcing districts to evaluate the strategies they are using to meet the needs of students of color. Hammond and Jackson (2015) suggest that:

just increasing standards and instructional rigor won't reverse this epidemic.

Dependent learners cannot become independent learners by sheer willpower. It is not just a matter of grit or mindset. Grit and mindset are necessary but not sufficient by themselves. We have to help dependent students develop new cognitive skills and habits of mind that will actually increase their brain power. Students with increased brain power can accelerate their own learning, meaning they know how to learn new content and improve their weak skills on their own (p.15)

The legislation has not solved the problem of racial and economic achievement disparities in the state of Minnesota. Minnesota still has one of the largest racial achievement gaps in the country. The problems associated with the social construction of race and its byproduct racism cannot be legislated away. Gau (2015) suggests that the state of Minnesota has one of the worst Black-White achievement gaps in the country. While this achievement gap is manifesting itself in K-12 educational systems across the state, Minnesota also has some of the most significant disparity between Blacks and Whites in unemployment, health care, incarceration, and home ownership. School districts will have to engage in adaptive work with the adults who are responsible for changing outcomes for students. This work will have to address the mental models that are holding up the systems that are currently not working for students of color. Too many adults working with students see them as failures. As Gay (2000) explained "failure is an experience, not an individual. Unfortunately, this is not true for many students who are unsuccessful in

school. They and their teachers connect their academic difficulties to their personal worth, and the individuals are deemed failures” (p. 8).

Gay (2000) also asserted that “the best quality educational programs and practices can never be accomplished if some ethnic groups and their contributions to the development of US history, life, and culture ignored or demeaned” (p. 20).

Teacher-Training Policy

Delpit (1994) suggests that teacher education programs should bring “parents and community members into the university classroom to tell prospective teachers what their concerns about education are, what they feel schools are doing well or poorly for their children, and how they would like to see schooling changed” (p. 179). Students of color and Native American students in Minnesota have the ability to be successful in school if they are provided a teacher who believes in them and is willing to expand their cultural understanding to make room for the culture of the students they serve. Beliefs play a mediating role between what a person knows to do and what they actually do (Pohan et al., 2009). An individual’s beliefs, especially those connected to a person’s value system, are highly resistant to change. In schools across the Twin Cities where the student population is different racially and culturally than the teachers charged with educating them, it will require suspending of judgment and beliefs to accomplish the goals of the legislation. As Hammond and Jackson (2015) observed, “For too long, the conversation has been dominated by the idea of culture of poverty as an organizing social and intellectual frame for teaching marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse students” (p. 5).

Since it is unlikely that policy makers will be able to legislate racially and culturally responsive school environments, a teacher’s pre-service experience and professional development opportunities are critical to accomplishing the goals of the World’s Best Workforce

legislation. In addition to developing a teacher's knowledge, pedagogical skills, motivational techniques, and management, a pre-service experience must also develop a set of beliefs in teachers that support all learners racial and cultural needs (Pohan et al., 2009). In order for all children to be school ready; reading well by the third grade; having no racial and/or economic achievement gaps; being career and college ready, and; graduating from high school, teacher preparation programs will need to push the thinking of pre-service teachers. Teacher preparation programs will also have to create space for pre-service teachers to authentically experience races and cultures different from their own.

There is a belief that engaging teachers during their pre-service experience with cultural and racial diversity training will influence their mental models and impact the instruction they provide to students. Reiter and Davis (2010) found that pre-service teachers often do not receive the training necessary to be able to create equitable learning environments. There is a belief that this is because of the privilege and background of the teachers and administrators teaching the pre-service classes.

The changes in pre-service programming that are necessary to adequately prepare teachers to meet the demands of diverse populations of students will not occur overnight. The same can be said for those experiencing the pre-service programming. Pohan et al. (2009) conducted research of students in a pre-service program and learned that a person's beliefs are not likely to significantly change over the course of a pre-service program, but that universities can create opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on the reasons for their personal beliefs.

Hammond and Jackson (2015) explained that for culturally and linguistically diverse students, their opportunities to develop habits of mind and cognitive capacities are limited or

nonexistent because of educational and equity (p. 13). In order to close all racial and economic achievement gaps between students of color and their White peers, an individual must first acknowledge the existence of a gap and the need for it to be closed. This level of consciousness development has to occur in teacher education programs so that pre-service teachers will be better prepared for the challenges ahead of them. Ullucci (2010) found that experience is the most powerful source of teacher knowledge and pre-service teachers need opportunities to experience life in urban schools. These experiences are believed to break down the pre-conceived notions pre-service teachers have about urban school environments and provide them with real-life experience. Only at this level of reflection and self-awareness will adaptive change occur and create space for multicultural education. Mann (1992) identified that power may be exercised either distributively or facilitative (Fowler, 2013, p. 23). In considering teacher education policy and practice, a facilitative approach to creating programs that would allow for racial identity development in teacher education programs will be critical. This will create conditions in teacher education programs that allow for students to understand who they are as racial beings and how race and racism create systemic inequalities in this country.

Hooks (1994) asserted that:

Among educators there has to be an acknowledgment that any effort to transform institutions so that they reflect a multicultural standpoint must take into consideration the fears teachers have when asked to shift their paradigms. There must be training sites where teachers have the opportunity to express those concerns while also learning to create ways to approach the multicultural classroom curriculum. (p. 36)

The intent of Minnesota's legislation is commendable, and with appropriate and visionary leadership at the school district level, districts in the state could have a significant impact on student achievement.

Edmin (2016) suggested that:

Rather than give teachers a set of tools to implement and hope that these approaches meet the specific needs of urban youth and their teachers in particular classrooms, reality pedagogy provides educators with the mechanism for developing approaches to teaching that meets the specific needs of the student sitting in front of them. (p. 30)

This type of professional development needs to occur before teacher candidates are licensed and ready to enter the classroom. Pohan et al. (2009) explained that with the help of supportive mentors and models of good teaching, the pre-service teachers can become more culturally responsive.

Hooks (1994) described teaching as “a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, intervention, spontaneous shifts, they can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom” (p. 11). A system cannot fix a problem with the same mindset that created the problem in the first place. In order for this to occur, the state will have to create legislation that mandates the need for culturally responsive professional development. This level of professional development in pre-service programs will create the space for pre-service teachers to have their mental models challenged about race and culture. This professional development will disrupt the traditional modeling that, as Edmin (2016) explained, exists in education: “The kind of teacher you will become is directly related to the kind of teacher you are associated with. Teaching is a profession where misery does more than just love company—it recruits, seduces, and romances it” (p. 208). With stronger foundational mental

models about the attributes students bring to the classroom, new teachers will be able to withstand the negativity that permeates the profession and embrace the significance of their work: [There are those] who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (Hooks, 1994, p.13).

In addition, the research found that cooperating teachers play an instrumental role in breaking down stereotypes. Ullucci (2010) shared that expanding teachers’ perspectives just may be the most important job of teacher educators. Building understanding through hands-on experiences in communities and through readings, videos, and simulations provide teachers with the crucial window into the lives of different people in different ways of knowing.

Culturally Responsive Practices

The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy and instruction have been explored in this country for many years. Researchers like Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), Geneva Gay (2000), Lisa Delpit (1995), Yvette Jackson (2011), Zaretta Hammond (2015) and many others have dedicated their life’s work to offering educators a pathway to engaging their students in a more authentic manner while acknowledging and celebrating who they are racially and culturally. Hooks (1994) shared that our capacity to generate excitement in the classroom is deeply affected by our interest in one another, and hearing one another’s voices, and recognizing one another’s presence (p. 8). What Bell is offering us in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) is a perspective that values the collectivism, selflessness and trust that is required to create learning environments that humanize students regardless of their skin color or cultural background. Hooks (1994) offers, “seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community” (p. 8).

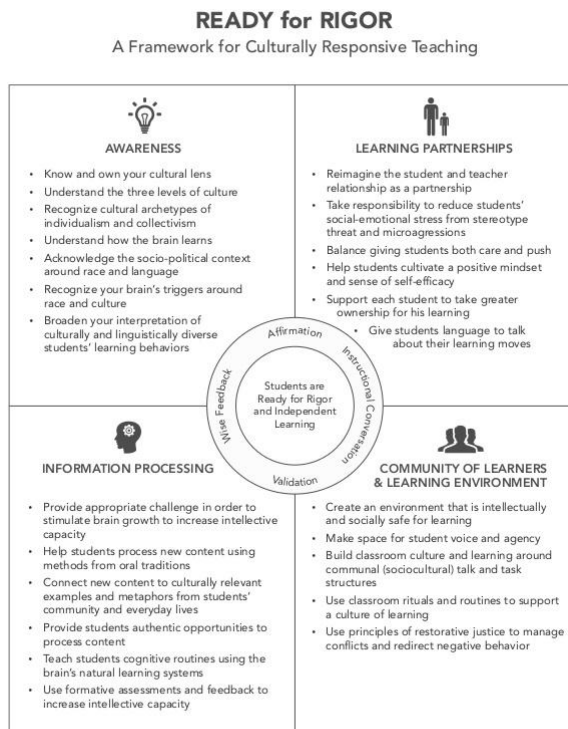
Researchers like Zaretta Hammond (2013) and Yvette Jackson (2011) have spent years looking at the connection to culturally responsive practices and cognitive science. Hammond and Jackson (2015) defined culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogical approach firmly rooted in learning theory in cognitive science (p. 16). These authors highlight the importance of understanding how the brain uses culture to make sense of the world:

If you want to use culturally responsive teaching to support the cognitive development of independent learners, we have to know how the brain uses culture to make sense of the world. When we know this, we can easily piggyback on the brains' natural systems to activate this unique ability to grow itself. (p. 36)

Through the lens of culturally responsive practices and cognitive science, Hammond (2013) developed the Ready for Rigor Framework (Figure 1) that is designed to create the social, emotional, and cognitive conditions that allow students to more actively engage in taking ownership of their learning.

Figure 2.1

Hammond's Ready for Rigor Framework



*Note: Reprinted from *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (p. X), by Z. Hammond (2015), Corwin. Reprinted with permission.*

There is a body of research that suggests culturally relevant pedagogy is organized into the components of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (1995) wrote:

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness to which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p.160)

The criteria of academic success acknowledges that any culturally relevant lesson will include an opportunity for a student to demonstrate mastery of a skill or standard. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning

potentials in ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities. Often in educational settings educators believe that relationships alone will improve student academic outcomes. However, as Ladson-Billings (1995) stated, “culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely make them ‘feel good.’ The trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to ‘choose’ academic excellence” (p. 160). Delpit (1995) explained that when teachers do not understand the potential of students they teach, they will under teach them no matter what the methodology (p. 175).

The criteria of cultural competence suggest that a culturally relevant lesson will provide an opportunity for a student to continue to work towards proficiency in their own racial and cultural identity and work towards fluency in at least one other. Gay (2000) acknowledges that learning experiences and achievement outcomes for ethnically diverse students should include more than cognitive performances in academic subjects and standardized test scores (p. 15). Gay went on to explain that a wide range of frames are critical for healthy positive contributing members of society to be developed through school systems. Ladson-Billings (1995) offers, “culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161).

The criteria of critical consciousness is designed to help students apply what they learned to challenge the status quo:

Culturally relevant teaching does not imply that it is enough for students to choose academic excellence . . . beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader social political consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values in institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162)

This concept of critical consciousness becomes challenging as there is so much pressure on educators to improve test scores on standardized assessments. Emdin (2016) suggested that:

to be an educator in America today means that your students' test scores, GPAs, and graduation rates are the primary measures of your effectiveness. Standardized exams drive everything from curriculum to teaching. As a result, many teachers believe that anything aside from teaching to the test will be detrimental to students and teachers alike. (p. 37)

There is much scholarship in this area: researchers like Gloria Ladson-Billings, Zaretta Hammond, Yvette Jackson, Lisa Delpit, Bell Hooks, and Asa Hillard offer pathways to improved academic outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. Gay (2000) acknowledged that culturally relevant teaching has multiple descriptive characteristics such as validating, compressive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory.

Delpit (1995) observed that one of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power. Seeking to understand difference is a critical component in the development of culturally relevant lessons. While there is an immense amount of scholarship in this area that provides context for this topic, I believe that I can contribute to the scholarship by looking at instructional strategies and beliefs that impact student achievement through the lens of Ladson-Billings' (1995) criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Through this research, I believe that students will not only benefit through increased realness, relevance, rigor and relationship in the classroom, but that the adults in front of students will grow and be humanized through the experience. Teachers, as hooks (1994) points out, must be

actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

As I reflect on what has led me to this point in my pursuit of knowledge and desire to gain a better understanding of beliefs and instructional strategies that promote achievement for students of color and Indigenous students, I am intentional about reflecting on my lived experience and how that influences how I see the world and this research. I have had an opportunity to serve in several different formal leadership positions over my career. As I reflect on the beginning stages of my educational leadership experience, I recognize that I had a strong passion for changing outcomes for students. The beliefs I had about how to accomplish the goal of changing outcomes for students were not always feasible, but as I gained more experience, I started to better understand the importance of process, monitoring my expectations, and the importance of understanding critical race theory as it is applied to public education. In this chapter I will share the purpose of the study, qualitative research and the case study, rationale, participants, limitations, data collection procedures, researcher's role, data analysis and validity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for elementary students of color. The research aimed to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that lead to traditionally marginalized populations of students in 3-5 educational settings being successful as measured on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Stake (1995) argued, "Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (p. 99). Through this study, I worked to construct knowledge through the lived experiences of the participants I had the honor to learn from.

Qualitative Research and the Case Study

I used a qualitative intrinsic case study method for this research. This approach is designed in this way, according to Stake (1995), because:

we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case, we may call our intrinsic case study. (p.3)

An intrinsic case study is a research method that is common in social science. It is based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event. I felt this was appropriate for this study because the goal was to gain a better understanding of beliefs that drive adult actions. Stake (1995) explained further that:

quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as ‘error,’ outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and context as important to understanding. Particularization is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case. (p. 39)

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group. A form of qualitative research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Njie and Asimiram (2014) suggested, “A case study is an interesting approach to consider when a researcher is motivated to expend time and effort to a situation, area, program, a group or person with the aim of answering the ‘how’ and ‘why’ conundrums” (p. 9). My research was not intended to focus on the discovery of a universal truth; instead, it intended to share the experience of educators who have demonstrated success at educating students of color and Indigenous students.

Yin (2002) defined a case study as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (p. 13). As a part of this case study I strove to be as descriptive as possible in order to illustrate the impact of the beliefs and instructional practices of these teachers. My goal was to make the unfamiliar familiar and to give readers a common language about beliefs and instructional practices that promote achievement for students of color and Indigenous students.

Rationale

I believe a case study design allowed me to better understand beliefs through the detailed information about participants through their understanding of their lived experience. Being that I looked at a small participant pool and drew conclusions only about the participants interviewed, a case study allowed for the greatest facilitation of this process. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that the qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (p. 544).

Participants

Focusing on the qualitative findings of participant interviews allowed for deeper exploration of the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote equitable student achievement. Teachers in this district were the target population for this study. Teaching staff that have a minimum of two years' worth of Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data in the district were engaged with open-ended questions pertaining to their beliefs, values, and instructional practices.

It is important as educators that we seek to understand what is happening in this area as we continue to have significant disproportionality in student outcomes in the state of Minnesota. I hoped to do this through learning from educators who have figured out a pathway to educate all students at high levels. According to Stake (1995), “to sharpen the search for understanding, qualitative researchers perceive what is happening in key episodes or testimonies, represent happenings with their own direct interpretation and stories” (p. 40).

The eight participants in this study were all grade 2-5 teachers. Specifically, these teachers will be selected to participate in the study based on their reading results on the Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test. NWEA supports students and educators worldwide by creating assessment solutions that precisely measure growth and proficiency and provide insights to help tailor instruction. I selected teachers who have supported 75% or more of their students of color demonstrating grade-level proficiency for a minimum of three consecutive years. A research-based, not-for-profit organization,

Teachers who participated in the study were told that their participation was voluntary and they could stop at any time without penalty by letting the facilitator know. They were told that they would not receive anything for participating nor would there be any ramifications if they chose not to participate. The invitation and informed consent form sent to participants included background information including confidentiality content. Specifically, participants were informed that no real names of staff would be used in the findings of this study and that themes would be shared in the report. All records, including forms, notes and tape recordings were maintained and stored in a locked file at the office of my faculty advisor on the campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato. Records will all be destroyed after three years.

An email invitation was sent to selected grade 2-5 teachers providing context for the study and inviting them to participate. When selected teachers expressed interest in the study, I sent a formal invitation designed to gain written consent through US mail. They were asked to mail signed consent forms in a stamped envelope to Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). Separate letters of agreement were given to participants once consent was gained.

Limitations

This study was limited to one school district in the suburban area of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Due to the small sample size, the data from this study may or may not be generalizable to other school districts across the country. This study also focuses on elementary teachers as opposed to secondary teachers. Examining the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote achievement for students of color will lead to greater knowledge about improving the educational experience for all students, especially students of color and Indigenous students.

There is still so much to learn in this area of research and I fully recognize I cannot learn all that needs to be understood in one small qualitative case study. While I recognized that I would not be able to fully discover all of the knowledge necessary to solve this persistent and predictable problem facing E-12 education systems, I firmly believe that I was able to discover knowledge that supports and advances the body of research in this area. Stake (1995) explained that “when we have the opportunity to choose the case, it is often more useful to pick the one most likely to enhance our understanding than to pick the one most typical. In fact, highly atypical cases can sometimes contribute to our understanding of other cases” (p.134).

Data Collection Procedures

Njie and Asimiram (2014) discussed that “data collection in case study is one of the most significant activities in the process because the richness and depth of what will be

eventually known is contingent on the craft and the effectiveness of the data collection methods covering relevant details about the situation” (p. 35). For the purpose of data collection, I hired a third-party interviewer, which allowed participants to speak freely about their beliefs regarding this topic. Since the study necessitated that the interviews take place in the district in which I am currently serving as the superintendent, I did not want participants to feel intimidated to speak their truth during the interview process. I believe that having a third-party interviewer allowed for greater vulnerability and authentic voice.

The first set of data I reviewed for this study is the longitudinal MAP data of selected grade 2-5 teachers to determine those who have supported 75% or more of their students of color demonstrating grade level proficiency for a minimum of three consecutive years. Next I reviewed the transcribed interview text from each participant engaging in the study. Finally, I reviewed the longitudinal stakeholder engagement survey data from the selected grade 2-5 teachers. This data source is collected by the Research, Assessment and Evaluation department in the St. Louis Park Public Schools district. My goal in triangulating these three sources of data was to uncover any alignment or consistency between student proficiency on standardized assessments, student engagement survey data, and teacher’s beliefs and instructional practice. This process followed Stake’s (1995) direction that “data source triangulation is an effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances” (p. 113).

After the interview reports were created, I shared the reports with each interviewee to ensure that their perspective was documented accurately and that they had an opportunity to share all of their thoughts and beliefs on the topic.

Instrumentation

The questions below were asked in each participant's interview. There are five questions designed for the study. Stake (1995) suggested that, "perhaps the most difficult task of the researcher is to design good questions, research questions, that will direct the looking and thinking enough and not too much" (p. 15). The intentionality regarding the number of questions was to not overwhelm the participants while still being able to gather critical information regarding their personal lived experience, instructional practice and beliefs.

Stake (1995) explained that issue questions provide a powerful conceptual structure for organizing the study of a case (p. 17). With the first question I drew the participant's consciousness to the idea that adult beliefs play an important role in the educational experience for students. I was hopeful that this question would help set the stage and facilitate the conversation. Stake (2004) advised that "a case study, like research of all kinds, has a conceptual structure. It is usually organized around a small number of research questions. These are not just informational questions" (p. 142).

My hope with questions 2-5 was to progressively learn more about each participant and keep the door open to be flexible and go where the participant took me with their reflection on their practice. Stake (1995) explained that "the best research questions evolve during the study" (p. 33). Understanding this, I hoped to engage in a manner that creates space for thoughtful reflection and vulnerability.

The following questions were asked of participants during the interview process:

1. What do you believe about the impact of race and culture on student learning?
2. Do the beliefs that you hold lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class? If so, how do they impact student learning?

3. Please talk about the instructional strategies you use that you feel lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class. Why are those strategies effective for students of color and Indigenous students?
4. Please share your beliefs about the impact of race and culture on your personal lived experience and experience as a teacher.
5. What do you believe are the most important factor(s) in promoting academic growth for students of color and Indigenous students?

MAP testing is a computerized adaptive test which helps teachers, parents, and administrators improve learning for all students and make informed decisions to promote a child's academic growth. I used MAP scores as an indicator for success for this study because of the growth component of the exam. The MAP test is administered during the fall, winter, and spring, and using this assessment gives educators an indication of the impact they are having on student learning over the course of a school year. I hoped to be able to tell a story of positive impact on the lives of students through the interviews of participants. As Stake (2004) discussed:

Even when empathetic and respectful of each person's realities, the researcher decides what the case's own story is, or at least what will be included in the report. More will be pursued than volunteered. Less will be reported than was learned. Even though a competent researcher will be guided by what the case somehow indicates is more important, even though patrons, other researchers, and those researched will advise, what is necessary for an understanding of the case will be decided by the researcher. (p. 144)

The interview questions were designed to learn more about the participant's instructional practices and their beliefs. In addition to learning about the participant's instructional practices

and beliefs, one question was designed to learn more about the racial consciousness of the participant. This was an important question because the consciousness of the participant may influence the beliefs and instructional strategies they employ in their classroom. Njie and Asimiram (2014) offered that the qualitative method is typically used on purpose and is used specifically to unravel a complex phenomenon or one with little information about it (p. 35). Matters of race and racial consciousness are complex in nature, and I believe the use of a qualitative method allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's beliefs in this area.

Specifically, understanding how they believe race and culture impact their personal lived experience may influence how they facilitate the conditions to allow for race and culture to be present in their classroom. I also recognized and understood that this semi-structured format would allow the participants to share personal lived experience that would most likely look different for each participant. Stake (1995) suggested that:

qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same question asked to each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell. The qualitative interviewer should arrive with a short list of issue-oriented questions. (p. 65)

The student engagement survey data was used to provide insight on how students perceived the teacher's care, beliefs, and encouragement of their learning. Specifically, I designed the study to see if the beliefs the participant stated they hold about the students they serve were reflective of how the students perceived the teacher.

When I started my graduate studies, I knew I was interested in conducting research in a metro area school district and learning more about how districts are engaging staff members in

professional development on the influence of race and culture on student learning. More specifically, how beliefs and instructional strategies promote accelerated achievement for students of color. My coursework helped me understand the importance of narrowing down my topic and designing my question in a manner that is researchable.

When I started this process, to say that I wanted to save the world would be an understatement. While I still want to save the world, I now realize that I will not be able to do it with just one research project. Recognizing this desire and limitation, I believe a qualitative study allowed me to begin to explore questions that are humanistic in nature. This perspective on qualitative research is articulated by Njie and Asimiram (2014) who explained:

This brings to light the humanistic virtues of qualitative research as well as the interpretive approach which is needed to understand certain situations, settings and the complexities between relationships which are way too important and way too intricate to be understood by a mere foraging through random sampling for the calculation of means and modes of results. (p. 35)

Initially, I recall wanting to see if there was a connection to equitable student achievement with school districts that had strategic plans that addressed race and culture. I wanted to look at how the tenets of critical race theory applied to school districts that are implementing racial equity work. I also wanted to look at how achievement and integration dollars are impacting equitable student achievement and integration in districts across the state. It is important to understand the policy that upholds the instructional and strategic direction of school districts. While all of those areas are important and can be studied at a later time, the research for this study helps to better understand the instructional practices and beliefs educators

in one Twin Cities suburban district are using to positively impact the World's Best Workforce Legislation (2013).

In addition to the policy implications, this study is significant because when a teacher seeks to understand and utilize a student's culture in the learning process, it validates their lived experience and epistemology. The beliefs, values, and strategies teachers use to influence and engage students are integral in the learning process. A student's culture cannot be invisible in the learning process. Yosso (2005) noted that race is often coded as cultural difference in schools. Culture influences how society is organized, how school curriculum is developed and how pedagogy and policy are implemented. Exploring belief systems that treat students of color as gifted and identifying instructional strategies that bring the experience of students of color from the margins to the center will be necessary if we as a state and country are going to ever close the persistent and predictable gaps that exist in public education between students of color and their White peers. As educators, we must learn from the lived experiences of students of color and the teachers that successfully teach them so that we can develop an educational system in which students of color thrive and are able to achieve their dreams.

As I conducted this study, it was important for me to understand my role in the process and responsibility for the data I collected. I spent time reflecting on my role and looking at it through the lens of a teacher, advocate, biographer and interpreter. During my reflection, I had a hard time narrowing down my role as I see a responsibility in the research to be a teacher, advocate, and interpreter of the data. However, as Stake (1995) explained, "researchers abide by such limits. Discreetly or not, they do their best to convince their readers that they too should believe what the researchers have come to believe. They too are advocates. They too are teachers" (p. 93).

I feel a sense of responsibility to the teacher about the data I collected since the challenge we are facing in public education systems is critical to the success of the economy in this country. If students do not develop the necessary skills to be productive and positive contributing members of society during their E-12 experience, it will have lasting effects on the economy of the state of Minnesota and this country. As Stake (1995) contended:

The intention of research is to inform, to sophisticate, to assist with the increase of competency and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate. These also are the responsibilities of the teacher. Teaching is not just lecturing, not just delivering information; more, it is the arrangement of opportunities for learners to follow a natural human inclination to become educated. (p.92)

I believe my desire to share the knowledge regarding the positive impact of these educators did not cause me to allow my bias and personal lived experience to influence the experience and beliefs of these educators.

Data Analysis

Stake (1995) suggested that there are two strategic ways that researchers make meaning about cases, categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Both strategic ways were used in this intrinsic case study. Categorical aggregation is the process of seeking a collection of themes from the data, hoping that relevant meaning about lessons to be learned about the case will emerge. Direct interpretation is the process of looking at the single instance or member of the case and drawing meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. Direct interpretation pulls the data apart and puts it together in more meaningful ways. The study required identifying the themes that emerged from the data collected from each participant in the case, including connections between or among the themes. These themes were further developed using direct

passages and direct quotation to emphasize each theme. This served as the summary of the thematic analysis for each individual participant.

For the purpose of this study I looked at three sets of data: MAP, student engagement survey, and participant interviews. The MAP data was used to determine the participants who had facilitated high levels of growth for students of color. The student engagement survey data was used to make connections to the beliefs participants hold about students and the perception students have about the learning environment created by participants. I had each set of data reviewed by each participant for accuracy and/or enhancement. For the purpose of this study I used a descriptive coding method that allowed me to assign basic and descriptive labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics. As a part of this I coded for beliefs that surfaced in the interviews. This allowed me to code for data that appeared to reflect a participant's underlying values, attitudes, and beliefs that represent their perspective.

CHAPTER IV

Emergent Themes

This chapter presents the research findings of the data collected. The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for students of color in a small first-ring suburban school district in Minnesota. The research aims to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that lead to traditionally marginalized populations of students in grades 2-5 demonstrating growth on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. The source of data in this study are the interviews that were conducted by a third-party researcher. The findings will be presented as emergent themes.

Participants

In the first-ring small suburban district where this study was conducted, eight elementary teachers supported grade-level growth for 75% or more of their students of color for a minimum of two years in a three-year period (Figure 4.1). Of the eight teachers interviewed, seven identified as women and one identified as a man. All of the teachers interviewed for this study identified racially as White.

Figure 4.1

Participant Reading and Math Targeted Growth Data, Fall to Winter

Teacher	Federal Ethnicity	MAP Test Subject	% Making Targeted Growth 2017-18	% Making Targeted Growth 2018-19	% Making Targeted Growth 2019-20
Participant 1	Black or African American	Reading	85.7%		83.3%
Participant 2	Black or African	Reading	80.0%	75.0%	

	American				
Participant 2	Black or African American	Math	80.0%	75.0%	
Participant 3	Black or African American	Reading	80.0%		85.7%
Participant 4	Black or African American	Math	80%	80%	75%
Participant 5	Black or African American	Math	75.0%		80%
Participant 6	Black or African American	Math	75.0%		75.0%
Participant 7	Hispanic/Latino	Reading	80.0%	79.0%	
Participant 8	Hispanic/Latino & Black or African American	Math	75.0%	75.0%	

Research Questions

The following questions are the larger qualitative ideas that encompass my desire to do this study:

1. What are the beliefs or mindsets about race and culture teachers must have to successfully educate students of color and Indigenous students?
2. What is the relationship between beliefs, strategies, race and culture when successfully educating students of color and Indigenous students?

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative intrinsic case study conducted to answer the research questions:

1. What do you believe about the impact of race and culture on student learning?
2. Do the beliefs that you hold lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class? If so, how do they impact student learning?
3. Please talk about the instructional strategies you use that you feel lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class. Why are those strategies effective for students of color and Indigenous students?
4. Please share your beliefs about the impact of race and culture on your personal lived experience and experience as a teacher.
5. What do you believe are the most important factor(s) in promoting academic growth for students of color and Indigenous students?

Emergent Themes

As a result of the interviews conducted during this survey, seven emergent themes arose in regards to the data that was collected. The emergent themes are as follows:

- Brilliance of self and others. Participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others.
- High expectations and developing student agency. Participants shared a collective understanding of the importance of instilling and upholding high expectations that empower students and staff to higher levels of achievement.
- Collective responsibility. Participants shared a collective understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community.

- Persistent effort and developing risk takers. Participants shared a collective understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking, anti-racist schools and academically successful learners can be created.
- Racial consciousness and cultural competence. Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change.
- Advocacy for equity through relationships. Participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships.
- Student-centered facilitation of learning. Participants shared a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning.

During this chapter I will explore each emergent theme through the perspectives of the participants in the study. Specifically, I will take excerpts from the participants' interviews to support the themes that emerged.

Brilliance of Self and Others

The participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others. The participants expressed an understanding that all students possessed strengths and that they had a responsibility to draw out those strengths and gifts from the students.

To me it's about partnering with students to see their learning identities and seeing that we all have strengths and that we all have growth areas, and then I see my role is also really drilling down on what are the next steps for each learner in terms of their growth,

like what are those specific skills that I can create learning opportunities for them to take to grow as learners. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

In addition to expressing an understanding that all students possess strengths and gifts, the participants in this study held a belief that their students had a desire to learn and that it was their responsibility to expose them to engaging learning experiences.

It's one of the vital things that a teacher has to do because I believe all students have a desire to learn about the world around them. And I believe all parents want their students, their children, to be successful. And while there might be differences in what that means, when you are able to tap into those two concepts and ideas, you can really make an impact regardless of how the students' race or culture might have made them marginalized. ((Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

An important aspect in helping to expose students to their brilliance that was shared by the participants was creating opportunities for students to see themselves in everything they do in the classroom. By doing this the participants believe it helps to validate students' identity which in return demonstrates value for who they are as human beings.

Understanding the role and presence of Whiteness and valuing and celebrating scholars in their full humanity is important. Curriculum or content that are windows, mirrors, and doors, as we would call it, where they can see others, see themselves, and walk out into new opportunities. Because I think it's important for students to see themselves in everything they're doing. I think it's important for them to reflect on what it looks like for others and then be able to compare the two. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 10, 2022)

I think I've really leaned into a structure where it's not centering myself, but centering the students and their brilliance through a collaborative structure. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

In embodying a strength- and asset-based mindset for the students they serve, the participants discussed the importance of not labeling students or putting limitations on their abilities. In some instances, the participants reflected on their experience and the impact that ability grouping had on their beliefs about the things that they were good and bad at doing as learners.

I can think back in my own schooling to times when I was grouped, or I would use the word tracked, based off of a test or some sort of learning experience and kind of the impact that that had on my identity and who I believed that I was as a learner. I think those experiences have really sat with me in planning, thinking about the kind of space that I want to create for students in my fifth-grade classroom. I'm really trying to interrupt this idea of, you know, there's a math person and there's not a math person, or we are reading people or not reading people, and focusing instead on a lot of the work that we can all be math people, we can all be reading people. It really gets back to identity and who we think we are as learners, and I think the teacher is kind of the root to that system in creating that and how learners see themselves as learners within that space. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

I think students in general aren't meant to sit and be quiet for long periods of time and listen. I don't know that even adult students do well, so for me, being able to decenter Whiteness in education has played a huge role as an educator. And I think even just in

how I see my scholars and honoring and celebrating them in their full humanity.

(Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

An aspect discussed by participants that demonstrates a belief in students possessing brilliance and strengths was ensuring that there were feedback loops for students. Creating an environment where students feel comfortable to give their feedback helps to draw out student strengths.

Getting student feedback about what helps them and creating an environment where they feel comfortable saying that and me soliciting that information. What can we do to make this work? Students will come up with some pretty amazing suggestions. They usually know. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

In addition to sharing a belief that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others, the participants also discussed the importance of having high expectations and developing student agency.

High Expectations and Developing Student Agency

The participants shared a collective understanding of the importance of instilling and upholding high expectations and how that empowers students and staff to higher levels of achievement. The high expectations that the participants discussed were connected to their belief in the brilliance of the students with whom they have had the opportunity to facilitate learning for over the years. In having high expectations for students, the participants discussed the importance of students having agency and not creating environments where they feel helpless.

Another thing is having high expectations and telling students that. I have a student that's struggling in one of these ninth-grade classes I'm working in. I think I need to talk to him one-on-one and say, 'What do you need to be successful here? How can I help you?' I'm making assumptions about what he needs. I'm saying, 'Do you want to read this with me or what do you want to do?' And he's just saying, 'No, no no no.' So, I think tomorrow I need to take him aside and say—I don't like to use the word help because teenagers are pretty tuned into that. That's making somebody sound like they're helpless — 'I want to support you; how can I do that best?' and let them come up with it. Again, nobody wants to be told they're helpless. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

In addition to expressing the importance of creating agency and avoiding learned helplessness, participants discussed the role and presence of Whiteness and White saviorism as an obstacle in instilling and upholding high expectations.

I thought in my early years I was probably helping my students or even the White saviorism of wanting them to feel like they're succeeding by not allowing them to fail because they're not at the grade level. And when I could begin to understand how I could see them in their full humanity and celebrate them in a way that wasn't centered in Whiteness, their success in my eyes changed tenfold. It has just really allowed me to help myself see them and hold them all to high expectations as well as celebrating them.

(Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

Giving students choice and accountability were aspects of creating high expectations for students. Participants talked about how giving students choice helped to foster agency in them as learners.

I have high expectations for everyone in the room, no matter what your ability is through classwork and homework. I have been implementing more choice in my teaching over the last few years. . . . Accountability is another strategy I have for the kids to make sure that they are completing their work and make sure that they feel successful and understand and I check for understanding through quizzes or homework or oral conversations.

(Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Participants identified the importance of challenging students to do more than they think that they are capable of. There was an understanding expressed that high expectations require high levels of support, especially for traditionally marginalized groups of students.

If we believe that students can do the work and provide appropriate accommodations, they will show us that they can do it. I almost never have someone prove me otherwise. Sometimes students need more support, sometimes they need a different support, sometimes I think we struggle to kind of find the right support for kids. I would say yes [my beliefs have an impact on the success of students of color and Indigenous students] and my beliefs are that all students can learn and my expectation is that they learn to the best of their ability. And I would say yes, they do impact student learning. I think if you tell students that you have high expectations and you are going to be there for them and provide support, they will perform. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

I'm part of the academic leadership team here at my school, and we went to a retreat and there was a panel of students and they had a lot to say. The thing that is sticking with me the most is beliefs about them only being capable of the bare minimum. 'Even if we say this is all I can do, push us to do more.' Promote academic growth. Tell them they can

reach for the stars—even if the historical data and what you know about them, such as maybe they're coming from a troubled background—tell them college is still an option. Push them as hard as you would push any student, because it's not fair to set a lower bar just because of their color or their culture or their family or what you know about their brother that you had three years ago. They get to be pushed as hard as anybody else. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

Participants identified the need to couple high expectations with increased rigor and making sure that students have access to academic standards.

I think about the area that I've always believed I need to continue to grow in is that idea of rigor for all and ensuring that I'm not lowering my standards for students. But at the same time as I'm raising my standards on all my students, particularly my students who are Black and brown, particularly my Indigenous students who have in the past, historically and currently are not succeeding on traditional measures and schools, making sure that they're my focal students, that my lessons think about them at the center and their perspectives at the center. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

I keep coming back to creating a sense of community and small environment where kids feel safe and know that they're loved no matter what. It's about being consistent and holding kids accountable and then letting them know that you have high expectations for that. To not give up and to keep trying, and we talked a lot about the future—academic success can look different for so many people, but there are so many options for them in the future, whether it's college or trade school or getting a job and being a good human being. We really talk about being able to express themselves in a kind and respectful way

so they can be understood and heard and seen. And then acknowledging our backgrounds and our differences and celebrating our different backgrounds so they can also feel a sense of pride in who they are and where they come from. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Giving students agency over their learning was mentioned by participants as an important aspect in having high expectations for students. Participants recognize that students are better learners when they have a say in what they learn and how they learn it. Giving students an opportunity to show their learning in different ways allows their creativity and brilliance to shine.

The things I mentioned in question one impact student learning by allowing them to learn in more authentic ways, to be in control of their learning, to also be able to show what they know in a way that I think often gets minimized when the traditional century-plus-old way of education takes place. I think that students are better learners when they're the ones actively doing it and not passively receiving it. I've always held fast to that belief and wanting my students to be the ones that are leading the learning and being in charge of it. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

Having high expectations and developing student agency emerged as a theme during the interviews of the participants. Similar to high expectations and developing agency, participants acknowledged a collective responsibility to support learning and the healthy development of students. The participants shared an understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community.

Collective Responsibility

Participants expressed a belief that collective responsibility exists not only with the staff in the school, but also the students and families to ensure student success. Additionally, there was an underlying belief that partnership with families was important to changing the experience for traditionally marginalized students and families.

And I think that is a huge piece of success for all students and families during their year in fifth grade with me. I have noticed patterns and trends as how White families have experienced school systems and how students of color and native students have experienced our school system, and so really trying to initially interrupt some of those negative experiences that many families or parents of students in my class of color have experienced within our educational system. Trying to create a new pathway or a different way of being. So that partnership is really important to me. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Parent involvement. . . I have done a lot with that in the last couple of years. Teachers and sometimes myself will start to form opinions about maybe this student is struggling because it's not important to the family, going down that road. When we can engage parents, we can have really amazing growth with students. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

I have straightforward communication with all my students and families—that's another strategy. I'm open to them calling, emailing or texting anytime if they need anything. But I also feel like the communication relationships with other people in the building make my teaching stronger and more successful. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Participants expressed a desire to learn from the families of their students of color. They acknowledged that the multiple perspectives that are offered by families of different races and cultures helps to shape the mental models they hold about the students they serve.

I've learned so much from my students and families of color, from my colleagues of color. I think all of it weaves right in. I don't think there's any lived experience that I've had that isn't part of me as an educator, even if it's something that I'm not intentionally implementing, I can't unlearn or unhear something that I've seen or learned or heard, and so they subconsciously are a part of it, and then there are ones that I'm actively trying to utilize as well. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

Beliefs are my number-one, my belief in students and students' belief in themselves. I also think a really important element for me is family engagement or family connection or involvement, however you want to phrase that. I begin every year doing a home visit to each of my students' families. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

We're really being open to hearing from families and communities and trying to incorporate that type of learning into the students' learning so that they're able to continue learning in a way that feels natural and authentic to their lifestyle. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Working to understand and lean into the cultural values of student's families have helped participants to provide more engaging instruction for students.

I'm going to say that for the students I work with, the families have a really strong culture and expectations around education. I would say that's for every family that I've worked with. They articulate that and they feel strongly about that and an important part of their

culture is that their students get an education and that the school delivers that education.”
(Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

I know that a lot of our students are marginalized because of race—that's something that happens within the school and within our institutions, but if you talk with families and home culture, education is always very important. I don't think I've ever had a family tell me that's not important or that we don't want that for our kid. It's a very important thing, the home culture of student learning. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

In addition to working collectively with families to enrich the work and learning environment, participants identified the need to also work collectively with students and for students to work collectively with each other.

Having the student conversations—I think sometimes they learn more from their peers than they do from an adult. Providing that opportunity, which if you look at a lot of non-White cultures especially, is centric to all of them. It's community, it's groups, it's helping each other succeed. It's working off of each other versus like the Whiteness of ‘I'm the holder of knowledge, and knowledge is power and I need to be the one controlling and giving,’ and that's just not the way that a lot of other community’s work. I think that it's really counterproductive when that's the style of education that students and scholars are submerged in versus when they're allowed to be in community. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

The participants identified teacher collaboration and collective effort as an important part of the process to support learning and the healthy development of students. Participants

expressed the importance of co-teaching and collaboration in supporting their success as educators.

I also fully believe that I cannot do that alone. I believe wholeheartedly in co-teaching and collaboration. I think a lot of that, though, the way that I have seen our education system do it, has not been successful. I believe what I often see is this kind of pull out; I would label it as classes for, you know, multilingual students or reading intervention programs, and I believe that that really impacts students' beliefs about themselves and their identity. I also think it is something that teachers internalize about students and where they belong and where they don't belong within our school system. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

I think I've done a lot in my work to interrupt that system and to create spaces where collaboration happens, but it happens in a way that does not impact students' views about themselves or their identity as learners. So, we do a lot of co-teaching and push in models and fully believe in heterogeneous groups and not homogeneous groupings of students. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

I also think for me it has to do with collaboration. I don't think that our education system currently is designed to meet the needs of all of our students. There are many things that need to change, and one is a more co-teaching model in the classroom. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Collaborative teams that share ideas and best practices are important to changing outcomes for students.

I think my instructional strategies likely look pretty similar to my neighbors' as we work collaboratively to plan out our lessons. I'm teaching the same standards that my

colleagues are teaching as well. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

My MAP data showed, and I think this is where I'm right, but I could be wrong with my number, 75% or more of my students of color met or exceeded the NWEA by the spring. I wouldn't just say it was me. My fifth-grade team worked extremely hard to have that occur. Looking at our school data, 75% or more was a lot higher than what the other grades below us had achieved. And that's what my team worked extremely hard on.

(Participant 6, personal communication, September 14, 2022)

Participants stated that understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community was important to creating culturally relevant learning environments. They also expressed the importance of creating the conditions for persistent effort and risk-taking.

Persistent Effort and Risk-Taking

Participants shared a collective understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking that they can create anti-racist schools and academically successful learners. The participants shared the importance of students being able to make mistakes in the development of their willingness to take risks and persevere through challenging situations.

I'm seeing a lot of my students actually being able to attempt some of the work they're being asked to do; they're being able to access what is being taught. As a result, they have huge self-confidence boosts and their feeling of success translates to them being able to take more risks or feel like they can do it. I have kiddos that definitely aren't at grade level, but because they know that they have seen their own progress, they're willing to

take risks and try new things. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

I think the other thing that's a tragedy in education is that students aren't allowed to be the ones making mistakes and the whole trial and error and problem solving. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

The vulnerability that comes along with taking risks and persevering through challenging situations has resulted in the development of trust for the participants with their students. Demonstrating that they were there to support their students when the work felt too difficult helped to increase student confidence over time.

So, I think that's a huge one. By doing that they trust you, and if they feel trusted, and this is all students, but especially my students of color—if they feel like they can trust you, they can relax and then they can let their guard down and they can learn. And that trust can be hard to build at first, because you don't know their experiences with other White people, with other White females in school in general. Going into it, knowing it's going to take time, but it will be worth it in the end and don't give up, I think that was my constant takeaway. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

Participants described that the instructional strategies they used contributed to students' ability to take risks and persist through challenging academic situations. Differentiating the manner in which the lesson is being taught sometimes helps to strip away all of the layers that can stand in the way of students' learning.

I feel like we can scaffold things differently and provide manipulatives or a smaller group environment that feels like they can take a risk and they can access what is being asked of them without feeling self-conscious if they're not getting it. I keep coming back to this

whole feeling safe piece. When all those layers of their needs are stripped away and you can meet those needs, whether they're just basic, everyday needs like getting enough sleep or food, or feeling safe or feeling valued, I'm never feeling settled in where I'm at as far as not settling for what I've done in the past year, but continuing to push myself with something that I think led to academic success for those students. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

Knowing that it is okay to make a mistake supports the healthy development of academically successful learners. Participants described that being consistent in their messaging to students about their beliefs in their ability helped to create the conditions for students to be more willing to take risks.

I'm fortunate enough to work with a couple of adult parents that help out and always send a consistent message to the kids that things are going to be hard, but you can do hard things and just really reinforce that. It's almost like a belief in them and helping them build their confidence and knowing that it's OK to make a mistake and it's OK to take a risk and try. When kids are in our space they really just begin to thrive and some of the behaviors decrease and they're able to access learning. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Participants described the importance of adults modeling appropriate ways of responding when they make mistakes. This helps students feel more comfortable making mistakes and working outside of their comfort zone.

Number one, the first strategy I use is building relationships, like I said, and creating an environment where kids are comfortable failing and also succeeding. It's important for us

as adults to model what we do when we make mistakes and how we handle them.

(Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

As an educator, continuous improvement on oneself and willingness to grow in one's own racial consciousness are important in creating anti-racist schools. Not being willing to settle for incremental change or believe that you have arrived impacts student academic success.

I sometimes wonder if part of the reason that I have been so receptive and willing to work on my equity journey is that modesty is something that I value, and not just modesty for modesty's sake, but to really believe that I could be doing this better. So then I seek it out and I want to continue to improve. I'm not willing to rest on 80% or 90% or 50% or whatever it is that I want to think about how to continually improve it. I also don't want to burn myself out. This is my job as well as my career; it's my passion. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Having an understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking, participants can facilitate the development of academically successful learners has been an aspect of the participant's journey. In addition to creating the conditions for students to take risks, participants discussed the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence in changing outcomes for students.

Racial Consciousness and Cultural Competence

As educators, the participants in the study believe that change is necessary to ensure that all students learn at high levels. In order to create this change, they expressed a belief that racial consciousness and cultural competence are important factors in changing educational outcomes

for students. Being open to multiple racial perspectives plays an important role for the participants in increasing their consciousness.

Being able to learn from my colleagues of color and understand how to actively listen when somebody of color is telling me something. It's not my place to not believe it; it's their truth and I need to hear and believe them at face value for what they're saying. The same goes for students. As an educator on that journey, it's humbling when you have a student of color tell you something that oftentimes is probably a deficit of my teaching. Something they're trying to let me know. And instead of trying to explain it away, or justify it, or deny it, being able to sit with that and be, you're right, you deserve better, and I need to figure out how to change. I'm so sorry that that's how you receive that. I hear you and I'll remember that. Again, where students just feel comfortable, where they don't feel like there are constant biases or microaggressions against them. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

In addition to being open to multiple racial perspectives, the participants in this study acknowledged the responsibility to be mindful of the role and presence of Whiteness in their facilitation of learning.

I don't know that it's too different from my scholars. For me, a huge learning curve has been just recognizing the role and presence that my Whiteness plays in education and how I perpetuate a stereotypical educational system because that is what I knew it was built for, for me to be successful. When I stopped trying to make all of my scholars fit into the box that I believed to be the right way to learn, teaching got a lot easier. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

There was a period where I noticed that my African American girls would struggle in my class, where they wouldn't necessarily struggle in other spaces, or they were struggling everywhere. And I wasn't able to do it. And I think that's also where I started to realize that it's important that I recognize that I'm showing up as a White male, and that carries with it additional baggage with how White supremacy and White male chauvinism are intertwined. And that's what I'm expected to be like. And so that's thinking about how I enter spaces now. That's changed how I think about how I enter spaces. I always was one to raise my hand, but maybe that's not what I need to do right now, even though I might have a great idea. I mean, I always wanted to hear other people's ideas, I always valued other people's voices, but I always just felt like, oh, they're asking the question, that's my turn to get to talk. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Participants expressed a desire to not only put themselves in a position to grow in their racial consciousness and cultural competence but also to create space for students to engage in this process of discovery.

I believe that race and culture is always present and always operating for all of us, so I think about myself as a White female facilitator of the learning in the classroom. And I think about the race and culture that I bring into this space. And then I think about the race and culture of students and that they are not all White females. And so I think there is a space that needs to be created within classrooms for students to develop and myself to develop cultural awareness or cultural competency in each other's cultures. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

We spend a lot of time in my fifth-grade classroom really looking at our identities and our values and making sure that we are creating space for students to authentically bring their full selves into our learning community every day. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Participants described a process of self-discovery and growth in their understanding of race and culture. They discussed having to unlearn things that had been taught to them about seeing race during their childhoods. This process has helped the participants become more aware of their beliefs and how they see students who are different from them.

Before that, I treated everybody like they're people and I didn't see color, and now we're taught that color is a thing and we should be seeing it. So those beliefs have changed. It does help me see the whole student instead of just saying, well, I just see students. Now I see student learners and I see them for who they are by finding out what I do know about them and their culture and how that may impact their learning. I'm trying to put my beliefs in that perspective. I think that just the fact that I am more conscious of my beliefs, more conscious of how I might see a student. How I might interpret their behaviors and interpret how they learn is definitely more impacted by what I have learned through my study of my own beliefs and my students' cultures. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

“I have done a lot of learning about what it means to be White and how has that functioned and shown up in my life? And then how has that shown up within our education system? So for me it has really started with myself and doing a lot of learning

and unlearning and reflecting on how my race has shown up and impacted who I am.
(Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

Having begun an ongoing journey towards racial consciousness, I think I've also tried to create space for that to happen within the classroom, trying to give all students this gift of a growing racial consciousness and awareness of the different systems of oppression or just how racism functions and often trying to make the invisible visible for students in that way and seeing how we are all impacted by our race and culture and then how society places value on different groups of people. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

During the interviews, the participants described the different strategies that they have used over the years to grow in their racial consciousness, everything from engaging in courageous conversations to professional development to reading scholarly articles on the impact of race and culture on learning.

As an educator I learned throughout my 12 years at Saint Louis Park that we all have certain biases that we come with to education, to students, to their families, and so how can we break those biases down and not let them impact how we view our students? I was challenged through different professional development and things like that to really think about 'Why am I having my students do certain routines throughout the day?' or 'Why am I asking them to do certain activities and then maybe not seeing them be successful in those activities?' Is it because I need to think outside the box and I'm just kind of in my culture of a White female teacher, or can I look at some of the strengths that I see my students of color having, which is collaboration, communication, and

community? I saw that as a pattern, so how could I harness that for good instead of just asking them to fit into a narrow little hole of what my original expectations were in my early years of teaching? (Participant 6, personal communication, September 14, 2022)

The participants in the study expressed a belief that their race and culture impacts student learning. They believe that it is not only important for them to understand their students' race and culture but also their own race and culture and how that impacts their facilitation of learning.

I believe it's everything. I think that there's no way that your race and culture doesn't impact student learning, and not knowing about others' races and cultures also impacts their learning. I think that when you consider a student's or a learner's race and culture, it plays into how they learn. It plays into the different things that they might already have prior knowledge on. For me, when I'm considering race and culture as an educator, it's really looking at what strengths different races and cultures bring and what they value in their culture. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

Participants in the study expressed a belief that racial consciousness and cultural competence are important factors in changing educational outcomes for students. Additionally, they shared a collective understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships.

Advocacy for Equity Through Relationships

The participants held a belief that their relationships with students and families impacted student success. They also believed that they could show up as better advocates for students when they knew about them and their families.

I would say my beliefs lead to academic success for these students because for myself personally, I feel like I'm very open-minded and I reach out and make relationships. Creating strong relationships with kids makes student achievement go higher in the classroom. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

It's not something I'm worried about as far as, 'How am I going to do this? How am I going to show up tomorrow and make sure that my Black and brown and Indigenous students know that I'm fighting for them and I'm fighting to create a more just classroom for them?' (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Participants in the study expressed a belief that through relationships, not only could they show up as better advocates for students and families, but they could garner trust, which is something that traditionally marginalized groups of people do not have for public institutions.

I know that as a White woman, I've had a totally different experience than many of my students and I think that after so many years of teaching I feel it comes back to relationships and just being able to let them know they're loved and that they can accomplish and be successful. I really strive to get to know the kids and their families, and when that attitude or understanding is there, students feel a sense of trust and safety, knowing that you've got their back and that you're there for them. Over the years most of my population has been students of color, so it's become just ingrained that relationship is everything when it comes to learning and really reaching students and helping them. I understand their learning and their needs and how they can get their needs met.

(Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Relationships go without saying. Relationships were the crux of those years, developing those relationships with students and parents because you get the buy-in; they have to

learn to trust you. We had many parents who maybe have had traditionally negative experiences with school, and I can't say we turned every family around, but we were trying to relentlessly show them that we care for their child, we love their child, we want the best for their child, just like they do. We can help those relationships through newsletters, through phone calls, through emails, through just communication, whether it's a note here or there, but continuing to build that up. (Participant 6, personal communication, September 14, 2022)

Oftentimes in school settings, relationships between students and staff are transactional, with the adults trying to influence the behavior of students through the transactional relationship. In order to develop an authentic relationship, the participants expressed a need to be able to receive real feedback from students and not get defensive when it is not positive. Participants also expressed how this type of authentic relationship enriches their lives as well.

A lot of our school days we have a transactional relationship with students—they know they have a role, we have a role, and we play this role. But I think we need to talk with students and listen to what they say in a non-defensive way, not taking it personally because we all operate within this culture in the Twin Cities and in the upper Midwest of our White middle class values and culture about what you need to be successful. It's so prevalent that it's hard for us to even see it sometimes. But I know that I would like to hear more about what kids or what students think and feel about school. A lot of my kids probably would feel very hesitant to do that because, again, they're very respectful and that might feel disrespectful. But when students say something, I try not to take that kind of stuff personally. That's where people go down a road that's defensive. Instead of feeling defensive, like 'that's not what I meant to do' or 'I'm not a bad person,' that sort

of thing, trying to be open and acknowledging that there's a lot of racism and a lot of marginalization of, in this case, in our schools, our Black and brown students and also our linguistically different kids, kids who have another language and another culture.

(Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

I think one of the major things I learned was how much richer my life is when I can invest in people who don't look like me, that maybe believe something different. The experiences that we can give each other through those relationships, whether it's parents, whether it's my students or my neighbors, those experiences and those relationships have only enriched my life. I really believe in the phrase that proximity builds compassion, and sometimes I encounter people up here, or at least their outer appearance, or their bumper stickers or whatever it is, indicates that maybe that hasn't been a part of their life. It makes me sad because I truly believe that your compassion only grows for people as you are surrounded by people who look and think differently than you do. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

The relationships that were formed were important for the participants to truly see the students as unique individuals who have a lot of talents and gifts to bring to the classroom and school community.

Over time it helps you see the uniqueness in everyone, and so I'm able to look at a child and see them on different levels. I'm seeing a child for their culture, like with my Somali students, I know that when they're celebrating Eid, we have to be much more respectful about our snack times and making sure that they're getting water if they can have it, and recognizing if they're tired. Just being a little more cognizant of the impact of home lives

and culture on how they're going to do at school. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

The participants expressed that it was important for the conditions to be created in the school or district that encourages and expects strong relationships and advocacy for students regardless of their race or culture.

And I recognize that not every school, every district can do that, even in Minnesota and let alone in the United States. I know that we are very fortunate and that if a parent questioned that I know that my administration would shut it down. They're like, 'Nope, they're doing what we told them to do.' You look at our mission statement, it says, 'We celebrate the brilliance of every kid.' That's why I feel like more and more I'm able to do this, that I can center my Black students in a lesson and I'm not doing something wrong, I'm not forgetting about somebody. I'm not censoring them. That's the most important thing. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Again, I'm going to say the foundation is making relationships. You have to make them feel successful. All students, but especially Black and brown. I love to get to know the kids and I stand out in the hall and I greet the 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, not just the grade I work in, which is fifth and by the end of the year there many children are giving me hugs and they're saying that they want to be in the classroom and just feeling that acceptance and love and caring that another adult outside of your family loves you as much as someone inside your family. That has to be there for them to feel academic success. They have to be comfortable asking questions and struggling. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

All of the effort to create authentic relationships with students and families positively impacts student learning. In addition, positively impacting student learning is an important aspect of being able to facilitate learning opportunities in a student-centered manner.

Participants shared a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning.

Student-Centered Facilitation of Learning

As facilitators of learning, the participants were intentional about being inclusive of students' perspective in the development of and implementation of lessons. Participants felt that their curiosity regarding student perspective led to higher levels of engagement.

One question I would use over and over in my classroom is, 'Whose perspective is missing in this?' To me it was always really important for them to be the judge and jury of who else we should be asking about this. Who else might be impacted by this?

(Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

How to be able to have conversations was a skill that I would work with my scholars on intentionally every year, no matter what age, and part of it was teaching them to listen.

Part of it was teaching them to analyze what they were hearing and consider whose perspective was missing. Also, that we could talk and not have to agree. I think so often the binary of right and wrong just exists in so many spaces. And then the minute somebody isn't on the same side of that fence as your belief is, it becomes polarizing and it shuts people down and doesn't allow students to be critical thinkers. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Another strategy is that I never called on a White student first if I could help it. I always tried to send the voices of the non-dominant narratives as the first couple of voices that

got to share so that it wasn't shutting students down. Thinking that since most of education is dominated by Whiteness, I wanted other voices elevated and lifted first. Then people could help and empower and lift those students and attach to their ideas. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

There was a belief that grouping mattered and that heterogeneity in groups was important for all students in the classroom. Creating this type of structure helps to elevate students' brilliance in the classroom.

Heterogeneous group work is a big piece that I've leaned into as an educator, really spending a lot of the time early on in the school year creating the structures to make group work successful. The importance of how and why we work in groups, problem solving within groups, shifting the power structure within the classroom to me not being the knowledge holder—we all have knowledge and skills and brilliance to share and that is collective among all of us. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

A smaller group approach has really been beneficial, and at times it's a lot of one-on-one work too, which is extremely helpful to help them focus on what the task is or what the objective is. Tailoring instruction to where they are and what their needs are. And if you know a little bit about the family backgrounds and family relationships and dynamics and having that connection with the family is huge. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

In addition to elevating students' brilliance through grouping, the participants also discussed the importance of centering students' stories in lessons. So not only providing access to standards, but also thinking about cultural and racial literacy and critical consciousness

development. Allowing students to lead the learning was an aspect that was discussed by participants.

One piece is making sure that I know it's my instructional strategies center their stories, trying to center their experiences and their ancestral experiences to make sure that we talk about and center the stories of marginalized groups throughout history as we're studying history and throughout the world, as we're studying the world. That as we talk about science, we talk about how that has impacted how scientific advancement has impacted marginalized communities and how scientific advancements have come from more than just one White culture. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

Another specific strategy is to continue to bring in things that are interesting in their world, whether it's a political issue that's on the table and they're scared about it or it's something cool happening, you know, just in our country or pop culture wise. If you can bring that in, it will only make them more interested and engaged and then allow them to talk about it, to reflect and to discuss. (Participant 6, personal communication, September 14, 2022)

I think number one is just allowing students to be leading the learning, to be asking questions, to be turning and talking to people working cooperatively, and that starts by teaching them how to work cooperatively. Again, there are a lot of life skills that kids don't naturally get exposed to, so we in my classrooms spend a ton of time on 'How do we exist in a community together? How do we restore things when they're not working or somebody is feeling like they're not part of the community?' So starting by teaching those skills I think are strategies that apply in a lot of our learning spaces because whether they are with a partner or small group, really prioritizing the fact that every voice

matters and that we need to consider all perspectives. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

Meeting students where they are at was identified as an important element in facilitating learning for students. Understanding students' needs and being able to differentiate helps to improve student engagement.

My very first rule in working with any student is meeting the student where they are and getting to know the student. I give them a lot of time to share and I try really hard not to cut them off because I find myself as an interrupter a lot, and I'm like, OK, I need to give you time to talk it out. And I let them. A lot of times I let students pass if they're not ready, but I always give them a second chance, and those other strategies are effective for students of color. Also, we don't have any wrong answers. There are no wrong answers. It's OK. I see where you're coming from. Can you say more? Or let's see if another friend has another idea, so I don't say nope, try again; we just kind of circle back, or we also ask each other for help a lot. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

Another strategy is using visuals to help supplement your instruction. I feel like there's a lot of talking going on in classrooms; there's a lot of teacher talking going on and we really need to get kids to do the talking because that's how you get better at it, by doing it. And teachers are great at talking. We do a lot of it. When I'm presenting some instruction, I'll always try to not just talk, but also show what I'm talking about, whether it's an image or showing the text because I know that retention is much better if you get that information in two ways, if you hear it and you see it. Or if you hear it and you see an image. This is the whole idea of, I guess it's multi-modality, but it's also just having visuals to help with whatever it is that you're talking about or presenting, I think that's

another strategy that's a best practice. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

I think a huge thing for my students was I used a ton of visuals. I was making anchor charts for almost every lesson and posting them up after and I would have them make the anchor chart with me. They would have their notebook and they would get out their little markers or something and they would engage with that. And it wasn't anything—I mean, I was grabbing them off of Pinterest, but those were key ideas that we were learning, and they were always posted up in the classroom, too. (Participant 6, personal communication, September 14, 2022)

Several of the participants had the opportunity to teach many students whose first language was not English. Whenever possible, they described the importance of using home language as an engagement strategy and as a way to make sure students understood the instructions. Participants discussed using technology to support things like accessing home language and differentiation to help students gain confidence in areas where they have lagging skills.

You get the added benefit of validating home culture and home language. I don't think that happens very much. I think a lot of the kids I work with feel kind of invisible in the school. The fact that they have another language and another culture is acknowledged at certain times of the year, but in general it's not really acknowledged. I think a lot of students would say that they feel kind of invisible. They don't feel like they're seen, so doing that in a classroom is a nice way to do that and validate kids' home language and home culture. That's a positive thing about technology. (Participant 3, personal communication, September 26, 2022)

“If we can activate that [engagement] by using first language, that really, really helps. It helps the engagement hugely and I need to do it more. I try to do it when I'm giving directions, but sometimes I get lazy or forget or whatever, but I think that's another strategy that is really solid, particularly with directions for how to do something so that it's really clear. Kids may try to do that work as second language learners, but if they know specifically what they're supposed to be doing and if that's in their first language I think that really helps. So that's a strategy, using the first language to give instruction. (Participant 8, personal communication, September 28, 2022)

Why do they [technological tools] make students successful? I think it's because it allows them to pick the thing they feel confident in, and if there's a required way, I can let them start in a method that they feel good in and help bridge it to a strategy or a method where they maybe don't feel as confident. But them seeing themselves as successful learners, I think is more than half the battle because when you believe you can, you can. Students don't rise to low expectations, so I think they believe that they're doing the same thing everyone else is. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

Summary

This study addressed the larger qualitative ideas that encompassed my desire to do this study. As an educator, student learning is central to my success. Understanding the beliefs and mindsets about race and culture teachers must have to successfully educate students of color and Indigenous students I believe is foundational and instructive for state legislation which influences learning at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels.

The study helped to address the question, “What is the relationship between beliefs, strategies, race, and culture when successfully educating students of color and Indigenous

students? The participants in the study, who have all had success with growing students of color, expressed a belief that these things are connected and are not mutually exclusive. The next chapter discusses the study as a whole and expands on its meaning and potential significance in the field of education.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

While I do not believe educators alone can solve all the issues we face as a nation, I do believe that educators have to give voice to the issues facing E-12 education and can no longer be active bystanders in route to liberation for students of color and Indigenous students. Delpit (1995) suggested that “to provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the cultural power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (p. 28). The participants in this study demonstrated a belief in the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices to enrich the learning environments in which they work. For the past 15 years, staff in this school district have been in pursuit of creating racially equitable learning environments.

Gay (2000) offered that “too many students of color have not been achieving in school as well as they should for far too long. The consequences of these disproportionately high levels of low achievement are long-term and wide reaching, personal and civic, individual and collective. They are too devastating to be tolerable. We must insist that this disempowerment stop now and set into motion change strategies to ensure that it does” (p. 1). While the path to racial equity transformation has not always been clear in this school district, the participants in this study have demonstrated a willingness to engage in learning and action to improve the daily lived experience for all students, especially Indigenous and students of color.

The participants in this study have done their personal work to grow in their racial consciousness, which resulted in academic growth for Black and Brown students. These educators are aggressively working to see, inspire, and empower each learner to live their

brilliance in an environment that centers student voice and experience to create racially equitable learning that energizes and enhances the spirit of our community. Hooks (1994) explained:

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds in ways that had characterized teachers in their pedagogical practices in our all black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. (p. 3)

Educators must understand their collective responsibility to improve the health of our democracy. If we are ever going to get to a point in this nation where Indigenous and people of color's humanity is seen, uplifted and empowered, public schools must play a critical role. Hammond and Jackson (2015) offered that as educators, we have to recognize that we help maintain the achievement gap when we don't teach advanced cognitive skills to students we label as "disadvantaged" because of their language, gender, race, or socioeconomic status (p. 14).

Educators must recognize that not only do they have the responsibility, but permission to create Pre-K–12 educational experiences where students have an opportunity to understand who they are racially and culturally and work towards proficiency in other races and cultures. Educators have the permission and responsibility to ensure all students have academically rigorous learning environments where they can develop their sociopolitical consciousness. Edmin (2016) offered, "If we are truly interested in transforming schools in meeting the needs of urban youth of color who are the most disenfranchised within them, educators must create safe and trusting environments that are respectful of students' culture" (p. 27).

The participants in this study identified the importance of race and culture in their practice and spoke to the work they did on themselves to engage, sustain, and deepen conversations about race and racism. At a time in our nation's history where there are laws being

created to silence educators who are in pursuit of humanizing students, these educators are doubling down on work in the areas of racial equity and culturally relevant instruction. The participants in the study are taking the necessary steps to produce students who will not only improve the health of our democracy but positively contribute to the creation of an antiracist democracy. Delpit (1995) asserted that educators will struggle achieving academic performance for students when students' culture, ethnicity, race, and personal experience are divorced from the learning process. The participants expressed a desire to create racially equitable learning environments that promote academic rigor, cultural competency, and critical consciousness. Over the years, there has been a lot of scholarship that has attempted to shift mental models about the concept of race and the behaviors associated with how race is played out in schools and society. Scholars have worked to restore confidence and positive identity development in students of color and, more importantly, influence the adults responsible for educating students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for students of color. The research aimed to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that led to traditionally marginalized populations of students in grades 2-5 demonstrating growth on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment.

Research Questions

The larger qualitative ideas that encompassed my desire to do this study were:

- What are the beliefs or mindsets about race and culture teachers must have to successfully educate students of color and Indigenous students?
- What is the relationship between beliefs, strategies, race, and culture when successfully educating students of color and Indigenous students?

Summary of Findings

Dr. Martin Luther King (1967), in his “Beyond Vietnam” sermon on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, shared,

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there ‘is’ such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action. (p. 8)

The participants in this study demonstrated a collective belief that there is such a thing as being too late based on the urgency they expressed in improving educational outcomes for all of their students. The participants described the vigorous and positive action they have taken that resulted in academic growth for students of color. They also explained the importance of collaboration with students, families, and other educators and the need to be responsive to the voices of their students.

The participants described their efforts to align instruction, curriculum, and assessment to culturally relevant practices. Hammond (2015) suggests, “culture, it turns out, is the way that every brain makes sense of the world,” adding:

That is why everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, has a culture. Think of culture as a software for the brain’s hardware. The brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful events. If we want to help dependent learners do higher order thinking and problem-solving, then we have to access their brains' cognitive structures to deliver culturally responsive instruction. (p. 22)

The participants talked about their efforts to build relationships with students and families to better understand them racially and culturally in order to be able to better meet their needs

through their facilitation of learning. The participants also discussed the importance of creating academically rigorous environments for students. Each participant discussed the importance of culturally relevant instruction. The participants expressed a desire to create racially equitable learning environments that promote student learning, cultural competency, and critical consciousness. They described their responsibility as educators to create learning environments that produce citizens who have the knowledge, skill, and will to interrupt racist systems.

Conclusions

This part of Chapter 5 will include the themes, theoretical construct, and connection to the literature review organized by research questions. I will be looking for alignment and misalignment to the research discussed in Chapter 2. Themes identified in Chapter 4 show up in multiple questions. For example, the theme about racial consciousness and cultural competence emerged in participants' responses in each of the questions.

Figure 5.1

Emergent Themes

Brilliance of self and others	Participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others.
High expectations and developing student agency	Participants shared a collective understanding of the importance of instilling and upholding high expectations that empower students and staff to higher levels of achievement.
Collective responsibility	Participants shared a collective understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community.

Persistent effort and developing risk takers	Participants shared a collective understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking, anti-racist schools and academically successful learners can be created.
Racial consciousness and cultural competence	Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change.
Advocacy for equity through relationships	Participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships.
Student-centered facilitation of learning	Participants shared a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning.

Question One

The first question participants responded to during the study was: What do you believe about the impact of race and culture on student learning? *The themes that emerged in the participants' responses were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence and a belief about the need for student-centered facilitation of learning.* Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change. Participants also shared a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning. This idea was reflected in comments made by participant 1.

I believe that race and culture is always present and always operating for all of us, so I think about myself as a white female facilitator of the learning in the classroom. And I

think about the race and culture that I bring into this space. And then I think about the race and culture of students and that they are not all white females. And so I think there is a space that needs to be created within classrooms for students to develop and myself to develop cultural awareness or cultural competency in each other's cultures. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 10, 2022)

In Chapter 2, I shared scholarship from Lynn and Dixson (2013), Sampson (2008), Haar and Robicheau (2008), and Duncan (2002) that aligned to the themes that emerged in the study. Specifically, Lynn and Dixson offered that professors, teachers, and scholars desiring to sharpen their pedagogy would benefit from multiple perspectives and voices outside of their profession (p. 32). Sampson identified that incorporating a diverse curriculum allows teachers and students to examine racial attitudes and behaviors while addressing students of color and Native American students' needs. Haar and Robicheau reported that multicultural educational practices have focused on the superficial cultural differences like food or fashion and have ignored underlying issues of racism and cultural conflicts that need to be addressed in schools. Duncan shared,

No one really listens to the powerless or, in those cases when they are granted permission to speak, they are rarely understood by others. In the latter cases, the stories of subjugated group members are often incorporated into dominant narratives with which they are incommensurable. (p. 134)

At the core of both themes that emerged in response to this question was a belief that racism was constant and that counter stories or an understanding of the lived experience of students and families helps to decenter the racial and cultural values that are held by many educators and in many cases are misaligned with the lived experiences of the students being

served. Lynn and Dixson (2013) offered that it was prominent American leaders—presidents, Supreme Court justices, social scientists, and respected university professors—who reinforced this narrative of Black inferiority for mainstream consumption. This idea of Black inferiority and inferiority of people of color has created inaccurate and racist beliefs about students and families and has caused an educational debt that has yet to be repaid.

Dr. Ladson-Billings (2021) suggested that these factors have created an education debt that must be addressed by educators. She offered that we live in the world of the pragmatic and practical and that we must address the education debt because it has implications for the kind of lives we can live and the kind of education society can expect for most of its children. As this debt is being paid, the inclusiveness of students' lived experiences and racial and cultural values can help to affirm and support in repairing the harm that has been caused over many generations in this country.

Hooks (1994) contended that “while it is utterly irresponsible for students to expect classrooms to be therapy sessions, it is appropriate for them to hope that the knowledge received in any setting will enrich and enhance them” (p. 19). In order for this enrichment and enhancement to occur, educators must center students' identity and lived experiences and develop their racial consciousness and understanding of their culture and cultures of the students they teach. The participants addressed the question: What do you believe about the impact of race and culture on student learning? As a part of their responses to the question, the themes that emerged were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence and a belief about the need for student-centered facilitation of learning.

Question Two

The second question participants responded to during the study was: Do the beliefs that you hold lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class? If so, how do they impact student learning? *The themes that emerged in the participants' responses were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence, the need for high expectations and student agency, and a belief about the brilliance of self and others.*

Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change. Participants also shared a collective understanding of the importance of instilling and upholding high expectations that empower students and staff to higher levels of achievement. Additionally, participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others in response to this question. This idea was reflected in comments made by participant 2.

I would say my beliefs lead to academic success for these students because for myself personally, I feel like I'm very open minded and I reach out and make relationships. Creating strong relationships with kids makes student achievement go higher in the classroom. (Participant 2, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

In Chapter 2, I shared scholarship from Hammond and Jackson (2015), Delpit (1994), and DeCluir and Dixson (2004) that aligned to the themes that emerged in the study. This scholarship supported the themes that were generated in the interviews with participants. In scholarship that spoke to the impact of low expectations, Hammond and Jackson explained that “over time, many students of color are pushed out of school because they cannot keep up academically because of poor reading skills and the lack of social emotional support to deal with

their increasing frustration” (p. 13). Scholarship that spoke to the need to acknowledge student’s brilliance included Delpit’s suggestion that “teachers must not merely take courses that tell them how to treat their students as multicultural clients. . . . They must also learn about the brilliance the students bring with them in their blood” (p. 182). The absence of the expectation to educate all children and an understanding of their brilliance creates an “othering” effect. DeCluir and Dixson stated that such structures allocate the privilege of Whites and the subsequent othering of people of color in all areas, including education.

At the core of the themes that emerged in response to this question was a belief in the need for high expectations and student agency and a belief about the brilliance of self and others. Seeing people of color as brilliant and having high expectations for them has not been a common aspect of schooling or life in this country. In the theoretical construct of critical race theory, there is a tenet that critiques liberalism. Specifically, this tenet speaks to the myth of meritocracy or the belief that people have gotten to where they are in life due to hard work only and not the privileges that they hold. This idea is commonly referred to as “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.”

Can a person pull themselves up by their bootstraps if others do not see them as capable of doing so or do not create conditions for their brilliance to be displayed? Critical race theory would suggest that whiteness as property, which is a distinct set of ideologies, assumptions, and privileges, has historically contributed to a conception of property in several ways. Property of ownership, property right of exclusion, and property right of status make it difficult for people of color to display their brilliance in an environment that has high expectations for them. Ladson-Billings (2021) shared, as a part of her Spencer postdoctoral fellowship, that she was plagued with the issue of low expectations and the inability of educators to see the brilliance of students

of color. She offered a belief that the literature is fixated on failure and what is wrong with African American and other students of color. Until educators hold high expectations for students of color, see them as brilliant and honor the gifts that they bring, it will be challenging to create learning environments that consistently foster academic growth for traditionally marginalized cohorts of students. The participants addressed the question: Do the beliefs that you hold lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class? If so, how do they impact student learning? As a part of their responses to the question the themes that emerged were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence, the need for high expectations and student agency, and a belief about the brilliance of self and others.

Question Three

The third question participants responded to during the study was: Talk about the instructional strategies participants use that they feel lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in your class. Why are those strategies effective for students of color and Indigenous students? *The themes that emerged in the participants' responses were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence; collective responsibility; persistent effort and developing risk takers; student-centered facilitation of learning; and advocacy for equity through relationships.*

Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change. They shared a understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community. Additionally, participants shared a collective understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking, anti-racist schools and academically successful learners can be created.

They discussed the importance of a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning. Lastly, participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships in response to this question. This idea was reflected in comments made by participant 4.

One piece is making sure that I know my instructional strategies center their stories.

Trying to center their experiences and their ancestral experiences to make sure that we talk about and center the stories of marginalized groups throughout history as we're studying history and throughout the world, as we're studying the world. That as we talk about science, we talk about how that has an impact, how scientific advancement has impacted marginalized communities and how scientific advancements have come from more than just White culture. And then in math, I think it comes down to making sure every student knows that they're a mathematician, providing them opportunities to be mathematicians and problem solvers. That involves lots of problem-solving, lots of lots of time for independent work so they can develop their independent skills, but also lots of time for cooperative work so that my students who come from more collectivist experiences and backgrounds are able to shine and be leaders or shine and be just a part of a group and have that learning opportunity as well. (Participant 4, personal communication, September 22, 2022)

In Chapter 2, I shared scholarship from Hooks (1994), Noddings (2013), Edmin (2015), Gay (2000), and Ladson-Billings (1995) that aligned to the themes that emerged in the study. This scholarship supported the themes that were generated in the interviews with participants. There was scholarship that spoke to the impact of trust and care being important aspects of

developing relationships. Noddings explained that as human beings we want to care and to be cared for by others. The notion of caring for oneself and others is foundational in this ethic and serves as a bridge to create trust and loyalty. Additionally, the scholarship spoke to the need of everyone's perspective playing in the success of traditionally marginalized students. Hooks (1994) stated, "There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community" (p. 8). Teachers alone with their own understanding are not sufficient in meeting the needs of all learners. Edmin (2015) explained that "the work for teachers becomes developing the self-reflection necessary to deconstruct the ways that media messages, other teachers' negative stories, and their own need to be the hero affects how they see and teach students" (p. 43).

Through persistent effort students can reach higher levels of learning. Gay (2000) offered that culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities (p. 20). Often in educational settings educators believe that relationships alone will improve student academic outcomes. Ladson-Billings (1995) offered that culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs, not merely make students feel good.

At the core of the themes that emerged in response to this question was a belief that improved educational outcomes for students of color could not be achieved with only the understanding of teachers. Instead, this required the perspective of students, families, and communities from which these students come. Within the critical race theory critique-of-liberalism tenet are several basic notions that have been embraced in liberal legal ideology that

must be deconstructed and challenged. Specifically, in addition to the myth of meritocracy discussed above, this tenet speaks to colorblindness and race neutrality.

If the things that have been socially constructed to define students are not fully recognized in the classroom setting, can students show up in their full humanity? I would argue that they cannot, therefore behaving in a color-blind manner of acting as if race and culture do not impact the learning environment for students is problematic and strips students of the attributes that make them beautiful and brilliant. Hammond and Jackson (2015) defined culturally responsive teaching as an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and ability to respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge. Additionally, they offered that culturally responsive teachers are able to scaffold to connect what students know to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. Culturally responsive educators are able to do this while understanding the importance of being in relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the students in order to create a safe space for learning. The participants addressed the question about the instructional strategies they use that they feel lead to academic success for students of color and Indigenous students in their classroom. Additionally, they were asked to share why those strategies are effective for students of color and Indigenous students.

Question Four

The fourth question participants responded to during the study was: Please share your beliefs about the impact of race and culture on your personal lived experience and experience as a teacher. *The themes that emerged in the participants' responses were the importance of racial consciousness and cultural competence, advocacy for equity through relationships, and the brilliance of self and others.*

Participants shared a collective belief that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change. They shared a belief that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships in response to this question. Lastly, they shared a collective belief that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others in response to question four. This idea was reflected in comments made by participant 5.

I know that as a white woman, I've had a totally different experience than many of my students and I think that after so many years of teaching I feel it comes back to relationships and just being able to let them know they're loved and that they can accomplish and be successful. I really strive to get to know the kids and their families, and when that attitude or understanding is there, students feel a sense of trust and safety, knowing that you've got their back and that you're there for them. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23, 2022)

In Chapter 2, I shared scholarship from Hammond and Jackson (2015) and Delpit (1994) that aligned to the themes that emerged in the study. This scholarship supported the themes that were generated in the interviews with participants. The literature spoke to the impact of trust and care being important aspects of developing relationships and the brilliance that students carry with them on a daily basis. Hammond and Jackson shared that “the brain needs to be a part of a caring social community to maximize his sense of well-being. Marginalized students need to feel affirmed and included as valued members of a learning community” (p. 47).

Not only do traditionally marginalized students need to feel affirmed and included as valued members of a learning community, they need to be cared for in an authentic way. “Caring is the way that we generate the trust that builds relationships. You have to not only care

about students and the general sense but also actively care for them in the physical and emotional sense” (Hammond & Jackson, 2015, p. 73). Additionally, all students possess brilliance and it is the educator’s responsibility to be in relationship with students in a manner that allows for students to share their brilliance in the learning environment. Although already quoted in the literature review and this chapter, Delpit’s (1994) words are worthy of a refrain: “Teachers must not merely take courses that tell them how to treat their students as multicultural clients. . . . They must also learn about the brilliance the students bring with them in their blood” (p. 182).

At the core of the themes that emerged in response to this question was a belief that improved educational outcomes for students of color can occur when educators draw out and lean into the brilliance of their students. Also, participants acknowledged the importance of having authentic relationships and advocating for traditionally marginalized students as an important aspect in response to this question. In the theoretical construct of critical race theory, there is a tenet called permanence of racism. This tenet suggests that racism has always been an integral, permanent and indestructible component of American society.

Ladson-Billings (2021) offered that if racism consisted of isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would see examples of educational excellence and equity together in public schools. Instead, she explained that the places where African-Americans experience educational success tend to be outside of public schools. She went on to say that some might argue that poor children, regardless of their race, do worse in school and because a higher proportion of African-American children are poor, this condition contributes to their dismal school performance. Even with that, she acknowledged that their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism.

Ladson-Billings (2021) explained that a next step for positioning effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also supports the acceptance and affirmation of students' cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate. This type of theoretical model or culturally relevant pedagogy is necessary for the understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships. The participants addressed the question: Please share your beliefs about the impact of race and culture on your personal lived experience and experience as a teacher.

Question Five

The fifth question participants responded to during the study was: What do you believe are the most important factor(s) in promoting academic growth for students of color and Indigenous students? *All of the identified themes in this study emerged in the participants' responses.* Participants shared a collective understanding that racial consciousness and cultural competence are essential to each person's ability to be a catalyst for change. They shared a understanding that embodying the collective and urgent responsibility of anti-racist practices enriches a work and learning environment and community. Additionally, participants shared a collective understanding that through persistent effort and risk-taking, anti-racist schools and academically successful learners can be created.

They discussed the importance of a collective understanding that students learn best when educators center their identity, lived experiences, and needs in the facilitation of learning. Participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has the capacity and responsibility to foster the growth and brilliance of others. Participants shared a collective understanding of the importance of instilling and upholding high expectations that empower students and staff to

higher levels of achievement. Lastly, participants shared a collective understanding that everyone has equal intrinsic worth and the ability to advocate for the historically marginalized through effective relationships in response to question five. This idea was reflected in comments made by participant 7.

Understanding the role and presence of whiteness. Valuing and celebrating scholars in their full humanity. Curriculum or content that are windows, mirrors, and doors, as we would call it, where they can see others, see themselves, and walk out into new opportunities. I think it's important for students to see themselves in everything they're doing. I think it's important for them to reflect on what it looks like for others and then be able to compare the two. A lot of pieces of scholars' humanity has been denied or taken away when we're not acknowledging how whiteness played out in something we're learning about. (Participant 7, personal communication, September 24, 2022)

In Chapter 2, I shared scholarship from Edmin (2016), Duncan (2002), and Hammond and Jackson (2015) that aligned to the themes that emerged in the study. This scholarship supported the themes that were generated in the interviews with participants, speaking to the need to move away from the traditional models of schooling and to see students of color not through a deficit lens, but for all of the assets they bring to the classroom.

Edmin (2016) stated:

the effectiveness of the teacher can be traced directly back to what the teacher thinks of the student. If the teacher does not value the student, there's no motivation to take risks to engage with the student. It is easier and safer to remain in the traditional model-even though that model has failed the student. (p. 207)

How educators see students and value their gifts is an important aspect in the mental models educators hold about their students. Duncan (2002) explained that a significant amount of research “technically constructs black males as a strange population and contributes to widespread perception about their place in school is unremarkable: the dominant storyline suggests that black males are too different from other students, and oppositionally so” (p.133).

We must change the trajectory of not only how students are seen by the adults in schools, but the expectations and rigor for students as well. Hammond and Jackson (2015) asserted:

While the achievement gap has created this epidemic of dependent learners, culturally responsive teaching is one of our most powerful tools for helping students find their way out of the gap. A systemic approach to culturally responsive teaching is the perfect catalyst to stimulate the brain's neuroplasticity so that it grows new brain cells that help students' thinking in more sophisticated ways. (p. 15)

Delpit (1995) explained that we hear the occasional urban school defined as excellence, but we are inundated with stories of inner-city mass failure, student violence, and soaring dropout rates. She explained that attempts at school improvement-better teacher education, higher standards, and revised curricula are noticed, but not sufficient. While all of these things are important, true change cannot occur without the perspective and engagement of those that are impacted by the systems that have been failing them.

In the theoretical construct of critical race theory there is a tenet called counter story telling. Counter narratives challenge the claim of race neutrality of traditional legal discourse to reveal that racism and racial discrimination are neither abnormal nor occasional parts of the lives of people of color. Lynn and Dixson (2013) explained that counter storytelling contains the personal accounts of other people. They are narratives that are grounded in real life experience

and empirical data and contextualized within the specific social setting. The use of counter stories allows for the telling of untold stories. In doing so, educators can open their minds to new possibilities that they did know or believe were possible for their students.

In this study the participants discussed the impact of their willingness to lean into the counter stories of the students that they served. Not only did it improve their relationship with the students they served, but it had an impact on their students' academic growth. The participants addressed the question: What do you believe are the most important factor(s) in promoting academic growth for students of color and Indigenous students? As a part of their responses to the question all of the themes discussed in this chapter and Chapter 4 emerged.

Recommendation for Practice

In a 2021 Atlantic article Wright wrote Ms. Mamie Till, the mother of Emmett Till, insisted that the casket containing his body be left open because, in her words, “Let the world see what I’ve seen,” (para. 5). Fast forward 65 years since Ms. Till’s comments, and the world has seen countless examples of what systemic racism has done to Black bodies and the bodies of people of color in this country. It saddens me that I am never surprised by this type of violence, both figuratively and literally, on Black bodies. Although I am not surprised, I am more convinced than ever that as educators we have the responsibility to influence the mental models that fuel the hate and fear that are so predictable in this country.

I have often said that public education is the key to the success of our democracy. While I believe that to be true, I also know that in many ways public education is a key contributor in sustaining a democracy that is fueled by systemic racism.

Our role as educators must include the development of students that will positively contribute to an antiracist democracy. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (2016) defined an antiracist as “one who is

supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing antiracist ideas.” A pathway to the development of an antiracist democracy is through the intentional use of culturally relevant instruction in our Pre-K-12 school systems.

If the officers involved in the death of George Floyd would have had a Pre-K–12 educational experience where they, as students, had an opportunity to understand who they were racially and culturally and work towards proficiency in other races and cultures, would they have behaved in the manner they did? If Amy Cooper would have had a Pre-K–12 educational experience where she, as a student, had an opportunity to engage in learning that informed her sociopolitical consciousness, would she have called the police on a Black male bird watcher for asking her to put her dog on a leash? A call which we have seen all too often is the type of call that leads to the knee on the neck?

As educators, we cannot look away from these examples of racism and we must change our educational practices to ensure that these things do not continue to happen in this country. If we are going to develop students who are academically proficient and racially conscious, we must lean into work in the areas of racial equity and culturally relevant instruction and, most importantly, produce students who can positively contribute to an antiracist democracy. In order to do this, *educators must position themselves to do this work and to create learning experiences that promote student learning, cultural competency, and critical consciousness.* We have a responsibility as educators to create learning environments that produce citizens who have the knowledge, skill, and will to interrupt systems that have plagued us far too long as a country. Participant 7 shared that being able to decenter whiteness in education has played a huge role as an educator. The participant went on to say that the manner in which they see their scholars impacts the way that they honor and celebrate them in their full humanity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Public education is the key to the overall success of our democratic society. What if in school systems across the country, students had the opportunity to learn about and embrace individual differences? Schools need to create school communities that are inclusive of multiple perspectives on matters of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. This type of education is more critical now than ever before. It is through seeking to understand these perspectives that we will produce graduates who have the capacity and feel the responsibility to contribute to the well-being of others. In this type of educational setting students and adults will develop urgency about the importance of investing in their community. As educators we hold the key to the overall success of our country. Our country and the world we live in will only be as strong as the educated people who inhabit it.

Collaboration

My first suggestion for future research is to examine the impact of collaboration on educator's racial consciousness and ability to implement culturally relevant pedagogy. A deeper understanding of the impact of collaboration amongst educators with educators and educators with students and families is an area of future research that should be further explored. During the study, participants discussed the importance of collaboration with educators, students, and families as an important aspect in their ability to get academic growth for traditionally marginalized students. Understanding how teams of adults continually evaluate and systemically improve student outcomes by aligning instruction, curriculum, and assessment in a culturally relevant manner requires further study.

Feedback

My second suggestion for future research is to examine the impact of feedback from students and families of color on student academic growth. During the pandemic, educators across the world were forced into engaging students and families differently. In many cases, educators had to place a greater focus on student to teacher feedback to improve the virtual learning experience for students and families. During the study, the participants discussed getting feedback from their students to improve their practice. Soliciting feedback and being responsive to the feedback is an important step in being able to facilitate learning in a culturally relevant manner.

Delpit (1995) explained that one of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power. Soliciting feedback is a strategy that educators can use to help minimize the challenges students experience in the classroom and this is an area that requires further study and exploration.

Vulnerability

The last suggestion for future research is to examine the importance of educator vulnerability in supporting academic growth of traditionally marginalized students. The participants in the study expressed the importance of being learners and open to feedback to improve their practice. Students and families need to be able to trust who educators say they are in order for them to be vulnerable with them and fully engage. As I think about educator vulnerability, I can see the critical role that it plays not only for each other in our collaborative

settings, but also for our students and families. Now more than ever, as educators we must be vulnerable with one another regarding our areas of strength and growth.

This is an area that requires further study because being able to recognize and discuss areas of strength and growth allow educators to better support one another. This allows educators to be transparent in collaborative settings which helps foster the development of lessons, programming, and services that are more meaningful and relevant to students and families.

Significance

This research is significant because I believe it is important for leaders to develop antiracist E-12 educational systems in order to produce citizens that can create and uphold an antiracist democracy. As we navigate a challenging political climate, it is essential that we are clear about our purpose as educators. Public schools are an important component of American society. As educators we create opportunities for students to explore areas of interest and develop the knowledge and skill necessary to pursue post-secondary experiences. We work to prepare students to positively contribute to society and the educational systems that students experience need to be culturally relevant.

The schooling experience is essential for all E-12 students, and when done well in a culturally relevant manner, students have an opportunity to develop socially, emotionally, and mentally; develop a roadmap to pursue their dreams; develop their gifts and talents; strengthen areas of growth; learn about themselves culturally and racially and work towards proficiency in other cultures and races; develop their social political consciousness; develop a network of other students who share similar interests and passions; and learn in an environment that energizes and enhances their spirit.

Schools must be places that are supportive of student growth both academically and socially. Educators support students in finding their voice and provide them exposure to activities, ideas, and fields of knowledge. Ultimately, this research is significant because understanding the beliefs and strategies used by educators that facilitate learning and academic growth for traditionally marginalized students is foundational in producing students who can contribute to the creation of an anti-racist democracy. In order to produce this type of citizens, schools need to be a place where students can show up as their true authentic self and be loved and supported no matter what their lived experiences have been.

I desired to engage in this study because I was interested in learning more about the beliefs and/or mindsets about race and culture teachers must have to successfully educate students of color and Indigenous students. Additionally, I wanted to learn more about the relationship between beliefs, strategies, race, and culture when successfully educating students of color and Indigenous students. Through this process and the research, I believe I was able to add to the scholarship in this area.

As educators, it is important for us to learn from the past and discontinue practices that have not supported the academic growth for students of color. There is a West African word, Sankofa. Loosely translated, this word means that it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind. As educators, we need to reflect on what has worked, what is working, and what our students and families asking us to do. When we recognize that our past informs our future, we are provided with many possibilities and opportunities to create learning environments that promote academic success, cultural competency, and critical consciousness.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, which I am conducting as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

My study involves an examination of the beliefs and practices of teachers that promote accelerated achievement for students of color. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have demonstrated success in growing students academically according to pre-pandemic NWEA MAP scores. Specifically, you had 75% or more of your students of color demonstrate growth in either reading or math for two consecutive years.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and after the interview notes are transcribed you should plan for an additional 30 minutes to review your interview notes and add any additional information in response to the questions you feel you missed during the interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately 60 minutes.

The interviews will be conducted by a third-party interviewer and will take place via phone, Zoom, or Google Hangout.

In a state where we have large achievement and opportunity gaps based on race this study will allow for the examination of the beliefs and racially consciousness practices of teachers that have promoted academic success for students of color. The beliefs and instructional practices shared in this study could be used to serve a pathway to educating students who have been traditionally marginalized.

You will find more details about the study in the attached Informed Consent form. If you would like to participate in this study, please respond to this email indicating your informed consent.

Thank you very much for your consideration in participating in my study. Also, thank you for the work you do on behalf of the students and families.

IRBNet ID: 1592321

Respectfully,

Astein K. Osei

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Accelerated Growth: A Case Study of Teacher Beliefs and Instructional Strategies That Promote Achievement for Students of Color. This study is being conducted by Astein Osei under the guidance of Principal Investigator, Dr. Melissa Krull from Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Department of Educational Leadership. If you have any questions for Dr. Krull, she can be reached via email melissa.krull@mnsu.edu or phone (952) 818-8864.

The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs and instructional strategies that promote accelerated achievement for students of color in a large suburban school district in Minnesota. The research aims to identify the beliefs and instructional strategies that lead to traditionally marginalized populations of students demonstrating growth on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). If you have any questions about the research, please contact Astein Osei at osei.astein@slpschools.org or (651) 494-2600.

You will be asked to commit approximately 60 minutes to the interview process. The interview will be voice recorded. The interviewer for the research study is Dr. Antonia Felix. Dr. Felix will contact you via email to set up a time for the interview if you consent to this study. During the interview you will be asked to respond to five open-ended questions. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes. You will be asked to review the transcribed notes, make any necessary adjustments, and send the changes back to the interviewer. It should take you approximately 30 minutes to review the transcribed notes and make necessary changes. A transcriptionist will be used to transcribe the voice-recorded data collected in this study. The researcher will ensure the protection of your confidentiality and privacy with the transcriptionist involved. The only people that will have access to the recordings are the interviewer and the transcriptionist. After the completion of the study, the recordings of the interview will be erased.

Participation is voluntary. You have the option to stop the interview at any time without penalty by letting the interviewer know. The interview will be conducted by a third-party interviewer and the transcriptionist will transcribe the interview data using pseudonyms. All of your feedback provided to me by the third-party interviewer will be anonymous. Individual participant responses will not be shared, but themes from interviews maybe shared with district level leaders. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

There are no direct benefits for participating. In a state where we have large achievement and opportunity gaps based on race this study will allow for the examination of the beliefs and racially consciousness practices of teachers that have promoted academic success for students of color. The beliefs and instructional practices shared in this study could be used to serve a pathway to educating students who have been traditionally marginalized. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge about beliefs and instructional practices that promote

achievement for students of color. By participating in the study participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about race and culture and isolate the strategies they use that have helped them successfully educate students of color.

There are minimal social or emotional risks in this study. Minimal risk is defined as harm not beyond what is encountered in everyday life. However, should any form of stress or discomfort emerge you will be allowed to either break from the process or discontinue.

Initialing and signing the consent form will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age. If you agree to participate, please provide your email address below. Your email address will be used to contact you to set up the interview.

Please print a copy of this consent form for your future reference. If you cannot print the consent form, take a screenshot, paste it to a word document and print that.

Minnesota State University, Mankato IRBNet Id# 1592321

Date of Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB approval:

Participant Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Email Address: