The Utility of Empathy for White Female Teachers' Culturally Responsive Interactions with Black Male Students

Chezare A. Warren
University of Pennsylvania

Teachers aiming to become culturally responsive must be concerned with negotiating professional interactions that produce favorable outcomes for the culturally diverse students under their charge. Very few studies offer empirical evidence of empathy's utility in the culturally responsive classroom, especially when the teacher is culturally different from his or her students. This study is an examination of empathy's benefit for improving the student-teacher interactions of four White female educators and a group of their Black male students. Findings suggest that empathy helps: a) facilitate teachers' instructional flexibility and risk-taking; b) establish trusting student-teacher relationships; and c) support teacher's ability to intervene proactively to ensure students meet high academic expectations. The nature, importance, and usefulness of empathy for helping teachers maintain interactions with youth that produces evidence of cultural responsiveness are discussed.

Keywords: empathy, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, student-teacher interaction, Black males

The literature on culturally responsive teaching provides a platform for helping teachers recognize, appreciate, and build on the cultural differences students bring to school (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). However, scholars have found that teachers who identify themselves as culturally responsive are either not clear about what it means to be culturally responsive or they think of themselves as culturally responsive, but maintain deficit perspectives of diverse youth (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Warren, 2012; Valencia, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This line of thinking can be especially problematic for White teachers who unintentionally oppress students because they have failed to resign dominant frames of reference when attempting to determine which examples, activities, and instructional experiences are culturally responsive. That is, ways of seeing the world and cultural norms that are anchored in the histories and heritage of the dominant racial group in the United States.

In the multicultural education literature, empathy has been theorized as a useful tool for responding to the aforementioned issue by closing the perception gap between teachers and their students (Dolby, 2012; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Empathy, the act of acquiring perspective and adequately responding to the needs of others based on an interpretation of their immediate needs (Davis, 1994), is highly beneficial for producing culturally responsive interactions with youth. Still, too few studies have documented the tangible benefits of teachers applying empathy in an effort to be culturally responsive.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Gay (2010) insists that culturally responsive teaching includes, "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them." (p. 31). A primary responsibility of a culturally responsive teacher is to tailor instruction and negotiate interactions that duly consider the intelligence, expertise, and competence students bring to the classroom. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy can be conceptualized as an intellectual, moral, and socio-political awareness of student diversity that informs multiple aspects of the teaching and learning process, including how teachers negotiate interactions with youth and families of color (Gay, 2013). Teachers who employ culturally responsive teaching practices in their work comprehend the influence of race and ethnicity for shaping how students define and express culture, and they use this knowledge to broker interactions that account for and directly respond to the social and cultural *perspectives* (or points of view) each student possesses. Culturally responsive teaching begins with acknowledging the considerable intellectual, experiential, and perspectival diversity students bring to the classroom. It builds on the unique contributions of *individual* students regardless of the overt or seemingly obvious cultural or racial similarities among them.

Hence, *culturally responsive interactions*, an outgrowth of culturally responsive pedagogy, can be viewed as student-teacher interactions that directly cater to the social and cultural needs, norms, realities, experiences, and preferences of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. Over the course of a school year, students will have hundreds of interactions with their teachers and every interaction has an intended outcome and an *actual* outcome.

Teacher Empathy

One is hard-pressed to find a conclusive, all-encompassing definition of empathy in the literature. The construct has been studied from multiple perspectives in fields that range from psychology and psychotherapy to evolutionary biology and social neuroscience (Bohart et.al, 2002). This study has settled on a baseline understanding of empathy useful for discerning its expression in social relationships. That is, looking at empathy as the act of acquiring perspective, demonstrating sympathy, and adequately responding to the needs of others based on an interpretation of their immediate needs, and feedback from the person whom the empathetic response is targeted (Davis, 1994).

Empathetic teaching is central to culturally responsive interactions, and by extension, essential for cultivating culturally responsive professional teaching practices. Empathy has been thought to be especially important for individuals teaching across differences, including but not limited to race, socioeconomic class status, and gender (Dolby, 2012; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Teachers who demonstrate evidence of empathy in their teaching are more likely to negotiate interactions that produce favorable student academic and behavioral outcomes, which may include increased student engagement and assignment completion (Warren, 2013).

When considering the overrepresentation of White female teachers in K-12 public schools (Toldson, 2013), it is essential to tell stories of White female teachers who demonstrate success with students of color and to document the dimensions of that success. Empathy has been theorized to improve the quality of teacher interactions in multicultural classroom settings (Dolby, 2012; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In other words, it is useful to learn more about how

empathy supports a White teacher's ability to effectively communicate and respond to student needs across difference. It is likely that White female teachers who are effective with students of color exhibit evidence of empathy in their interactions. The urgency to provide the field with tools that will improve social and academic outcomes for Black males, for example, is of paramount concern for the author. Too many public K-12 education institutions in the US consistently fail to provide African-American males (or Black) males an adequate education (Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2008; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). The present study is an attempt to better understand the potential outcomes of empathy's application as a tool for improving cross-cultural and cross-racial student teacher interactions. The findings shed light on the utility of empathy as a teaching disposition useful for bolstering one's culturally responsive pedagogy.

Differentiating Empathy from Sympathy

Both sympathy and empathy stem from separate intellectual traditions. Up until the early 20th century, sympathy was the term of choice for describing a human's ability to imitate or imagine the perspectives of another human being (Wispé, 1986). Although much research has been conducted to trace the distinct origins of empathy versus sympathy (Hunsdahl, 1967; Gladstein, 1984), much of this work has led to conflicting understandings of the relationship between the two constructs.

Sympathy, according to its earliest roots in 18th century moral philosophy, is characterized as "feeling for someone, and refers to feelings of sorrow, or feeling sorry" (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 6). In recent years, scholars have generally agreed that sympathy is analogous to the shared affect one person has for another in a distressing situation, and that it is a necessary aspect of empathizing with someone (Wispé, 1986). While social psychologists concur that empathy requires some form of sympathy in its application, sympathizing alone does not constitute empathy's full expression (Davis, 1994).

In social psychology literature, sympathy has been widely referred to as empathic concern. Davis (1994) and Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) agree that empathic concern is characterized by an emotional connection or "feeling with" an individual that creates a heightened awareness of that individual's plight. Empathy can and does include feeling with or for someone, but it also includes the adoption of other people's psychological perspective in order to see the person's circumstance from his or her point of view.

While sympathy is viewed as a way to relate, empathy is regarded primarily as a means of knowing (Wispé, 1986). The word empathy was translated from the German aesthetic word Einfühlung and introduced by German scholar Theodor Lipps to describe a means of projecting one's self into others (Tichenor, 1909). It is actualized as the "inner imitation" or internal resonance an individual goes through when observing another person's emotional, physical, or situational condition (Stueber, 2006). This internal resonance produces an emotional *and* a physical response intended to alleviate personal distress or minimize the adverse impacts of an individual's confounding or precarious circumstance.

Understanding the Function of Empathy in Human Interaction

The full expression of empathy includes both empathic concern and *perspective taking* (Batson et.al, 1991; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Wispé, 1986). Davis (1994) defines perspective taking as "the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life",

while empathic concern is "the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others" (p. 57). Acquiring or adopting others' points of view and using these points of view to determine how to communicate and respond with them is no easy task. The capacity to empathize adeptly develops over time and is affected by numerous social variables such as social context, personal distress, and familiarity or closeness to the person who is on the receiving end of the empathetic response (Batson, 1991; Decety & Ickes, 2009).

A process for educators to apply empathy in student-teacher interactions includes perspective-taking, using students' social and cultural perspectives to guide subsequent interactions with them, and capitalizing on student feedback to adapt and repeat the process (Warren, 2013). Empathy functions as a mediator between what the teacher (thinks he or she) knows about students' own needs in any given interaction, and students' perspectives about what they need. This becomes especially important when considering where and how teachers' points of view diverge from students or families around issues related to diverse cultural approaches and instructional decisions.

Culturally Responsive Interactions as Building Blocks of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Irvine and York (1995) insist that student-teacher interactions are the places where learning takes place. Similarly, the core of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is the interactions between teachers and their students. Making sure each interaction appreciates, builds upon and affirms the cultural identities of youth can be extraordinarily challenging work. Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) concede that engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy seems "herculean" to teachers who are attempting to balance the many demands of their jobs. They also argue CRP "clashes with the traditional ways in which education is carried out in our society" (p. 444). Engaging in the arduous task of getting inside students' lives long enough to begin to see the world through their eyes may seem impossible considering all that teachers are expected to accomplish with students daily. Still, just as Milner (2010) suggests, teachers must start where they are, but commit to moving forward by learning from and about students with each interaction. Empathy is one variable worthy of greater consideration for its utility to help teachers negotiate culturally responsive interactions.

Perspective-taking is central to applying empathy in social relationships. With that said, trial and error is fundamental to the perspective-taking process as practitioners will likely fail to accurately interpret students' needs at some point or another. Nonetheless, every interaction with a student is a learning opportunity if a teacher is willing to accept student feedback (Warren, 2013). The feedback teachers receive is a form of perspective-taking. Teachers who develop perspective-taking or social perspective-taking skills (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012) will learn to draw meaningful parallels between their own lives and that of their students.

Connecting Cultural Responsiveness, White Teachers, and Student-Teacher Relationships

Gay's (2002, 2010, 2013) works on culturally responsive teaching provides a robust framework for the use of culturally responsive strategies, methods, and practices for building on students' culture to improve their academic and social outcomes. Building student-teacher relationships is one of the tenets of cultural responsiveness espoused by Gay. However, the teacher has to construct the relationship and determine how that "relationship" looks in practice.

Demonstration of cultural caring is another critical tenet of culturally responsive teaching espoused by Gay. According to Gay (2002), "Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (p. 109) for teachers who aim to create classroom climates conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students. Although teachers are encouraged to be caring, Whiteness shades how teachers interpret and make meaning of such characteristics (Hinchey, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Lewis, 2003; Marx, 2006). Whiteness represents a layer of social and cultural perspective most akin to White racial norms, truths, expectations, and experiences. Teachers bring their own set of perspectives to their work with students. They likely demonstrate care in cultural forms familiar to their own experiences and socio-cultural understanding of care. These forms may differ from students' norms and perspectives of care. The result can be a series of conflicts that, unbeknownst to the teacher, are caused by the divergence of perspective between how students interpret caring behaviors versus how the teacher believes he or she is enacting care. Valenzuela (1999) brings this concern to the forefront in her discussion of the "politics of care," which focuses on the possibility that care can be one-sided and self-serving. It must be noted that this is not a phenomenon exclusive to White teachers. Ullman and Hecsh (2011) assert that being a person of color does not mean that he or she will be more culturally responsive than a White person. The authors assert that being a member of a historically marginalized racial or culture group is not coterminous with understanding the everyday realities of contemporary youth from the same racial or culture group.

Charting the Outcomes

Because teachers may bring limited knowledge about cultural differences to the classroom (Gay, 2013), those concerned with developing a more culturally responsive teacher workforce should give more attention to the academic and social outcomes that result from the use of culturally responsive strategies. This information will likely inform how said strategy needs to be modified. Central to how a strategy is interpreted and interpolated into a teacher's practice are the social and cultural perspectives employed to frame its use. Ladson-Billings' (1994) empirical work is most cited for the specific student outcomes or behaviors one should expect from teachers who incorporate culturally responsive (culturally relevant) approaches in their instruction. Ladson-Billings' classic study of effective teachers of African American children provides the field with a set of indicators for which to measure a teacher's ability to serve African American youth. Prior to this work, cultural deficit theories abounded for explaining why Black (African American) kids were not performing on par with their White counterparts. However, Ladson-Billings set out to demonstrate that any teacher, including White teachers, can and should be expected to be effective teachers of diverse students.

From the works of Ladson-Billings (1994, 2006), we learn that culturally relevant teachers can help produce students who are academically successful, demonstrate cultural competence, and have some sociopolitical consciousness. The first step for a teacher aiming to be culturally responsive is to adopt the student's perspective to inform the strategy to be used, turn attention to the outcomes, and make the necessary pedagogical adjustments. If the aforementioned are evident in student behaviors, then it is likely a teacher is utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy. We can infer cultural responsiveness from tangible student-teacher interaction outcomes, as opposed to a narrow emphasis on a teacher's description of herself or her teaching practices.

Utility of Empathy for Culturally Responsive Interactions

Tangible indicators of success with students of color can better position stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of a teacher's cultural responsiveness. Evaluating effects of a teacher's cultural responsiveness by simply ascribing a value and meaning to their behavior, emotions, or specific actions can be highly fallacious. Similarly, it is less productive to attempt to name a teacher as more or less empathetic by the way he or she interacts with students. Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) argue that the application of empathy happens most poignantly during student-teacher interactions. Their premise serves as the basis for this study. It is theorized here that teachers who are successful with historically underserved student populations demonstrate empathy in their instructional practices; and Davis (1994) provides a useful interpretive framework for scrutinizing the social relationships of teachers (e.g., student-teacher interactions) aspiring to be culturally responsive. Hence, the current study adds to the empirical literature on culturally responsive pedagogy by first providing documentation of the nature and contours of the student-teacher interactions of four teachers identified as effective educators. Secondly, the interaction narratives to follow provide a record of outcomes resulting from such interactions. Because outcomes matter most when attempting to develop and enact a truly culturally responsive pedagogy, empathy was presumed to be a factor that influences the interactions of effective teachers selected for participation in this study.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to systematically document the benefits of empathy in the student-teacher interactions of four White female teachers and their Black male students. The study describes the explicit benefits of empathy in the day-to-day classroom interactions of teachers and students in a multicultural classroom setting. The primary research question underlying this study was: *What is the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students*? The findings of empathy's utility suggest that the student-teacher interactions under investigation qualify as culturally responsive based on evidence of student outcomes characteristic of a skilled, culturally responsive teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1991, 2002; Paris, 2012).

Participants

Teacher participant selection was based on principals' perceptions that they have White female teachers in their building who demonstrate cultural responsiveness based on indicators from the literature (Gay, 2002, 2010; Howard, 2010). These teachers were nominated using a modified version of Ladson-Billings' (1994) community sampling approach, and a group of past and/or present Black male students. One thirty-minute semi-structured interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2006) was conducted with the principals prior to their compilation of a list of White female teachers. At the conclusion of the interview, the principals submitted a list of five to eight names to the researcher for consideration. A snowball sampling technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) was used to select the principals after an e-mail was distributed to the researcher's professional network of education practitioners. The principals involved in the selection process were administrators in a majority African American school district on the fringes of a major Midwestern city. Teachers in the district are predominately White topping more than 75% of the total teacher workforce. The district, which was at one time majority White, had now become predominately Black. The townships and villages where the high schools were located

experienced an influx of Black students from the big city in the last decade. This posed many new pedagogical challenges for the majority White teachers in each school. The district was now forced to deal with similar challenges of any large urban school district including poverty, underpreparedness, and student mobility.

Student selection of teacher participants involved three 1-hour focus groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) with Black male juniors and seniors. Juniors and seniors are the oldest students and would have had the most experience and interaction with White female teachers in the building. These students were randomly selected by each school's administration and counselors to ensure a heterogeneous grouping of Black males with varying academic and discipline profiles. The students participated in a discussion of their experiences with White female teachers while in high school. Each of them took turns telling stories of frustration with White female teachers and the various factors shaping that frustration. They also discussed the qualities of White female teachers they found to be exemplary. At the end of the discussion, the students debated and ranked a list of White female teachers in their high school they believed negotiated really positive relationships and interactions with Black males. To finalize the selection of teacher participants, the researcher crosschecked the administrators' list with the student focus group list. Beginning with the top-ranked teachers, individuals whose name appeared on both lists were invited to participate in the study. Four White female teachers were recruited for participation in this study and each of them consented.

The following two sections are an overview of the research methods and analysis, which include classroom observations, student focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Data sources included four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of the four White female teacher participants, over 40 hours of classroom observation, and data from student focus groups. Each teacher first participated in an initial interview. During this interview, the four White female teachers separately defined empathy and elaborated on its relevance to their classroom teaching practice, including their conceptions of empathy's significance to their interactions with Black males.

Procedure and Data Analysis of Classroom Observations

Non-participant observation (Glesne, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2006) of each teacher's classroom was a particularly important method. The observations alternated between morning and afternoon classes once or twice a week over a ten-week data collection period similar to the approach taken by Ladson-Billings (1994) in her study. Whole class periods were observed. Each teacher received over five hundred minutes of classroom observation. Special care was taken to record student-teacher interactions during each observation using Bakeman and Gottman's (1997) sequential time interval analysis approach and "event recording" (p. 54) to document patterns in behavior. Each interaction was considered an "event" and was observed for an entire interaction (e.g., a teacher explaining lab instructions to a group of Black male students and the students' feedback to the teacher's directions).

After the observation, the behavior was recorded and coded based on the various aspects of the student-teacher interaction using Davis' (1994) process model for empathy expression, which is comprised of three major domains — antecedents, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes. *Antecedents* represented anything that happened just prior to interactions that provided

a context for observed interactions. *Intrapersonal Outcomes* focused on what the teacher did after the initial exchange with the student. *Interpersonal Outcomes* were the internal processes that resulted from the interaction exchange between teacher and student, which manifested as physical outcomes of the interaction.

Figure 1 shows a sample line from the observation protocol inspired by Davis' (1994) process model of empathy and examples of EC and PT from the classroom observations. For the antecedent domain, the researcher recorded important words, the lesson instructions or objectives, and the student's physical behavior. There was also an attempt to balance reference to student-initiated interactions and teacher-initiated interactions. For the intrapersonal outcomes domain, the researcher recorded the teachers' physical behaviors and pertinent verbal responses (e.g., facial expressions; teacher-student proximity/movement towards the student; head nods, etc.). The teachers' physical behaviors were used to infer emotional responses. The researcher also noted particularly surprising, confusing, or interesting interactions that were later discussed during follow-up interviews with each teacher. Lastly, for the interpersonal outcomes domain, the researcher recorded how the student responded to or interpreted the teacher's actions during the interaction. The researcher periodically came back to this section of the observation protocol for each interaction to document whether the intended outcome was accomplished as well as to get a sense of the finality of the outcomes produced by each interaction or event observed during the class period. There was also a space to memo and jot down follow up questions for the teachers (see Figure 1).

Each interval lasted no more than one-minute on the high end and twenty seconds on the low end. Observing in intervals enabled the researcher to capture full details of a single interaction including the antecedents, social context, as well as student and teacher reactions during the interaction. These events served as the building blocks of the interaction snapshots or interaction narratives used to capture patterns in teacher behaviors, attitudes, and approaches. After 2 - 4 classroom observations, the events were analyzed to identify themes or patterns in teacher behaviors and to isolate tangible evidence of EC and PT. Also included in Figure 1 are a few of examples of actions or practices determined to demonstrate EC and PT.

Observation data informed construction of the interview protocol, but was analyzed separate from the interview transcripts. Patterns in teacher behavior under the columns labeled as interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes were analyzed across the three different interaction types (i.e. academic, behavioral, and social/relational) in two phases. The first phase was an analysis of behavioral and pedagogical practices for each individual teacher. These were the recurring habits, physical gestures, and rhetoric in her interactions with students. These actions were later discussed with each individual teacher in her follow up interviews. The actual questions asked during follow up and exit interviews were derived from these themes in each teacher participant's classroom observations. Highlighting aforesaid behaviors in the follow-up interview provided the researcher with greater understanding of the source, origin, motivation, and intention in the teacher's professional decision making. The second phase was an examination of congruent behaviors exhibited in these categories by *each* of the four teachers and themes from interviews with the women.

Figure 1. **Sample Portion of the Observation Protocol and Examples of Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern**

Observation Form		
Teacher and School Name	**Date**	**Class Period**
Interaction Narrative		
Academic		*Questions for Follow-Up*
Time:	**Intra**personal Outcomes	**Inter**personal Outcomes	
Antecedents:			
Miscellaneous Notes/Analysis Memos:		
Perspective Taking* *(Acquiring Student Perspective)*	*Empathic Concern** *(Sympathy or Affective Sharing)*	
- Frequent oral and written communication (i.e. journaling, letter writing) "Family Business": Class Story Sharing or whole class "Rap Sessions" - Knowledge of the socio-political, socio-cultural, and community context	- Using the theme of family to communicate academic and behavioral expectations - Adopting and utilizing aspects of students' home language and cultural dispositions to maximize affective sharing - Acting in the interests of the "whole" child when determining instructional priorities	
*See Warren (2013) for a more detailed explanation of Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern NOTE: This table would also include at least four more rows for behavioral interactions followed by another four rows for social/relational interactions		

Procedure and Data Analysis of Interviews

The observations were useful for capturing the behavioral dimension of empathetic expressions. The follow-up and exit interviews were central to discerning inferences about the emotional and cognitive dimensions of empathetic expression. The two 1½-hour follow-up interviews and exit interview with each participant were mainly conducted to confirm and clarify patterns in behavior, and outcomes for the interactions observed. They were scheduled to occur after every 3 – 4 classroom observations. For example, the researcher noted that a participant rarely raised her voice during behavioral interactions despite how visibly frustrated she seemed. The researcher

pointed this out during the follow-up interview to get a better sense of the intrapersonal outcomes, or the teacher's motivation, intention, and priority for behaving in such a manner. This enabled the researcher to better infer the teacher's ability to demonstrate empathic concern and perspective taking in her interactions with students.

According to Davis (1994), empathy is understood as both intellectual (perspective taking) and emotional (empathic concern). Student-teacher interactions as described during the teacher participant exit and follow up interviews were analyzed for expression of empathic concern (EC) and perspective-taking (PT) using a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon under examination was the demonstration of empathy in student-teacher interactions. The researcher read the transcripts at least three times to identify key words, examples, and scenarios that suggested demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking. The researcher categorized this evidence by teacher and interaction type. Then, he matched descriptions and justifications provided during teacher participant interviews to the various instructional strategies and approaches observed in each teacher participant's classroom interactions. Finally, the researcher cataloged the various student outcomes observed and discussed them in the exit and follow-up interviews to infer the benefits of empathy's application by each teacher participant.

Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). Interview and focus group data were used to triangulate (Patton, 2002) themes coded from the observation data. Taken together the observation data, focus group interviews, and teacher participant interviews were used to construct an understanding of the multidimensionality of empathy's expression in each teacher participant's classroom interactions. The follow up and exit interviews were also used to member-check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) themes from the observations. These interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to assess the accuracy and credibility of behavior patterns noted in observations of each teacher's classroom interactions. These conversations were the cornerstone to the data collection process as they were necessary for confirming and/or rethinking interpretations of the data from the classroom observations. At the conclusion of the data collection process, teacher participants were invited to review and provide feedback on themes derived from the interview data and early drafts of the research report. There was also an older colleague who acted as an external auditor and reviewed the data analysis process and transcripts. He offered feedback and considerations for modifying inferences about empathy's utility. Three overarching themes of empathy's usefulness emerged from the confluence of focus group, observation, and interview data. The combination of the three data sets helped crystallize descriptions of empathy's expression and framed empathy's utility.

Findings

The various differences between the White female teachers in this study and their Black male students, which include race, gender, and socio-economic status in many cases, made studying the student-teacher interactions between them most compelling. Before moving to the crux of the research findings, it is noteworthy to highlight the teacher participants' conceptions of empathy and its role in their professional teaching practice. Additionally, it is equally important to point out that regardless of one's conception of empathy, its expression will look different for each teacher when observed from a third party perspective. The one thing that binds the teachers,

besides commonalities in racial background and gender is the outcomes of interactions with the Black male youth in their classes. The interaction styles, preferences, responses, and reactions may be different, but the common outcomes set the stage for discerning empathy's utility.

Teacher Participants Conceptions of Empathy

Prior to their participation, each of the four White female teachers admitted to never discussing empathy in any detail. General conceptions by these teachers cast empathy as primarily emotional. They used words such as "feel" and "feelings" to answer the question "What is empathy?" Also, the teachers separately agreed that empathy is useful for "building relationships" and demonstrating "care". In addition, the teachers concurred that care is central to their student-teacher interactions, but that "understanding student situations" is not a scapegoat for meeting high academic and behavioral expectations. They also emphasized numerous times throughout their interview that empathy in the professional context should not be used as an excuse for why Black males are not achieving in their classes. One teacher maintained that her "brand of empathy" in practice does shape her interactions with youth, but not to the degree that Black males are not held accountable for achieving and living up to his full potential, or her high expectations.

Variation in Teacher Participant Expression of Empathy

Interestingly, the four White female teachers' expression of EC and PT looked and sounded differently based on a number of factors including personality and life experience. Two of the teachers confirmed they are not "touchy feely" or "a hugger" and were averse to demonstrating too much emotion or being too vulnerable with their students. Another teacher referred to herself as "very emotional". She is almost the complete opposite of the first two teachers. The fourth teacher seemingly had a balance between the two extremes. Interactions and observations of her with students suggested she learned how to emote in culturally congruent ways with students, including adopting certain linguistic conventions and vernacular, without being a pushover, which was the concern of the first two teachers. Two of the four teachers taught in the school they had attended as high schoolers. A third taught in the same district where she attended school, but in the rival high school. The fourth had more teaching experience than the other three in a district very similar to the site where this study took place. The four teachers had between six and fifteen years of teaching experience at the time of data collection.

Interaction Narratives

The author is using the term *interaction narrative* (IN) to describe a collection of student-teacher interaction snapshots or events taken from classroom observation data. These narratives were constructed by combining observation data with focus group and teacher interview data. Narrative is "used in making sense of all kinds of situations" (Eason, 1982, p. 143). In this study, INs are used to make sense of the teachers' interactions with their Black male students in a readable, easy-to-follow format. These narratives provide a global perspective of the interactions (e.g., interactions shaped by physical examples of empathic concern and perspective taking) of each teacher documented during data collection. All scenarios and quotes reported are real and unchanged from the original transcripts.

Multiple narrative formats were used to describe the elements of empathy observed in the teacher's behavior, which they demonstrated through their response or "reactions" (Davis, 1994, 221) to students. Understanding empathy's full expression requires a read of the entire context of the interaction including the teacher's intentions and some understanding of student needs driving the interaction. The IN format was found to be most beneficial for attempting to report each of these aspects in a seamless, cohesive way.

In this study, the interactions of teachers were collapsed into the instructional practices of "Ms. Johnson." Using the characterization of Ms. Johnson to recant the dimensions and nuances of each teacher's observed interactions was determined to be the most suitable for sharing the results from the study. Ms. Johnson is a "composite" (Rossman & Rallis, 2006, p. 345) of the four teacher participants. Her actions and thoughts are based on the combined actions and thoughts of the study's White female teacher participants (see Rallis & Goldring, 2000; Rallis & Rossman, 1995 for other examples of the use of composites). Like Brown (2013) and Hemley (2006), it was the goal of the author to protect the identities of the teachers in this study and simultaneously depict the overlapping similarities in each of their interactions with their Black male students. Rather than talk about each teacher separately, Ms. Johnson was created to represent the diversity of approaches taken by each teacher to produce favorable outcomes for individual students. In essence, the interaction snapshots represent the assortment of expressions, strategies, techniques, and behaviors of the expression and demonstration of empathy (i.e., empathic concern and perspective taking) exhibited by the teachers as well as some of the associated outcomes. Through the characterization of Ms. Johnson, the INs become descriptive of any one teacher's real-life attempt at negotiating culturally responsive interactions.

Themes of Empathy's Utility for Culturally Responsive Interactions

Three salient themes of empathy's benefit to producing culturally responsive interactions emerged from the data set. Culturally responsive interactions are the result of empathy's utility for building and maintaining a safe classroom environment and trusting student-teacher relationships. The next and arguably most noteworthy outcome influenced by empathy is Ms. Johnson's willingness to take risks and demonstrate flexibility in her interactions with Black male students. The final benefit of empathy is Ms. Johnson's capacity to develop proactive academic interventions. These interventions marry Johnson's knowledge of students' personal experiences and circumstances to mutually agreed-upon terms and expectations negotiated with the student. All student names used in the IN are pseudonyms.

Trust & Classroom Community Building

With a big smile, Ms. Johnson enthusiastically greets her students, "Good morning young lovelies. Who has Family Business?" Johnson turns off her Michael Buble transition music, which signals the students to settle into their assigned seats. She knows that music is the center of much discussion in her class, so her music selection is a way that students connect with her. Family business is the first agenda item each class period of each day throughout the school year. Ms. Johnson only bypasses family business to prepare students for an exam they have to take or to set up an extensive, time-consuming lab experiment. Students talk freely and openly during family business about whatever is on their minds at that moment.

When asked how Ms. Johnson came up with family business, she points emphatically to trial and error. She declares:

> Oh my God, it's the best thing I've ever done in my life! Seriously. It is the best thing that I…I literally, I go back and I like made it up. Like I made it up. I didn't read it in a book… Like just one day, I felt like this was a good idea…Kids come in and they all want to talk and whatever. So we like get it all done, and then we move on.

Ms. Johnson is very zealous as she reflects on family business' significance for reshaping how she thinks about and arranges interactions with students, Black males in particular. She has seen some students do a complete 180-degree turn in behavior. She attributes this success to the implementation of family business. Prioritizing time to get to know students in this structured way, on *their* terms, has had a major impact on the quality of her student-teacher interactions. The students are extremely comfortable with her. She acknowledges as a White woman, she did not always have such success reaching Black students. They were more closed off until she started utilizing family business. The class trusts her as evidenced by the sensitive topics that come up during family business related to death, dating, and future goals.

Donald, one Black male in Ms. Johnson's first period class happens to be a local rapper. Routinely, Ms. Johnson allows a student performance, but not often. She reluctantly acquiesces this particular day. Donald commenced performance of a freestyle rap. A *freestyle rap* is a form of rap music typically performed live as a duel between two rappers (Alim, Lee, & Carris, 2010). The percussion and lyrics are created in the moment. The lyricist has no preparation, but is expected to cleverly recite lines of improvised text related to the social context. In this case, Donald raps about being tired in first period, his classmates, Ms. Johnson, and how he feels about school and learning at that particular moment. The entire class immediately pulsates back and forth to the rhythmic flow of Donald's prose recited to the improvised, syncopated beat made by his classmates' fists pounding their desktops.

After about a minute of observation, Ms. Johnson joins in, first rocking and then jockeying her fist in the air just as the students were doing. She repeats phrases the students are saying in deference to Donald's provocation. In this moment, Ms. Johnson is sharing affectively in the moment. There is a sense of solidarity and linearity between the teacher and her students that marks this particular moment as extra special. Next thing you know, Ms. Johnson attempted her own freestyle rap as a followup to Donald's rousing performance. It is unclear whether Ms. Johnson was familiar with freestyle rapping or if she'd done it before. Embracing the student accolade and fist bumps, it appeared she had tapped into a cultural moment that would later earn her increased credibility amongst her predominately Black and Latino students. She entered that moment, a bit aloof at first, but without inhibition. Her awkward start turned into one cadenced line after the next. With the close of her hip-hop debut, the students cheer in adulation of their teacher's effort. The positive energy was palpable. "Okay, the objectives of the lesson are…" is the students' cue they must transition into a detailed conversation about the parts of the ear. You could still overhear the students' surprise and wonder seeing their teacher freestyle.

Prior to Ms. Johnson allowing Donald the space to perform in class, he was failing her class. He did not see himself as academically successful. She noticed this after her first time allowing him to participate in family business in this way. Donald began coming to class early and seeking extra help for his studies. Almost over night, he became more engaged in the learning environment and more invested in his academic performance. Ms. Johnson learned to partner with students to create moments like this that celebrate students' individual cultural expression. It sends the message to the student that who they are is enough. Ms. Johnson learned that carving out this time gave them a social outlet *in school* that removed the burden of having to be academic all of the time. This time was staged with the intention of garnering for herself specific, student-level insight she would later use to negotiate other interactions with youth; information she might not have accessed otherwise. The act of engaging in family business is perspective taking in action. The more the students talk, the more Ms. Johnson learns about them, their families, their community, and their points of view. As a result, she has developed a rather strong classroom community.

Reggie's father was diagnosed with a terminal illness during the previous school year. Ms. Johnson went out of her way to make sure he had the proper supports during his coping period. She offered him the option to come to her class and talk whenever he needed extra support. And, she made arrangements with each of the Reggie's other teachers and checked in with him regularly throughout the day when she would see him in the hallway. She calculated when Reggie needed his space and when she needed to be hands on with him. She consulted his friends and his other teachers to ensure he had no excuse to disengage in school. Ms. Johnson was vulnerable to his needs and went above and beyond to ensure he had the social support needed. Almost in tears, Reggie reflects fondly of Ms. Johnson's flexibility as central to his coping during this very difficult time in his life.

Another student declares, "Ms. Johnson is not easily frustrated when a student doesn't immediately understand the content of a lesson. She's willing to talk to you and hear you out and listen to your opinions and your views". Ms. Johnson makes him *feel* heard in her class. Another young man goes on to say, "She never treats people differently…even if you're the class clown, she'll still answer your question or, still try to help you out". He emphasized that Ms. Johnson has high expectations and doesn't mind telling you exactly how she feels, but that she is patient and flexible. While Ms. Johnson admits that she has good days and bad ones, she does her best to never let students know the difference. With each interaction, her goal is to produce outcomes that are most favorable for the student even if the personal and professional adjustments she must make are uncomfortable for her.

At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Johnson stresses the importance of making students aware that she is available to both help and learn from them. She expounds:

> I put myself out there…I tell the kids…when you first meet somebody, you don't trust them. You gotta get to know each other. I don't know you, you don't know me, but eventually we'll get to know each other and there will be a bond.

The metaphor of family is evident in the classroom. There is a subtle camaraderie between Ms. Johnson and many of her Black male students. She always asks them about topics of interest to

them, especially their participation on sports teams. This does not mean they are her friends, but rather that she works to maintain amicable relationships by investing time to know and appreciate the people they are and the young adults they are becoming. Some students take advantage of her kindness. She is constantly monitoring her level of vulnerability and flexibility as not to be perceived as a pushover.

Risk-Taking/Flexibility

On another day, family business lasted for more than 25 minutes of a 55-minute class period. The tremendous loss of instructional time was a matter of concern. Ms. Johnson responds to the length of family business by affirming, "How do you price what somebody feels is important to them in their life? You can't! There is no, 'You can't talk.' Everyone gets to share." Ms. Johnson emphasizes that family business generally balances itself out and that sometimes it is really short, but on occasion it can become long. Still, she compromises instructional time because she perceives the risk is worth it. Ms. Johnson warns, "If I don't allow them to get this stuff off of their chests, I can't expect them to focus on the lesson". She consciously ignores school policy to do what she feels will honestly produce the best outcomes for students. The decision is based on prior experience. Ms. Johnson acknowledges that although her superiors could see this practice as problematic, she retorts that she would defend this practice based on the evidence of its effectiveness to accomplish the intended outcomes of each interaction. As a result of family business and her insistence that each student who wants to participate have the chance to contribute, she boasts extremely low incidences of in-class behavioral disruption and out of class disciplinary referrals for her Black males.

Ms. Johnson demonstrates a high degree of patience with her Black male students to maintain amity with them. Traditionally, many of the young men she teaches have had tumultuous relationships with other White female teachers. The focus group participants share story after story of feeling like they were under intense scrutiny and surveillance by other White female teachers. When they contrast their negative experiences with the positive experiences they'd had with "good" White teachers, patience and the ability of the teacher to "get" them was important. Trenton maintains, Ms. Johnson's "expectations are high, but Ms. Johnson is patient". She keeps her expectations high by modifying *processes*, or the approach(es) to reach high expectations, rather than modifying the expectation itself. Empathy is supposed to facilitate increasing expectations of students, not lowering them (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This requires Ms. Johnson to be willing to adapt to students more often than trying to coerce students to adapt to her. She constantly has to modify and renegotiate the boundaries of the instructional tasks without compromising the rigor of that task.

On the contrary, Ms. Johnson felt strongly that she treated all of her students the same regardless of race and/or gender. After multiple observations, she was exposed to patterns in her behavior related to her differential treatment of certain Black males in her classes. For example, Gerald, a student in Ms. Johnson's third period class was always seen wearing headphones in class. Ms. Johnson disciplined other students for listening to music during class, but this particular student was allowed to wear his headphones regularly. When explaining her motivation and intention for allowing Gerald to wear his headphones, Johnson discloses, "He can't sit still. He bounces around. He's like a gnat. But he's that way in every single class." Wearing headphones during

independent practice actually helps him to concentrate. She did not initially see her approach with Gerald as treating him differently. She was vehemently opposed to being perceived as racist or favoring certain students over others. After more conversation, she concedes that students do need different strategies to help them realize success.

Gerald's behavior has been misread in the past. Once Ms. Johnson realized that listening to music increased his productivity, she consented that he could have his headphones on only if he committed to completing every assignment and living up to every single academic expectation of the course. This was a *partnership* brokered with Gerald despite her explicit disapproval with other students attempting to wear headphones. The other students seemed to understand this arrangement and acquiesced to her reprimand without reference to Gerald. Moreover, Ms. Johnson advocates for Gerald to her colleagues by saying, "If he misses something, send me the handout and I'll talk him through it later." As a result, this student is experiencing increased academic success: his grades are better; he has greater classroom participation and engagement; and his overall conduct has improved. The residual effect of Ms. Johnson's agreement with Gerald is that he has more confidence in his academic abilities. Black students who have positive interactions with faculty/teachers are shown to have a more positive self-concept and greater school efficacy (Cokley, 2000; Noguera, 2008).

Correspondingly, Ms. Johnson emphasizes that she doesn't write discipline referrals for students. She only writes them when she feels the behavior is "something egregious [she] can't handle in class." There is considerable risk she may lose the class' attention when it appears certain problem behaviors are allowed to persist. Vernon and Ronald are in Ms. Johnson's seventh period class. These two Black males are friends that if permitted, would talk to one another during the entire class period. Ms. Johnson laments, the class is structured around them. She modifies the learning activities and pace in this class. She also heightens expectations for class productivity to keep the boys engaged and on task for the duration of the final class period of the school day. Vernon is very smart and often has a correct answer to Ms. Johnson's questions. She recognizes that because the boys tend to "dominate" so much of her attention during class, she is constantly wrestling with how effective she is being at meeting the needs of other students. She lauds the two boys' ability to be role models. Students follow their lead. This is a matter that Ms. Johnson acknowledges is positive when harnessed appropriately. Therefore, she works hard to challenge the boys intellectually and keep them on task. Most days she is successful, while other days she is exhausted by her failed attempts to curb problematic behavior. The boys' grades are slipping and now they are earning a D in the course. They care about their grades and were observed arranging time to discuss what they could do to increase them. The amount of flexibility she has with these youths is overwhelming and she admits that other students may be losing out because she has not struck a balance.

Another student, BJ, a junior in one of Ms. Johnson's classes, gets up and sits down at his leisure. At times he sits on a big red bouncy ball in front of the classroom, plays with materials on Ms. Johnson's desk, or writes on the white board during her lesson. Ms. Johnson, unmoved and uninterrupted by his activity, conducts the lesson as if these things were not happening. The researcher was easily distracted by the student's behavior, but the other students appeared unphased. When asked why she allows BJ to get up when he wants and whether or not she is concerned about the risk that he will interrupt the flow of the class, Ms. Johnson nonchalantly

nods in dissent. She responds, "I know he's a mover. He's got to move. He's got to do something. He's got a little history behind him. He kind of knows how I roll, and like, 'We're going to do this.'" She is very flexible with meeting BJ's needs, but she is also very proactive. She can only be this way because she has spent time observing and getting to know BJ through a lot of trial and error. Ms. Johnson knows that she needs to have a range of activities that will meet BJ's needs as a kinesthetic learner. This is perspective taking. The two have an agreement, and as long as he holds up his end of the bargain, Ms. Johnson adjusts accordingly. This same student on another day was the first to complete a complicated classroom activity that required the students to identify the fourteen stops of the blood's flow through the heart. After a year suspended from school, BJ is earning a B in Ms. Johnson's class.

Proactive Interventions

Ms. Johnson is always thinking about ways to prevent the Black males in her class from going off track. She tries to be very observant. One way she keeps students on track is by openly challenging them when she thinks they are losing focus. Ms. Johnson has been teaching long enough to know that being proactive yields far greater results than being reactive. She steps in when she believes it is advantageous, but is careful not to usurp a student's own will to be successful. She is clear with the students about the consequences that result from their low academic performance in her class. Trenton laughs and shares:

> If you slackin off in class, She might say "get your shit together"… She will give you time to like get the work done, or another day because she understands and she knows we can do the work, it might just be something holdin you back and that will really help because the assignment she gives, most of them are heavyweight. The points are high.

The boys trust Ms. Johnson has their best interests at heart and they interpret her behavior as care, even the use of expletives in her passionate plea for them to improve academically. The focus group participants excitedly contrast their experiences in Ms. Johnson's classroom with experiences with other White female teachers in their school. Another young man offers:

> She's like a motivational speaker, like. She's always hype or something. Its like, its like she wants you to do good, but she's not the type of teacher that's going to get an attitude with you if you don't do good. She is going to be like playful with you and like make you actually want to like, "dang I can actually do this", I gotta work harder.

Ms. Johnson's prior knowledge from teaching in communities of color has given her some understanding of the unique challenges they may face during their educational careers. She pulls on this knowledge to help young Black men under her charge to see how some of their actions may produce adverse outcomes.

Many of the young men observed in her class and the students from the focus group feel a great sense of responsibility to do well in Johnson's class. They don't feel pressured to put on an academic identity that is unfamiliar to them, but they respect the fact that Ms. Johnson is

constantly stepping in to remind them of their potential. She comments, "I don't take a lot of excuses". And, she constantly makes judgment calls about the legitimacy of student's issues. She confirms that she will not "budge an inch" if she believes that the student is not doing his best or is not being truthful. In each case, her intervention relies on her ability to fully comprehend the source of the student's problem. Ms. Johnson respects the young men for who they are and she is always pushing them to become better.

Ms. Johnson quips, "the kids that give, I give back." Other students like Jamon who Ms. Johnson considers to be a "pain" and "combative", won't get "ten munutes of my time because he just keeps throwing himself against the wall and nothing works." She discloses that this student was "kicked out last semester…got arrested, booked for battery and burglary. And now he's back, and he's doing the same thing." Upon his most recent return, Ms. Johnson confronts Jamon. She retells the encounter with him:

> You realize you're really fucking up! You understand that right? He's like 'yeah.' I go, 'What are you going to do?' He's like, 'I got connections.' And I said, 'Jamon, you're 15, almost 16, you're going to be somebody's patsy. And you don't think before you do stuff. Let's get out of high school.' And he's like, 'Naw, I really don't care.' He's honest…I can't fix that part of his life.

If Jamon wants help, Ms. Johnson is willing to help. She has not given up on him, but settles that she will only intervene when he invites her to arbitrate his affairs. Ms. Johnson releases considerable control and takes multiple opportunities to reiterate her expectations. Jamon's boldness translates to Ms. Johnson that he is not interested in her help. Hard conversations like these are a routine part of Johnson's practice. She is unafraid of conflict and uses contentious interactions like the above as a means to prevent the student's downfall. Nonetheless, as much as she wants to help each student meet his fullest potential, she recognizes there are limits to her helping.

Christopher, another Black male in Ms. Johnson's class was found regularly sleeping in class and in danger of failing. She describes him as a nice kid. After a long talk, she finds out that he is financially supporting his entire family. He's tired because he's working late nights. If he stays in her class, Christopher will fail the course because he is not completing the work required. Instead of failing him because he is not meeting course expectations, she advocates for his placement in an alternative night school program in the district. By doing so, the young man can continue supporting his family *and* earn his high school diploma at the same time. Ms. Johnson worked with this student to identify a solution that allows him to be a student while also maintaining his important role at home as a provider. She acted in Christopher's best interest (i.e. alternative option for earning his high school diploma) without compromising rigorous course requirements. Ms. Johnson had to make a decision informed by knowledge of student's circumstance, interpret the legitimacy of his circumstance, and respond in a way that produces the most favorable outcome for him, which included ensuring he had the ability to keep financially supporting his family.

One of Ms. Johnson's classes is approximately 93% Black males. The course enrolls students who have failed one or more classes in a prior semester. The students may have up to eight credit-bearing classes on their schedule. The class functions like an advisory during the students' lunch period. Students are urged to check in regularly, but attendance is not compulsory. Yet, students often attend and bring their lunch because they know they will have one-on-one time to talk to Ms. Johnson about the range of issues they believe may be limiting their academic success. One way that Ms. Johnson gets the boys to come to the class is by keeping extra snacks in her desk. She keeps a steady stash of Granny Smith apples, because for many of the boys, having one in Johnson's class was the first time they had ever eaten one.

Several of the boys are jokesters, and Ms. Johnson does not mind fielding their punch lines and landing a few of her own. They have rapport with her that she uses to help them develop personal plans of success so that they earn their credits, and hopefully never end up in this particular class again. Ms. Johnson will leave her desk to sit with the students rather than always call them up to her desk. This is one way she makes each boy feel important. Another way is that she makes sure to reach out to their parents/guardians when they are making good progress. She does everything she can to minimize student anxiety related to their academic progress. The environment and the multiple interactions with students are arranged to make each student feel at home in a non-threatening, social environment. Ms. Johnson maintains that if she can get them to check-in with her everyday, it is more likely to ensure they earn the credit for each course(s) they failed. Johnson finds that students who come regularly are considerably more academically successful than students who do not.

Discussion

Outcomes are what matter most for assessing how well one has developed into a culturally responsive pedagogue. That said, cultivating empathy as a professional disposition with the expressed purpose of enhancing the quality of student-teacher interactions has tremendous potential for improving student outcomes. Indeed, creating a more empathetic workforce does very little for improving student outcomes when teachers fail to understand the importance of empathy, or in other words, perspective taking.

It is perspective-taking that enables all teachers, regardless of race and ethnicity, to make culturally appropriate and affirming interpretations of student difference. Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2012) argue the significance of social perspective-taking for enhancing student outcomes. However, they found that little work has been done that unpacks the process of perspective-taking. Both perspective-taking and empathic concern make up empathy, but perspective-taking is at the core of empathetic application in social relationships. Some strategies for social perspective-taking in Gehlbach and Brinkworth's study showed up in the current study, including analogies of teachers' personal experience to the experience of students, drawing on background knowledge of students to inform decision making about the students, and consideration of the present context to infer how students experience their circumstances. Ms. Johnson learned to demonstrate joy like her students, share in her students' cultural forms of artistic expression, and utilize their points of view to make decisions with them that most benefit them.

Empathy and the Negotiation of Culturally Responsive Interactions

Similarly, empathy has been theorized to produce such outcomes including, but not limited to higher academic expectations and success, productive parent partnerships, and instructional programs that affirm students' racial and cultural identities (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Culturally responsive interactions are birthed from a teacher's ability to adopt perspective and share affect in sync with students' cultural norms and experiences.

Bestowing or attempting to earn a label as empathetic minimizes the significance of the utility of empathy as a disposition of culturally responsive teachers. Empathy improves the likelihood that teachers may build trusting relationships with student and families, establish positive classroom climates, take risks, be flexible, and take proactive steps to ensure each classroom interaction produces favorable student outcomes. The primary difference between being empathetic and cultivating empathy as a professional disposition is the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral orientations from which empathy is framed and applied in interactions with students. In other words, one size does not fit all, and empathy is the mechanism that allows the teacher to be sensitive to the needs of individual students within a homogeneous culture group.
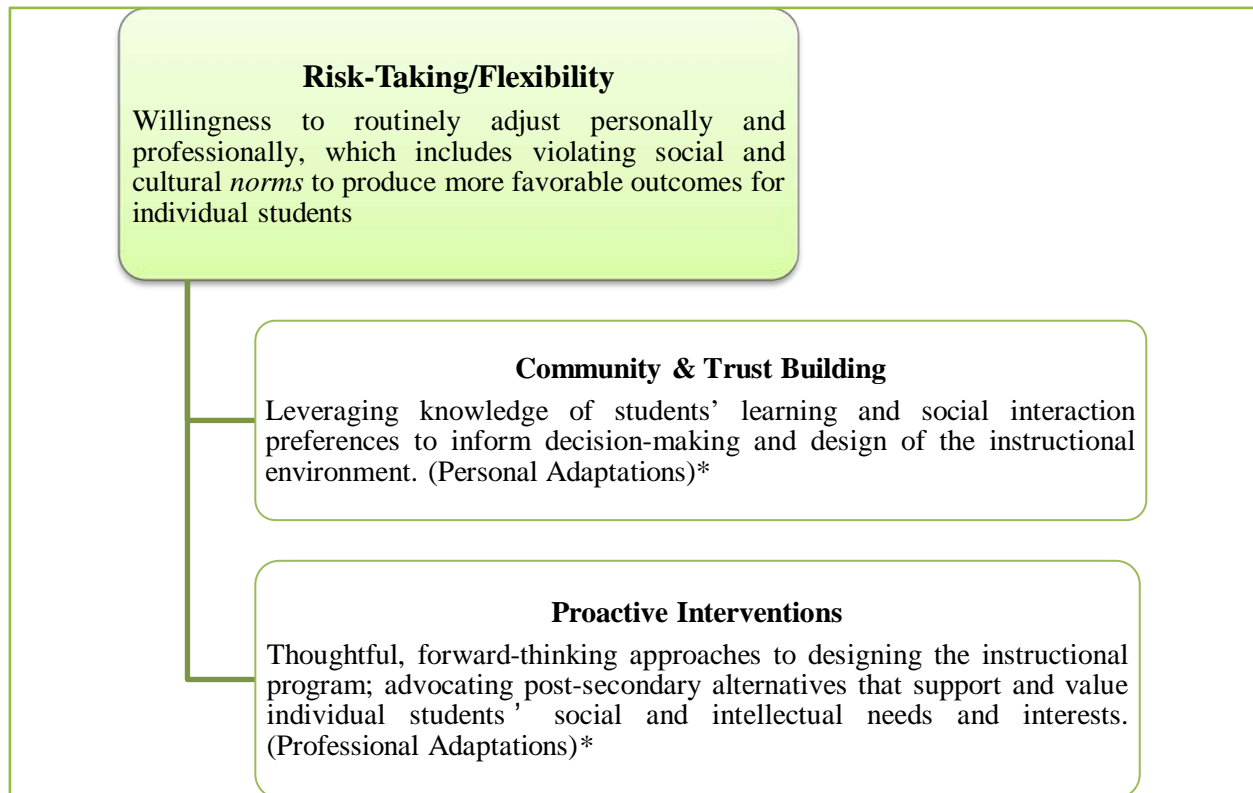
Ms. Johnson's interactions with students are substantive, each in a different way. The link between them is her attempt to partner with Black male students in such a way that they *feel or perceive* they have agency in their academic performance. The young men have a significant stake in his intellectual development and academic work. The effectiveness of her interactions and the utility of empathy for improving the quality of those interactions cannot be judged simply by what she said, how she behaves, or the intentions driving her actions. Ms. Johnson's capacity to make each Black male feel as if the classroom was a safe space for him to be himself, to fail with support, and have multiple opportunities to experience success was pivotal to her ability to be perceived as effective by her superiors, and exceptional by her students. Every young man knew that redemption was possible. Ms. Johnson communicated through her behavior in every academic, behavioral, and social/relational interaction that no student is ever completely lost. She learned how to frame interactions with the expectation that students would be successful, even if the decisions they were making in the moment suggested otherwise. Ms. Johnson made concessions in cooperation and collaboration with students. She solicited the terms of her relationship with them by using the language of family, creating space for them to talk explicitly about the matters on their minds (e.g. family business), and she did not make excuses for their failure. Instead, she looked for opportunities to adapt to their needs and then conciliate mutually beneficial terms of agreement to maximize their academic output.

The Utility of Empathy for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Empathy, which includes the demonstration of empathic concern and perspective-taking, has been found useful in at least three ways when attempting to negotiate culturally responsive interactions. Figure 2 provides an overview of the benefits of the utility of empathy in this study. The utility of empathy was measured by how teachers responded or "reacted" to students (Davis, 1994). This includes the way Ms. Johnson applied her critical knowledge of students to the subsequent adaptations made to personal and instructional processes for which she was responsible. One teacher did not necessarily enjoy "hugging", but she would hug certain Black

males she knew really needed that type of affection. Still, it is important to point out that a necessary part of applying empathy to student-teacher interactions is receiving and using student feedback as a primary source for judging how to make the necessary adjustments (Warren, 2013; Davis, 1994).

Figure 2. Benefits of the Utility of Empathy

Risk-Taking/Flexibility

Willingness to routinely adjust personally and professionally, which includes violating social and cultural *norms* to produce more favorable outcomes for individual students

Community & Trust Building

Leveraging knowledge of students' learning and social interaction preferences to inform decision-making and design of the instructional environment. (Personal Adaptations)*

Proactive Interventions

Thoughtful, forward-thinking approaches to designing the instructional program; advocating post-secondary alternatives that support and value individual students' social and intellectual needs and interests. (Professional Adaptations)*

*****Personal Adaptations** are modest modifications to one's personality, thinking, and philosophy concerning a certain idea, or approach to social interactions with students; **Professional Adaptations** are accommodations the teachers make to the processes that pertain to instructional planning, class assignments, requirements for class participation, and lesson presentation.

Responding appropriately to the cultural diversity that students bring to the classroom benefits from the application of empathy in at least three ways. Despite the climate of high stakes testing, teaching ultimately rests on a teacher's ability to facilitate humanizing interactions with their students (Bartolome, 1994). This study sheds light on and brings attention to both the feasibility and benefit of empathy when it becomes an intentional aspect of negotiating student-teacher interactions. The sign of culturally responsive teaching should be in the outcomes that are produced, not one's ability to masquerade dominant cultural norms as best practice for Black and Latino children. Second, the Ms. Johnson composite could be any teacher in any school anywhere in the world. The application of empathy presupposes that the humanity of the teacher will intersect with the humanity of students in some meaningful way. The ability to take risks, be proactive, and build community will look and sound different for each teacher because of the many social variables mediating the interaction process. Stakeholders must work at leveraging the voices and perspectives of students as a baseline for negotiating instructional decisions that

ultimately benefit youth, rather than stroke the egos of adults or meet the bottom lines of districts. Finally, teachers and school leaders must work together to create opportunities for cultural learning to happen both inside and outside of the school building. Any opportunity for perspective taking is an opportunity to cultivate culturally accurate and appropriate frames of reference. These new frames of references are the interpretive filters that enable teachers to meet students where they are regardless of the difference that exists, while at the same time helping the teachers to resign deficit notions of success and preparedness.

Future Research and Limitations

Future research in this area must include more systematic observations and teachers from across different races, ethnicities, and genders. Further, teachers who have been identified as culturally responsive based on indicators from the literature should be selected for participation. Studying strong teachers in diverse school settings (e.g., rural, urban, and suburban) across grade levels will contribute significantly to the literature on the application of empathy and its utility as a professional disposition. This will also challenge assumptions about the parameters of culturally responsive teaching. One limitation of the study includes not having a team of scholars who completed observations. Traditional studies of empathy include multiple researchers as a means to improve inter-subjective reliability of observation data. Studies of the usefulness of empathy for improving cross-cultural and cross-racial application is essential to further operationalize culturally responsive teaching in contemporary schools through student-teacher interaction.

Conclusion

The application of empathy is essential for negotiating culturally responsive interactions with students, but it is not a linear process. This research confirms that culturally responsive interactions are best negotiated in partnership with students, not through power or control of students. Teachers cannot have sole authority for framing the boundaries of this partnership. Rather, the student must have some input about the nature of the relationship. Relinquishing control to negotiate culturally responsive interactions necessitates professional and personal adaptations on the part of the teacher that can make him or her particularly vulnerable in relationship with students. Notwithstanding, doing this likely improves culturally diverse students' investment and engagement in school. Empathy helps teachers more accurately and appropriately respond to students. When teachers share affectively with students and make active attempts to adopt their points of view, it is likely that evidence of culturally responsive teaching will be made present through the outcomes that are produced.

AUTHOR NOTES

Chezare A. Warren, PhD, is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Division of Applied Psychology and Human Development, Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. There have been changes in the author's university affiliation subsequent to the time of the study. This study was conducted while the author was a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Chezare A. Warren, Division of Applied Psychology and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19144. E-mail: chezare@gse.upenn.edu

References

Alim, H. S., Lee, J., & Carris, L. M. (2010). "Short Fried-Rice-Eating Chinese MCs" and "Good-Hair-Havin Uncle Tom Niggas": Performing Race and Ethnicity in Freestyle Rap Battles. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *20*(1), 116-133.

Bakeman, R., & Gottman, J. M. (1997). *Observing interaction: An introduction to sequential analysis* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bartolome, L. I. (1994). Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, *64*(2), 173-195

Batson, C. D. (1991). *The altruism question: Toward a social psychological answer*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum.

Batson, C. D., Batson, J. G., Slingsby, J. K., Harrell, K. L., Peekna, H. M., Todd, R. M. (1991). Empathic joy and the empathy-altruism hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*(3), 413 – 426.

Biernacki, P. & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *10*(2), 141-163.

Bohart, A. C., Elliott, R., Greenberg, L. S., & Watson, J. C. (2002). *Empathy*. In J. C. Norcross (Ed.) *Psychotherapy relationships that work: Therapist contributions and responsiveness to patients* (pp. 89 – 108), New York: Oxford University Press.

Brown, A. (2013) "Waiting for superwoman: White female teachers and the construction of the "neoliberal savior" in a New York City public school". *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies. 11*(2), 123-164.

Cokley, K. (2000). An investigation of academic self-concept and its relationship to academic achievement in African American college students. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, *26*(2), 148-164.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Davis, J. E. (2003). Early schooling and academic achievement of African American males. *Urban Education*, *38*(5), 515- 537.

Davis, M. H. (1994). *Empathy: A social psychological approach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Decety, J. & Ickes, W. (2009). *The social neuroscience of empathy.* Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Dolby, N. (2012). *Rethinking multicultural education for the next generation: The new empathy and social justice.* New York: Routledge.

Eason, D. (1982). New Journalism, metaphor and culture. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *15*, 142-149.

Eisenberg, N. & Strayer, J. (Eds.) (1987). *Empathy and its development.* New York: Cambridge Press.

Feshbach, N. D. & Feshbach, S. (2009). Empathy and education. In J. Decety and W. Ickes (Eds.), *The social neuroscience of empathy* (pp. 85-98). Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *53*(2), 106-116.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *43*(1), 48-70.

Gehlbach, H., & Brinkworth, M.E. (2012). The social perspective taking process: Strategies and sources of evidence in taking another's perspective. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(1), 1-29.

Gladstein, G. A. (1984). The historical roots of contemporary empathy research. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *20*(1), 38 – 59.

Glesne, C. (2010). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Garcia, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society*, *36*(2), 150-168.

Hemley, R. (2006). *Turning Life into Fiction*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press.

Hinchey, P. H. (2006). *Becoming a critical educator: Defining a classroom identity, designing a critical pedagogy.* New York: Peter Lang.

Howard, G. R. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multi-racial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hunsdahl, J. B. (1967). Concerning Einfuhlung (empathy): A concept analysis of its origin and early development. *Journal of The History of the Behavioral Sciences, 3*(2), 180-191.

Irvine, J. J. (1991). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices and prescriptions*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Irvine, J. J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African-American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices*. New York: Palgrave.

Irvine, J. J. & York, D. E. (1995). Learning styles and culturally diverse students: A literature review. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 484-497). New York: Macmillan.

Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2005). Focus groups: Strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 887-907). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). "Yes, but how do we do it? Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy." In J. Landsman & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism* (pp. 29-42). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education.* New York: Routledge.

Lewis, A. (2003). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and communities.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marx, S. (2006). *Revealing the invisible: Confronting passive racism in teacher education.* New York: Routledge.

Marx, S., & Pray, L. (2011). Living and learning in Mexico: Developing empathy for English language learners through study abroad. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *14*(4), 507-535.

McAllister, G., & Irvine, J. J. (2002). The role of empathy in teaching culturally diverse students: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *53*(5), 433-443.

Milner, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Morrison, K. A., Robbins, H. H., & Rose, D. G. (2008). Operationalizing culturally relevant pedagogy: A synthesis of classroom-based research. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *41*(4), 433-452.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Noguera, P.A. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys...and other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, *41*(3), 93-97.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage

Rallis, S. F., & Goldring, E. B. (2000). *Principals of dynamic schools: Taking charge of change*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

Rallis, S. F., & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Dynamic teachers: Leaders of change*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

Rossman, G. B. & Rallis, S. F. (2006). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stueber, K. (2006). *Rediscovering empathy: Agency, folk psychology, and the human Sciences.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Tichenor, E. B. (1909). *The experimental psychology of the thought processes*. New York: Macmillan Company.

Toldson, I. A. (2013). Race matters in the classroom. In C.W. Lewis & I.A. Toldson (Eds.), *Black male teachers: Diversifying the United States' teacher workforce* (pp. 15-21). United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Toldson, I. A., & Lewis, C. W. (2012). *Challenge the status quo: Academic success among school-age African American males*. Washington, DC: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.

Ullman, C., & Hecsh, J. (2011). These American lives: Becoming a culturally responsive teacher and the 'risks of empathy'. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *14*(5), 603-629.

Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Warren, C. A. (2012). *Empathic interaction: White female teachers and their Black male students* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10027/9470

Warren, C. A. (2013). Towards a pedagogy for the application of empathy in culturally diverse classrooms. *The Urban Review.* doi: 10.1007/s11256-013-0262-5

Wispé, L. (1986). The distinction between sympathy and empathy: To call forth a concept, a word is needed. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *50*(2), 314-321.