

Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Impact on Leadership Preparation: Lessons for Future Reform Efforts

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of one school's teacher-driven professional development effort to address culturally responsive teaching practices in a large district in a Midwestern state. During the 2011-2012 school year, a team of teachers and principals began a three-year long effort to provide job-embedded professional development intended to focus on delivering high-impact strategies to transform the educational practices of teachers through improving cultural competence. A survey was given to 120 fulltime certified teachers, and findings suggest that while teachers agreed most that the professional development helped examine views on poverty, they agreed least that the professional development helped close the achievement gap. Additionally, elective and special education teachers were significantly more positive than core subject classroom teachers in terms of how the research they read improved instruction and how the professional development provided impacted building-wide faculty instruction. Analysis of open-ended items highlight several themes, namely the professional development helped teachers by acknowledging cultural differences of the students they taught, but that ultimately the challenges of lack of time and implementation apathy impeded the success of the professional development effort. These findings provide important insight for leadership preparation, particularly about supporting teacher-driven efforts, facilitating culturally responsive practices, and the reflecting on the pressures teachers face due to high stakes accountability and reform efforts.

Introduction

As the diversity of our nation increases, teachers of today must educate students who come from a variety of cultures, languages, and with varying abilities (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). According to Hawley and Nieto (2010), ethnicity and race influence teaching and learning by impacting how students react to curriculum and to instruction, but also by shaping teachers' notions about students' capacity for learning. Often teachers are unaware of their own beliefs about their students' backgrounds, and as a result teachers are not conscious of the potential impact those biases might have on interactions with others who are not like themselves (Ayres, 2001). To help combat these perspectives, Hawley and Nieto (2010) posit, "school-based professional learning communities can improve teaching and learning and lead to a fundamental change in teachers' work" (p. 70). By analyzing culturally responsive teaching practices and providing professional development in this arena, teachers and principals can help school systems address stereotypes that traditionally limit opportunities for students (Gay, 2010; Haberman, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is critically important to study how this type of professional development impacts the everyday work of educators, as well as the leadership required to facilitate and support this important work. Thus, understanding how to develop these skills in leadership preparation programs is equally important.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) refers to effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms (Irvine, 2009). Ford (2010) states,

When we are responsive, we feel an obligation, a sense of urgency, to address a need... so that students experience success. When teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they eliminate barriers to learning and achievement and, thereby, open doors for culturally different students to reach their potential...[when culturally responsive] teachers proactively and assertively work to understand, respect, and meet the needs of students who come from cultural backgrounds different from their own (p. 50).

Building on the idea that learning may be different across cultures, CRP helps teachers to learn about cultural backgrounds with the intent to use the knowledge to design lessons which could increase students' success (Irvine, 2009). In truly culturally responsive classrooms, students and teachers experience culturally supported and student-centered instruction that focuses on the strengths of the students to promote achievement for all (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). CRP strategies include scaffolding of students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and learning styles to provide better access to curriculum through flexible groups, collaboration with other students, and creating a classroom community that is cooperative and family like (Ford, 2010). By employing this style of instruction, CRP is student-centered and provides high levels of support by approaching effective instruction through a cultural lens to help learners understand new concepts and information (Irvine, 2009).

Allen and Boykin (1992) posit to genuinely increase student success and achievement, teachers must find a way to help students to bridge various cultural gaps that exist between home and school. CRP attempts to accomplish this by nurturing the achievement of students of all cultures, and by capitalizing on the individual strengths each child brings to school (Richards,

Brown, & Forde, 2007). Irvine (2009) suggests by understanding student learning as a socially constructed process influenced by cultural backgrounds and experiences, CRP can impact teachers' instructional strategies to maximize student learning. It is through identifying these strengths, and providing faculty members with appropriate support to grow professionally, that culturally responsive teaching can be utilized to increase student achievement. Truly culturally responsive teachers have deep understanding of content and are able to provide multiple representations of this knowledge to connect with students' lived experiences in the home, community and society (Irvine, 2009).

Culturally responsive instruction can best be understood by examining its basic components. Richards, Brown, & Forde (2007) define CRP in the following manner:

Culturally responsive pedagogy comprises three dimensions: (a) institutional, (b) personal and (c) instructional. The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policy and values. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction (p. 64).

Recognizing that these three components are significantly intertwined in the teaching and learning process is the critical first step in truly understanding the effectiveness of CRP.

Institutional Dimension of CRP

Little (1999) notes that our educational system is comprised of both physical and political structures. The challenge, then, to make our educational system or institution more culturally responsive should be approached in three specific areas: (1) school organization, including principals and central office administrators and their views regarding diversity and the use of physical space; (2) school policies and procedures, which determine the delivery of services for students of diverse backgrounds; and (3) community involvement, in relation to how the institution is involved with the community to include all stakeholders and build strong relationships with both families and communities (Little, 1999). Nieto (2002/2003) emphasizes that perhaps the most significant of the three areas are how institutions allocate their resources, specifically where the best teachers are assigned as schools could develop greater awareness by allocating more proficient teachers for culturally diverse classrooms as a routine institutional practice. Therefore, principals play a critical role in supporting CRP and influencing school policies and procedures. It is through questioning these practices that principals can help institutions to become more culturally responsive.

Personal Dimension of CRP

To become culturally proficient, teachers must undergo a personal transformation through careful self-reflection of their own biases, attitudes, beliefs, as well as their beliefs about others. Through deep, personal self-reflection known as the cycle of socialization (Harro, 2000), teachers uncover experiences in their lives that have shaped their thoughts and feelings about themselves and others. When teachers honestly examine their own attitudes and beliefs as well as their beliefs about others, they begin to realize who they are, why they are this way, and can confront biases that have shaped their moral compass (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It is through

this deep reflection of their own personal histories and experiences that teachers can recognize and reconcile their negative views toward specific groups, including but not limited to economic status, sexual orientation, language, or other cultural identities. Often, this is difficult work for teachers who may resist acknowledging their own prejudices or racism toward certain groups.

Instructional Dimension of CRP

Culturally responsive pedagogy impacts instruction at the classroom level and strives to create a more socially just learning environment, by addressing the needs of all learners. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007, p.66) posit, “Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes and utilizes the students’ culture and language in instruction, and ultimately respects students personal and community identities.” A synopsis of the literature suggests culturally responsive instruction is characterized by learning by valuing various cultural identities, respecting diversity, strengthening relationships between schools and the communities they serve, valuing student voice, and instilling critical perspectives to questions issues of equity (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Richards, Brown, and Forde, 2007. Bluntly, race and ethnicity impact and influence not only how students perceive the world, but also how teachers perceive instructional practices and abilities of students (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Often, however, teachers and principals have had little training about CRP in their preparation programs, and as a result these educators often have a limited understanding of racism and race relations in American schools (Lopez, 2003). Moreover, while issues of diversity and equity have been openly addressed starting in the Civil Rights Movement and up through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability measures, CRP has not always translated into practice nor has it necessarily been valued in research (Evans, 2013).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was born out of legal scholarship and questions the status quo on race, gender, and equality in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT to the field of education, providing a basic understanding of the racial discrimination that impacts the educational experiences of children of color. CRT contends racism is inherent in American society and is central to the functioning of the laws and policies of the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Through this framework educational policies and practices are seen as inequitable and unjust to students of color (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lerma, Linick, Warren-Grice, & Parker, 2013), and views racism as “the weapon of choice used by the ruling class to keep the working class divided” (Gilligan, 1997). Wise (2003) posits that racism in the form of White privilege is so deeply entrenched in American society, that it goes unnoticed, with the analogy of a fish in water does not know she exists within the water and thus takes it for granted. Supporting this notion, Spina (2000) argues, “racism is so deeply internalized in our society that most Whites are not even aware of its existence or how far they will go to keep it that way” (p. 9).

Historically, White culture, privilege, and hegemony have permeated education systems, including educational preparation programs that traditionally lack focus on helping address issues of race to help schools transform society (Brown, 2014). As America has advanced through history, immigration and annexation of people from various backgrounds has produced

cultural boundaries and have failed to address different racial identities (Ji-Yeon, 2004). Critical scholars argue that teachers and administrators have a duty to transform schools from historical sorting machines where students were prepared for their place in society, into an equitable system where the disenfranchised are given hope and social change becomes a reality (Anyon, 2005; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This goal for social change can only be achieved by preparing future educators to understand how concepts of racism are embedded in the educational system with the hope to eradicate racism as they work in schools (Lopez, 2003; Parker & Shapiro, 1992). This critical context is essential for practitioners and scholars to recognize so that change can occur and teacher and principal preparation programs can address this topic in course work.

To understand and change the current social situation for racial minorities, CRT seeks to analyze society's self-organization according to racial boundaries and hierarchies and then strives to eradicate these boundaries and hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Additionally, CRT provides a theoretical framework to analyze existing power structures through the lens that racism is institutionalized and pervasive in the dominant culture in the United States (Jay, 2003). Through questioning the power dynamics reinforced in American society, school systems can help confront the persistence of racism, classism, and sexism in the quest for social justice (Jay, 2003; Lerma, Linick, Warren-Grice, & Parker, 2013). What is most disturbing, however, is many authors postulate our educational system has become complacent and does little to change the status quo of racial and social structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

Teachers and principals have a duty and an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems, organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or perspectives over other groups (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer, Imber, & Scheurich, 1995). Historically, however, traditional preparation programs of teachers and principals often neglect to examine the historical components of race and racism in our society, as well as how certain privileges based on racial and socioeconomic status impacts our educational system (Blount, 2013). "Quite simply, preparation programs across the nation do very little to equip students with a cogent understanding of racism and race relations" (Lopez, 2003, p. 70). There is much research to support the position that CRT is a valuable framework to promote social justice within our school systems (Laible & Harrington, 1998; Lomotey, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Reyes, Velez, & Peña, 1993; Young & Laible, 2000). As teachers and principals attempt to address issues of racism that further alienate traditionally disenfranchised students based on academic achievement, race, and socioeconomic factors (Noguera, 2003), researchers must also be cognizant of the role race and racism play in conducting research in order to help acknowledge and express deeply held beliefs (Brown, 2011). Thus, in order for schools to become vehicles of social justice to help transform issues of poverty and racism (Anyon, 2005; Noguera, 2003), practitioners and researchers must be able to work together to highlight school reform and policy issues that impede efforts to address injustice and to inform policy makers of what might be done differently to produce policy that truly address deeply-seeded issues within America's schools and districts.

Using Professional Learning Communities to Address Issues of Social Justice

For almost two decades, professional learning communities (PLCs) have been viewed by educators as the foundation for sustaining school improvement efforts, improving student achievement, and addressing the culture of a school building (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). However, as our country becomes increasingly diverse, the use of PLCs have also been used by teachers and administrators to help address hidden cultural assumptions amongst educators, increase culturally proficient practices based on the demographics of students being served, and embrace diversity as a strength of a community (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, & Lindsey, 2009). To move beyond minor changes in teaching, often the result of top down reform initiatives, teachers must be able to renegotiate the pressures of policies and programs in order to apply instructional concepts that are meaningful, applicable, and that speak to the identity of the learners in their classroom (Spillane, 2002). This requires principals who are supportive of creating and fostering PLC environments that allow teachers a safe space to explore cultural differences and address issues of social justice.

As posited by Sharratt and Planche (2016), principals must be able and willing to work alongside teachers and engage in collaborative learning in order to understand the needs of a building, addressing a plan for action, and continually refining the plan of improvement based on ongoing data collection. Additionally, strong school leadership is required in order for educators to talk about the history of race in America, the ability for staff to examine White privilege, and enable school faculties to work together to close the achievement gap between White and non-White students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Thus, through PLCs, teachers and principals can critically examine issues of race and culturally responsive pedagogy, all in the hope of addressing issues of social justice and equity.

Context of the Study

The study occurred in a Midwestern city with a population of over 136,000 people. The district selected is one of the largest in the state and serves just over 18,000 students. While 83% of the citizens self-identify as White, only 61% of students report as being White, accounting for a huge cultural and generational shift that is occurring within the regional area. With 39% of the students within the school district identifying as non-White, there have been considerable efforts to increase culturally responsive practices, especially considering the school district studied exists in the same city as the local university, which is a major land-grant institution and provides many professional development opportunities for the local school district. Existing in the same community as the local university has provided the school district an advantage when it comes to employing well-educated teachers – with 73.5% of teachers having earned a master’s degree or higher, the school district in this study employs almost 15% more teachers with a master’s degree or higher than the state average.

Table 1

District Subgroup Student Achievement by Year and Percent Proficient or Advanced

Subgroup Achievement (non-White)	2011-2012 % Proficient or Advanced	2012-2013 % Proficient or Advanced	2013-2014 % Proficient or Advanced
English Language Arts	34.3 %	33.3 %	31.4 %
Mathematics	32.1 %	28.3 %	28.6 %
Science	35.4 %	37.2 %	33.1 %

Table 2

District Total Student Achievement by Year and Percent Proficient or Advanced

Total Achievement (all students)	2011-2012 % Proficient or Advanced	2012-2013 % Proficient or Advanced	2013-2014 % Proficient or Advanced
English Language Arts	54.7 %	55.5 %	53.3 %
Mathematics	52.0 %	48.7 %	48.3 %
Science	57.2 %	59.9 %	56.0 %

The school district was selected for this study due to its efforts to improve student achievement, specifically focusing on narrowing the achievement gap between White and minority students. While the district has been able to make some progress on narrowing the achievement gap, stubborn levels of low performance by students of color on the state standardized test have prevented the district from fully addressing this issue of equity regarding student achievement. Table 1 shows the percentage of non-White students scoring proficient or advanced on the state standardized test, while Table 2 shows the percentage of all students in the district scoring proficient or advanced on the state standardized test. When comparing this information there is almost a 20% difference between percentage of White and non-White students scoring proficient or advanced, providing a clear display in the difference of the level of achievement based on race, and thus the focus on providing culturally responsive practices to help improve achievement within the district.

The school selected for this study, Clear River High School (CRHS), is demographically different than the district in the sense that 71% of its students are White and 29% are non-White, which accounts for a 20% change in demographics when compared to the aforementioned school

district population that is more diverse (61% White; 39% non-White). When comparing the student achievement of CRHS in the 2011-2012 school year, total student achievement was considerably higher than subgroup (non-White) achievement. These achievement data helped serve as the foundation for CRHS faculty to continuously examine data discrepancies between White and non-White students.

Starting in the 2011-2012 school year, nine CRHS educators who served on the building multicultural committee, including teachers, department chairs, and an assistant principal, began reading and researching information on the achievement gap, culturally proficient teaching, and examining the societal notion of White privilege. Their readings included works of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Gary Howard, Jean Anyon, Peggy MacIntosh Michelle Jay, and Glenn Singleton. Together, the group began to formulate their understanding of barriers that made it difficult for students of color to be successful.

The CRHS multicultural committee shared their learning with the building leadership team and the group was invited to continue their work next year and create job-embedded professional development sessions to share with small groups of teachers on a semi-regular basis, which amounted to three times a year. These sessions were 45 minutes in length and occurred during teachers' professional learning committee meeting time. Sessions were designed and planned by the group and facilitated by various group members utilizing a common script to ensure fidelity of the content delivered. Sessions typically contained norms, content, discussion, and reflection. Feedback was solicited from participants and that input shaped future professional developments.

Over the summer of 2012, the group grew to 12 and met and continued to research and learn about factors that contribute to the achievement gap and sought out researched based strategies to close the gap. The group read work by Noguera & Boykin (2011), which is a meta-analysis of 26 years of research around closing the achievement gap. During the 2012-2013 school year, the group compiled proven strategies from this book and delivered professional development supporting the implementation of these strategies during PLC meeting times. To illuminate the achievement gap within CRHS, the group compiled school achievement data illustrating the seriousness of the problem that minority students and students of poverty were failing courses at a much higher rate than their White counterparts. In the 2013-2014 school year, the group grew to 16 and continued to study ways to close the achievement gap and provide culturally proficient teaching strategies. CRHS faculty members designed three more job-embedded professional sessions and delivered one each trimester. These sessions explored the idea of culture, various identities, structural oppression, poverty, and specific characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Over the course of the three year period, the multicultural group continued to research and learn as they facilitated professional development for their staff. During the spring of 2014, a survey as delivered to all certified teachers in CRHS to assess the impact culturally responsive practices had on teachers' perceptions.

Method

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of CRP professional development and the impact this had on their instructional practices. The high school, CRHS, was selected for this study due to its attempted efforts to implement CRP practices in order to better engage students of color in instruction and to further narrow the achievement gap within the school building. In order to

gain a better understanding of the impact of the CRP professional development, two research questions guided this study: 1) How do teachers perceive culturally responsive pedagogy professional development based on their job assignment? and 2) What do teachers perceive as the greatest successes and challenges in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy?

Data were collected using an online survey tool and was distributed to all teachers in CRHS via email to assess their perceptions of the impact of culturally responsive instruction professional development. An overview of the survey was shared with the entire faculty during a faculty meeting in April of 2014. Then the survey was sent to the principal of CRHS, who in turn forwarded the survey to all certified teachers in the school building. In total, the survey was sent out twice to increase the participation rate of teachers. Of the 120 teachers the survey was sent, 73 responded, giving the study a 61% response rate. Thus, the intent of the study was to better inform the impact of CRP professional development on teachers' perceptions in one high school in a school district experiencing racial and socioeconomic change.

Instrument

In the data collection process the researchers used a survey instrument that was composed of three sections. Developed by the researchers who have more than 73 years of combined teaching, administration, and research experience, the intent of the instrument was to assess the impact of the CRP professional development based on the perceptions of teachers. The first section was informed by 11 Likert scaled items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*) to measure teachers' perceptions of the aforementioned professional development. To establish internal reliability of the created instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficient were calculated on all 11 scaled items and found to be 0.90. The second section of the instrument consisted of two open ended questions that asked teachers to describe the greatest successes and challenges to implementing CRP within their instruction. The third section of the survey allowed the researchers to gather demographic information of the participants and included gender, race, years of experience, job assignment, and tenure status.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to interpret quantitative data. To analyze the entire sample, descriptive means were calculated for the 11 items measured. Additionally, means were broken down and analyzed by job assignment, (two groups), years of teaching experience (three groups), and tenure status (two groups). Data were analyzed with inferential statistics as well, specifically independent samples *t*-tests for the variable of job assignment. To analyze the two open-ended items, an open-coded process was used to identify initial themes and remained flexible as additional themes emerged (Saldaña, 2013).

Results

Of the 73 teachers who responded to the survey, 20 identified as male and 52 as female, with one participant choosing not to self-identify. Additionally, 54 identified as tenured (73.9%) compared to 14 as non-tenured (19.1%). Regarding years of teaching, 26 had one to nine years of experience (35.6%), 28 had 10 to 19 years of experience (38.3%), and 18 had 20 years or

more of teaching experience (24.6%). A total of 49 teachers (67.1%) identified as being a regular classroom teacher who taught a core subject such as English, math, science, or social studies, while 18 (24.6%) identified as being an elective or special education teacher. For the purpose of this study, an elective or special education teacher includes all non-core subject teachers (e.g. music, art, physical education, technology, etc.) and special education teachers. When analyzing racial composition of the teachers who took part in the survey, 67 identified as being White (91.7%). In context of the school being studied, the percentage of White teachers in the building is 20% greater than the White student population of CRHS, and 30% more White than the average of the school district student population. This discrepancy is important to point out when interpreting the analysis of teachers' perceptions.

To answer the first research question, "How do teachers perceive culturally responsive practice professional development based on their job assignment?" the researchers analyzed the data descriptively. Overall means for the 11 items were calculated in order to analyze perceptions of how culturally responsive practices impacted the perceptions of teachers. Table 3 shows the over means for the 11 items, as well as for tenure status, years of teaching experience, and job assignment.

Table 3
Perceptions about Culturally Responsive Practice Professional Development based on Job Assignment, Years of Teaching Experience, and Tenure Status

	Overall 1 Mean	Tenure Status Mean		Years of Teaching Mean			Job Assignment Mean	
		Tenured (n=54)	Non (n=14)	1 to 9 (n=26)	10 to 19 (n=28)	20 or more (n=18)	Classroom (n=49)	Elective/ SPED (n=18)
PD helped examine views on poverty	3.54	3.60	3.14	3.54	3.50	3.63	3.46	3.82
PD helped examine racial identity	3.49	3.50	3.43	3.58	3.32	3.67	3.45	3.78
Change requires administrators and teachers to work together	3.49	3.40	3.64	3.46	3.50	3.50	3.40	3.67
PD helped examine white privilege	3.32	3.26	3.43	3.46	3.21	3.29	3.23	3.67
Research read improved instruction*	3.31	3.33	3.07	3.25	3.36	3.35	3.11	3.82
PD improved instruction	3.29	3.31	3.14	3.35	3.30	3.28	3.18	3.61
PD impacted building faculty*	3.12	3.19	2.93	3.08	3.15	3.17	2.96	3.61
PD helped address racism in building	3.10	3.06	3.21	3.19	2.89	3.28	3.00	3.50
PD helped examine grading practices	2.76	2.74	2.71	2.58	3.46	3.58	2.57	3.22
Research read helped close achievement gap	2.75	2.80	2.50	2.65	2.86	2.83	2.57	3.22
PD helped close achievement gap	2.73	2.75	2.54	2.65	2.85	2.78	2.56	3.24

Note: Scale ranges from 1=*strongly disagree* to 4=*strongly agree*; Elective includes music, art, physical education, technology, etc.; SPED indicates special education * indicates a significant difference at the 0.001 level between classroom teachers and elective/special education teachers

Overall, teachers in the study agreed with all items as all had means higher than 2.50. Teachers agreed most that the *professional development helped examine views on poverty* ($M=3.54$), however they agreed least that the *professional development helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.73$). When examining the data through the perception of tenure status, those teachers who have tenure agreed most that the *professional development helped examine views on poverty* ($M=3.60$), and least that the *professional development helped examine grading practices* ($M=2.74$). Additionally, non-tenured teachers agreed most that *change requires administrators and teachers to work together* ($M=3.64$), and least that the *research read helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.50$).

When analyzing the data through the lens of years of teaching experience, teachers with one to nine years of experience agreed most that the *professional development helped examine racial identity* ($M=3.58$) and least that the *professional development helped examine grading practices* ($M=2.58$). Teachers with 10 to 19 years of experience agreed most with the *professional development helped examine views on poverty* as well as *change requires administrators and teachers to work together* ($M=3.50$), and least that the *professional development helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.85$). Additionally, teachers with 20 or more years of teaching experience agreed most that the *professional development helped examine racial identity* ($M=3.67$) and least that that the *professional development helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.78$).

Finally, when analyzing the data by job assignment, regular classroom teachers agreed most that the *professional development helped examine views on poverty* ($M=3.46$), however they agreed least that the *professional development helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.56$). Elective and special education teachers agreed most that the *professional development helped examine views on poverty* as well as the *research read improved instruction* ($M=3.82$). Elective and special education teachers also agreed least that the *professional development helped examine grading practices* and the *research read helped close the achievement gap* ($M=3.22$). An independent t test revealed there was a significant difference between regular classroom teachers and elective and special education teachers in terms of how they viewed culturally responsive practice professional development in terms of how the *research read improved instruction* ($p < 0.001$) and how the *professional development impacted building faculty instruction* ($p = 0.001$). Specifically, the elective and special education teachers were significantly more positive about these items. An alpha level of 0.05 was initially used to determine significance, and a Bonferroni correction was applied to reduce the chance of a type I error. Thus, a final alpha level of 0.004 was used to determine significance.

Table 4

2013-2014 CRHS Student Achievement by Year and Percent Proficient or Advanced

Subgroup Achievement (non-White)	2012-2013 % Proficient or Advanced	2013-2014 % Proficient or Advanced
English Language Arts	40.1 %	52.2 %
Mathematics	8.5 %	35.5 %
Science	64.5 %	48.3 %

Table 4 shows the percentage of non-White CRHS students scoring proficient or advanced actually increased from 2013 to 2014 in both English Language Arts and Mathematics, however students scoring proficient or advanced in Science decreased. Compared to the 31.4% of district non-White students who scored proficient or advanced in English Language Arts in the 2013-2014 school year, 52.2% of CRHS non-White students scored proficient or advanced in the same subject. Additionally, 28.6% of district non-White students who scored proficient or advanced in Mathematics during the 2013-2014 school year, while 35.5% of CRHS non-White students scored proficient or advanced in Mathematics. Also, it should be noted that in the 2013-2014 school year, 52.2% of CRHS non-White students scoring proficient or advanced in English Language Arts is on par with the 53.3% of total district students scoring proficient or advanced in the same subject.

To answer the second research question, “What do teachers perceive as the greatest successes and challenges in implementing culturally responsive professional development?”, researchers analyzed two open-ended questions with an open-coding process. With regards to the reported success of implementing CRP professional development, the main theme that emerged was the notion of *acknowledging cultural differences*. Teachers commented on their increased respect for diversity, the awareness of different cultural backgrounds and how this translated to building positive relationships, and the ability to reflect on how a student from a different racial and/or socioeconomic background might perceive instruction within CRHS. One respondent stated:

I think just a shift in mindset. I feel like I used to ignore race, treat every kid the same, but I'm realizing more and more that we can't just put all our kids in a box. So, I think it's been good for me to have to think more about how I identify my kids.

Another teacher reflected:

The professional development has reminded me... [to] add another dimension to knowing my students as individuals. I understand my students and their situation better. I have tried to encourage my students to be successful at school with the culturally relevant information in the front of my mind. This is the only way to truly connect....

Thus, some teachers were able to reflect on notions of race, poverty, and white privilege as a result of the culturally responsive practice professional development.

Regarding the reported challenges of the CRP professional development efforts, two main themes emerged, namely *lack of time* and *implementation apathy*. In reflecting on the challenges faced implementing the improvement effort over a three year period, some teachers commented on the difficulty to deeply connect with students, parents, and community members while attempting to implement other improvement efforts.

It is challenging to impact big changes in such a short time. We could have used more time to unpack, discuss, implement and work through this material as a staff. I think the teachers who gained the most from this PD were teachers who already strive to practice culturally relevant teaching.

I need more time to work with/help students, and our district need[s] more institutional opportunities for students who need education to look differently.

In implementing a self-directed improvement effort, albeit an important one, teachers also had to adhere to other ongoing improvement efforts driven by building leadership as well as district initiatives. This highlights the notion that for school improvement efforts to be accomplished, principals need to be cognizant of the number of these initiatives and focus on only one or two aspects to truly impact change.

Additionally, teachers commented on the notion that some teachers sincerely took the improvement effort to heart, while others struggled to change deeply held beliefs about racial and cultural differences. Many of the comments regarding the challenges of the CRP professional development implementation highlight beliefs of apathy among fellow teachers.

[We are still] fighting the perception that we don't have a lot of diversity or need to close the achievement gap.

Not everyone seems to have a desire to learn about culturally relevant practices or seems to believe that this is something we need to address.

I feel there are many teachers who do not work with, or think they don't work with these populations, and that is a huge problem. This can't be ignored and I think too often it is, or that people feel it is someone else's problem.

Thus, there appeared to be a divide in the staff between those teachers who were willing to look at students differently and engage them in culturally responsive practice, and those who were not willing. This theme reflects the significant differences between subject areas, specifically how elective and special education teachers applied the research regarding CRP from the readings, as well as how this professional development initiative impacted the faculty.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions about CRP and to better understand how teachers perceive the successes and challenges to implementing such a professional development initiative. The findings from this study can be summarized by the following: 1) teachers agreed most that culturally responsive pedagogy *professional development helped examine views on poverty* ($M=3.54$), however they agreed least that *professional development helped close the achievement gap* ($M=2.73$), 2) elective and special education teachers were more positive than regular teachers on every survey item regarding their

perception of the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy, 3) elective and special education teachers were significantly more positive than regular classroom teachers in terms of how the *research read improved instruction* ($p < 0.001$) and how the *professional development impacted building faculty instruction* ($p = 0.001$), 4) teachers reported success of the CRP professional development by *acknowledging cultural differences*, however 5) teachers also reported challenges of the CRP professional development efforts, namely *lack of time* and *implementation apathy*.

Based on the context of the study, the findings in this article should help inform leadership preparation in general, as well as future school improvement and reform efforts that are led by school leaders. First, much can be said about the important steps taken by a group of educators that work in a school that employs 91% of teachers who are White but of whom 29% of students identify as non-White. By acknowledging the importance race and ethnicity have on learning (Hawley & Nieto, 2010), the teacher leaders of CRHS provided grassroots professional development opportunities that specifically helped teachers examine their own views on poverty and race, as well as address pervasive stereotypes (Gay, 2010; Haberman, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Additionally, the teachers of CRHS were empowered by CRHS principals to explore these important issues as they took part in the collaborative learning process (Sharratt & Planche, 2016). While this collaboration is paramount, it is also interesting to point out that teachers' agreed least that the CRP professional development helped close the achievement gap, even though the percentage of non-White CRHS students scoring proficient or advanced actually increased from 2013 to 2014 in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. It is possible that this discrepancy between perception and reality occurred because the survey was given in the spring of 2014, and achievement data for the 2013-2014 school year was not released until the late summer of 2014. When viewed through the CRT framework, educational practices and procedures highlight inequities and keep racial classes divided (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), even though the CRHS faculty attempted to improve efforts over the course of three years of CRP professional development to increase student engagement, success, and achievement (Allen & Boykin, 1992). As a result, providing leadership that focuses on issues of social justice, and celebrating improvements in closing the achievement gap, are considered critical components of educational leadership.

In terms of elective and special education teachers being more positive than regular teachers regarding their perception of the impact of CRP, this study adds to preexisting literature that explores perceptual differences of educators based on developmental stages of teaching careers (Range, Anderson, Hvidston, & Mette, 2013) and administrative experience (Hvidston, Range, McKim, & Mette, 2015). What is interesting about this specific finding is it highlights the notion that elective and special education teachers might provide a different approach to incorporating culturally responsive instruction that is student-centered and focuses on individual strengths rather than being *topic* centered (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). By definition, special education teachers adapt instruction to meet the needs of individual students, and elective teachers typically provide instruction to students who *chose* to be in their classrooms. Regular classroom teachers who deliver core content, on the other hand, are increasingly scrutinized with accountability measures to examine if quality instruction is being provided. While this cannot be a conclusion of causality, it is important to question if added pressures to perform on state standardized tests creates the opposite desired effect of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and other reform efforts. When viewed from a CRT framework, instead of eliminating racial disparities,

reform policies further institutionalize the dominant White culture in America by enforcing racial boundaries and hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Jay, 2003). These findings have major implications for educational leadership preparation programs, particularly around understanding the psychology of teachers responding to reform efforts, especially in subjects assessed by high stakes accountability exams, but also the need for educators to be able to examine their own beliefs about racial disparities and stereotypes about student achievement.

In attempting to address achievement disparities, it is crucial to highlight the perceived success of the CRP professional development effort, specifically the chance for a predominately White faculty to reflect on and learn about cultural differences in the students they serve. As teachers at CRHS learned more about the backgrounds that their non-White students came from, they were better able to understand them as individuals and meet their personal learning needs (Ford, 2010). In this regard, teachers went beyond what their educational preparation programs provided them and challenged their own understandings of race and poverty (Lopez, 2003). That being said, due to other conflicting improvement efforts, as well as the perception that not all teachers were willing to question their own White privilege (Spina, 2000), the effort has met some resistance in continuing to question the status quo of racial and social structures, supporting the notions of CRT that racism and segregation is institutionalized by the dominant culture in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Clearly, there is a need for leadership to help address the issues of institutionalized racism with their own school buildings.

Conclusions

Three important conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the three year, grassroots, ongoing CRP professional development effort highlights that teachers and principals have an ethical and moral obligation to challenge the status quo of school systems to lead to better outcomes for historically disenfranchised groups (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer et al., 1995). In this study, the educators of CRHS helped bridge the gap between theory and practice to show the important work that can be done to help teachers and principals examine their views on racial and socioeconomic factors that impact instruction of students and school culture. However, teachers agreed least that the culturally responsive practice professional development helped close the achievement gap, even though the data suggests the percentage of non-White CRHS students scoring proficient or advanced increased from 2013 to 2014 in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. While this is likely due to the perceptions of teachers being collected prior to the release of student achievement data, it does not minimize the perceptions of teachers (a majority of whom are White), that closing the achievement gap is a legitimate struggle. Thus, while teachers and principals have a duty to help traditionally disenfranchised students by transforming educational systems (Anyon, 2005; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), there continues to be a struggle to close the achievement gap, or even the *perceived ability* to close the achievement gap, particularly as practitioners navigate a high stakes accountability and reform environment.

Second, elective and special education teachers were more positive about the CRP professional development than regular classroom teachers who taught core subjects such as English, math, science, and social studies. Additionally, elective and special education teachers were significantly more positive than regular classroom teachers regarding their perceptions of

research on culturally responsive practice, as well as how they perceived the impact the CRP professional development had on overall faculty instruction. Previous studies have highlighted the need to differentiate professional development opportunities for teachers based on various demographic backgrounds, such as job assignment, years of teaching, and tenure status (Range et al., 2013), however another conclusion could be that there are different driving factors as to *why* these differences occur in the first place. Teachers instructing courses that are assessed with a state standardized test likely experience more pressure to ensure content is learned as opposed to support teachers whose job it is to engage students with a course that the student elects to take, or through special education requirements that dictate accommodations to meet the individual needs of students. This finding can and should inform school and district leaders about the need understand the perceptions of teachers in their own buildings and districts, support professional learning communities that address issues of social justice and equity, and target ongoing efforts to narrow the achievement gap. Additionally, further research should be conducted to gain the perspectives of students to see if there is a perceptual difference between instruction provided by regular classroom teachers and elective and special education teachers. This type of research could provide evidence that the current accountability system is not helping address an achievement gap, but rather further alienating students and inhibiting school systems from addressing issues of social justice (Anyon, 2005).

Third, while the culturally responsive practice professional development helped CRHS teachers acknowledge cultural differences, the continual pressure from additional school improvement and reform efforts, coupled with apathy from some teachers to address issues of race and culture, contributed to the *perceived* lack of any major student achievement improvement. Not only is there a need for educational preparation programs to continue to improve ways to help teachers and principals reflect on issues of race and racism (Lopez, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007), but there seemingly still exists the notion that racism is so deeply embedded and reinforced that teachers who identify as White are not able to deconstruct the narrative of how public school systems favor White students (Spina, 2000). All leadership preparation programs, regardless of the apparent level of diversity, will need to find ways to incorporate this important and yet very difficult work, especially as America continues to rapidly diversify.

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