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"Kids Like Us": A Teacher's Impact on Students' Cultural Identity Development Using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the English Language Arts Classroom

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"Kids Like Us": A Teacher's Impact on Students' Cultural Identity Development Using
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the English Language Arts Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of

Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2024

The dissertation of Ardisia Knowles is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Kids Like Us": A Teacher's Impact on Students' Cultural Identity Development Using
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the English Language Arts Classroom

by

Ardisia Knowles

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2024
California State University, San Marcos, 2024

Professor Thandeka K. Chapman, Chair

Some researchers believe that students of color are not achieving at high levels in various school subjects compared to their White counterparts. Scholars suggest that this academic discrepancy results from systemic or structural inequities (Acosta, 2007; Capper, 2021; Covell, 2009; Howard, 2013; Jones, 2018; Nasir & Al-Amini, 2006). Brunvand and Byrd (2011) suggest that low engagement and motivation occur when students reach high school. Further, Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) assert that adolescent-aged students lack motivation due to a lack of intrinsic reward. Some scholars believe that the academic success of students of color hinges on the ability of the curriculum to allow them to experience adequate cultural and

social identity development (Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Milner, 2005). This study examines how English Language Arts (ELA) teachers practice culturally relevant pedagogy and how these practices affect students' cultural identity development and engagement. The literature review highlights CID's importance in schools, provides a deep dive into CRP (its history and implementation), and why it is the chosen framework for this study. It will examine how CID, CRP, its tenets (academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness), and student engagement interact to support students of color. The methods chapter overviews how the study was performed (observations, interviews, focus group meetings, and artifact collection). Once all data were collected, there was a lengthy analysis process where the researcher looked at the data to determine the most vivid findings. The two results chapters break down the most pressing findings from teacher and student interviews and focus groups. Finally, the discussion chapter ties all information together to discuss the most significant findings.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Some researchers believe that Students of Color are not achieving at high levels in various school subjects compared to their White counterparts. Scholars suggest that this academic discrepancy results from systemic or structural inequities (Acosta, 2007; Capper, 2021; Covell et al., 2009; Howard, 2013; Jones, 2018; Nasir & Al-Amini, 2006; Thomas & McIntyre McCullough, 2016). Others believe that while schools may perform meaningful work to modify curriculum, not enough is done to draw inspiration from the communities students reside within, nor to examine the effectiveness of teachers who already work with high achieving Students of Color (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Irizarry & Raible, 2011). Howard (2013) mentions in his article how a staggering "47% of Black males graduated within 4 years from U.S. high schools in 2008, compared with 78% of White males" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). According to the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP/Nation's Report Card), though the reading scores of all students have generally decreased over the last few years, there remains a significant gap between the scores of Black and Hispanic students and that of White students. The NAEP report from 2019 reading scores also reveals that while 49% of White students scored proficient, only 17% of Black and 25% of Hispanic students did the same.

Research suggests that educational researchers are just some of the ones concerned about the academic success of Students of Color. Adults in the U.S. also display this concern, according to a 2021 survey: "Almost three-fourths (71%) of U.S. adults [who were surveyed] are concerned about K-12 students' current academic progress" (Saavedra). These academic performance gaps show the depth of the problem surrounding students of color in schools. These data suggest that Students of Color are not achieving academically at the same level as their

White counterparts. Some scholars believe that Students of Color struggle to succeed academically because of the broken connection between engagement and course material (Acosta, 2007; Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Tello et al., 2010; Young, 2010; Thomas & McIntyre-McCullough, 2016). Ervin (2021) highlighted the challenging balancing act teachers have to play when there is an equal need to meet district standards and use culturally inclusive curriculum.

Moreover, Brunvand and Byrd (2011) suggest that low engagement and motivation occur when students reach high school. Further, Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) assert that adolescent-aged students lack motivation due to a lack of intrinsic reward. The two previously mentioned scholars also cited various research which suggests that "students' motivations tend to be stronger, more resilient, and more easily sustained when they emerge from internally held goals rather than from externally applied coercion (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001)." Educators wonder how to fulfill a student's internal goals and motivation to help increase their academic success.

V. Ellis (2009) believes the English class is a substantial environment for personal growth and intrinsic goals. Concurrently, Bean et al. (1999) believe that multicultural literature in the context of the ELA classroom can increase student engagement when the characters in the literature reflect the students' experiences. These scholars and the idea that culture shapes teaching and learning (a racial or ethnic group's way of living and communicating), suggested by Bomer (2017), signify the benefit of cultural relevance in ELA classrooms.

Some scholars believe that the academic success of Students of Color hinges on the ability of the curriculum to allow them to experience adequate cultural and social identity development (Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Milner, 2005). Ladson-Billings

(1995b) suggests that culturally relevant pedagogy helps students be academically successful and supports them with the development of their cultural identity. Young (2010) also signifies how some scholars have taken Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b) framework to increase student achievement by using their cultural histories and life experiences as a resource in the class. The three tenets of the framework, academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness can support teachers in adding student experiences and culture to the class. Connecting students' lived experiences relates to Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) idea of increasing intrinsic rewards to increase student motivation and engagement. Through CRP, students can see their experiences as essential to learning, which the research suggests can increase engagement.

Additionally, by embedding cultural identity development (CID) in curricula, scholars predict student academic success will occur (Acosta, 2007; Cooper, 2014; Feinauer & Cutri, 2012; Jones, 2018; Morales & Hartman, 2019). CID is an exploratory process students go through where they can see their cultures and experiences in curricula. Thus, the following research study suggests that a connection between CRP and CID should help educators keep their Students of Color engaged in learning, allowing them to achieve academic success and close the gap between them and their White peers.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examines how English Language Arts (ELA) teachers practice culturally relevant pedagogy and how these practices affect students' cultural identity development and engagement. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. **What are the multiple characteristics of a culturally relevant English Language Arts classroom?**

   a. How does the classroom environment reflect CRP?

b. How do the teacher's curriculum and instruction reflect CRP?

2. **How do culturally relevant classrooms foster student engagement and cultural identity development (CID)?**

a. How do students respond to classroom activities and assignments?

b. How do students perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their CID?

These questions helped guide me toward seeking potential solutions to engage Students of Color better and improve their school achievement.

Definition of Terms

There will be a variety of technical terms throughout this paper, which will be essential to make the reader proceed smoothly. To begin this review, the term **'Students of Color'** will refer to students in historically marginalized cultural backgrounds to help educators learn to benefit all students, not just one group. **Engagement** is another term that will come up often in this study. Cooper (2014) and Connell (1990) refer to student engagement as [positively] responding to activities in a class either through behavior, emotion, or cognition.

Additionally, **cultural identity development (CID)** allows students to see themselves and their experiences in what they learn and make real-world connections in creative ways (Acosta, 2007; Bean et al., 1999; Cooper, 2014; Sciurba, 2017). CID also allows students to see their cultures represented in curricula. If students can feel stronger connections to the material they learn in school, this will lead to more engagement in the classroom and, overall, better attitudes toward learning. Embedding cultural identity development in the curriculum can assist in altering such issues as disengagement in the classroom (Acosta, 2007; V. Ellis, 2009; Feinauer & Cutri, 2012; Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Milner, 2005).

Culture is another prominent term. In this paper, culture will refer to the racial and ethnic backgrounds with which students identify. Those are the identities this research will focus on to further build on the literature surrounding students of marginalized ethnic and racial backgrounds. Bomer (2017) defines *culture* as "a group of people's way of life, all of their patterns of communication, systems of valuing, habits of being, and understandings of expression—a group's ways of signaling membership and belonging through both minute and large-scale interactions" (p. 11). This paper will use this definition of culture regarding racial and ethnic groups.

Another term that will arise is **critical pedagogy.** This conceptual framework for teaching is rooted in Critical Theory, multiple social theories, and multicultural education for social justice. Critical pedagogy integrates the experiences of marginalized peoples into the curriculum and promotes student empowerment so students feel inspired to become "agents of social change" within their communities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 49). Teachers taking part in critical pedagogy provide space for students to critique traditional literature and use it to promote social change.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is the final term used in this study. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy seeks to incorporate students' lived cultural experiences into the classroom by implementing three tenets: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). The goals are to see students succeed academically, learn about themselves and others, and learn to become social change agents (as mentioned by Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Knowing these terms ahead of time will allow readers to flow through this paper easily and gain a foundational understanding of the conceptual frameworks that impact this study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Significance

The researcher possess assumptions and limitations that need to be considered in this study. This section will briefly describe those challenges for this study.

Assumptions

This study assumes that the students will respond positively to the CRP strategies and tools used in the classroom. As readers will see, some of the literature points out the challenges teachers face with implementing CRP in the classroom. One challenge is students' responses to these tools and strategies. Thus, one assumption is that students will always respond positively to class activities and assignments. For instance, students might need more time to engage in class discussions fully, or there might sometimes be disruptive students.

The second assumption held in this study is that students will be willing to talk about their experiences in class or with me, the researcher. There will be a level of relationship building that will take place for the students to feel comfortable having deep conversations with me about their learning and the experiences that impact their learning. Additionally, there may be instances when some students come into the classroom having a bad day, which could contribute to their level of engagement with the material, thus providing another challenge for the teacher. I recognize these assumptions and plan to let the classroom's organic nature occur.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study is the use of a case study methodology. I only observe one teacher and her classroom, receiving one set of perspectives. The decision to conduct a small study in this way is twofold. First, as a working professional, my job is limited to how much time I can invest in this study. It will be essential to balance my schedule and the teacher's schedule to get the best observations within the allotted time. Second, the limited number of teacher participants (one) will allow for a qualitative deep dive. Data triangulation in this case study will

occur through observations, multiple interviews (with the teacher and her students), and student focus group meetings, increasing the rich data gathered (Maxwell, 2012). Using the case study model limits my participants, but this is the best option. Yin (2009) wrote on case study methodology and stated that a strength of the case study is its ability to manage a variety of evidence (interviews, documents and artifacts, and observations). Case studies "allow investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Exploring a single site will allow me to see the impact of CRP in that teacher's classroom and how CRP tools contribute to classroom management.

A final limitation is the location. I am limited to doing observations at schools in southern California. Due to travel costs and the hours of my work schedule, this limitation is unavoidable but manageable, as I can choose from many schools in the area.

Significance of the Study

The conceptual framework of CRP supports keeping students engaged and allowing them to partake in CID. The proposed study in this paper seeks to add to the existing body of literature by delving into one teacher's classroom to examine the methods and strategies used to create an exceptional CRP English classroom. As previously mentioned in the statement of the problem, some scholars find that literature on this topic only highlights the pitfalls within schools and curricula. I aim to highlight what one teacher is already doing and how her practices positively impact her students. By the end, the hope is to provide new and veteran teachers with helpful information for improving their practice.

Furthermore, I will highlight how CRP can impact high school students in southern California in ELA classrooms. Their experiences will be brought to the forefront and provide a lens they can use to engage in classroom material. When students are engaged, their academic

success improves. Overall, the hope is for this study to add more depth to the existing literature on this topic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines cultural identity development (CID) and the history of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). The review will highlight CID's importance in schools, provide a deep dive into CRP (its history and implementation), and explain why it is the chosen framework for this study. More specifically, an examination of how CID, CRP, its tenets (academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness), as well as student engagement, interact to support students of color will take place in this chapter. Figure 1 (as created by the researcher) below suggests these components work together in a cyclical motion, impacting each other for maximum student academic success (as seen in the center). The images show how imperative these components are to happen simultaneously in a continuous, circular motion for maximum impact. The remainder of this chapter will go into more detail about these concepts and how they work together.
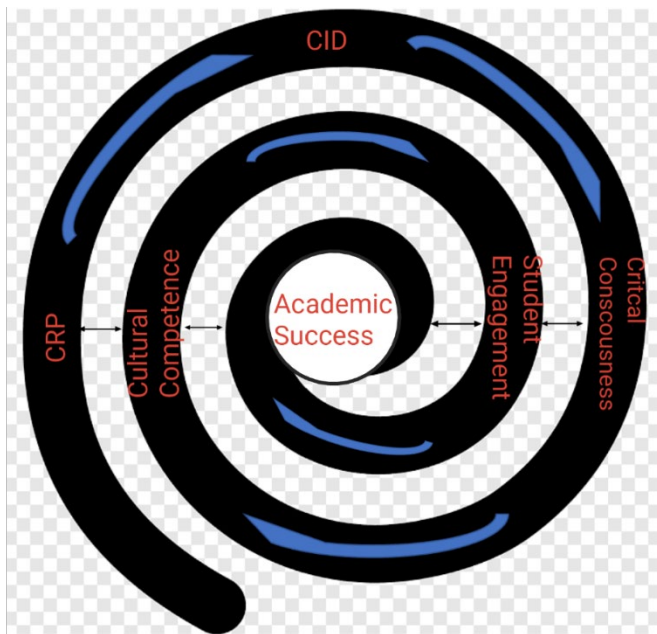
Figure 18 Visual of the elements of CRP and CID working simultaneously to obtain academic success for students. Visual created by the researcher (Knowles, 2024).

Cultural Identity Development in English Language Arts

Cultural identity development heavily influences student engagement and individual growth. CID is the exploration of one's own life through class activities. The chosen class activities allow students to create meaning and connections to their lives through validation, critical thinking, and empowerment (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Jones, 2018; Young, 2010). Some scholars describe CID as the missing piece to achieving student engagement and individual growth (Ellis & Rowe, 2020; Martin, 2014). The English Language Arts (ELA) classroom is one place to implement curriculum connections to obtain higher engagement and individual growth. The ELA curriculum provides educators with a platform to modify and add to class activities, lessons, and processes, which will allow students the chance for self-exploration through the lens of cultural identity (Bean et al., 1999; Brauer, 2018; Chapman et al., 2011; Packard, 2001; Sciurba, 2017; Stovall, 2006). Through discussions in class surrounding ELA content, students can begin to nourish their cultural identities through reading, writing, and speaking activities.

Fostering cultural identity development in the ELA classroom has many long-term benefits. One of those benefits is that students can contribute valuable knowledge and creativity to the classroom. Researchers have found one way this can be done by positioning students' native languages in class to elevate their voices and identities (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019). One example is having a dual Language Arts classroom, as seen in a study by Morales & Hartman (2019). In this example, portions of the class take place in one language (Spanish), and other portions of the class take place in another (English). This dual-language classroom allows students to see their language and culture as essential to learning (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019).

Another example is encouraging the use of other languages or dialects of language in the classroom through activities such as poetry assignments. For instance, poetry can expose students to the African American Language (often called Ebonics or African American Vernacular English) or Spanish (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019; Rickford, n.d.). A third example involves leveraging the communities of the students. In two separate studies, Irizarry speaks of the importance of drawing inspiration from the community of the students (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Irizarry & Raible, 2011). In the 2011 article, Irizarry and Raible, state "The funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) present in students' barrios, or neighborhoods…have the potential to positively inform teachers' work yet often remain untapped by schools" (p. 187). In the other study by Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007), one of the findings discusses the essential practice of honoring community resources. These examples show how teachers can encourage identity development by leveraging student culture. If teachers can position students to lift their voices in ways that feel most comfortable to them, they can create instances for students to engage with classmates and with themselves in their cultural identity development journeys (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019).

With this in mind, education should be responsive to all cultures- not just the default, dominant culture, and educators should make sure this is explicit in their classrooms (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019). Positioning languages and cultures as necessary in the classroom is integral to learning; creating circumstances for students to see their native language as being just as important as the English language allows them to explore connections between language and cultural identity. This exploration will help them feel more linked to the presented curriculum (Bomer, 2017; Gibson, 2022; Morales & Hartman, 2019).

As previously mentioned, researchers have found that identity development needs to be added to curriculum and instruction (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Cooper, 2014; Hockings, 2009; S. Ellis & Rowe, 2020). Some studies focused mainly on cultural identity development in the ELA curriculum. One example was discussed previously with the dual language arts classroom. Those students were Spanish-speaking or using African American Vernacular. They were allowed to use their preferred way of speaking in the learning process, which allowed them to connect language and identity (Morales & Hartman, 2019). Morales & Hartman's 2019 study shows how exploring cultural identity allows students to naturally increase their engagement and achievement in the classroom (Bomer, 2017; Martin, 2014; Morales & Hartman, 2019). This increase also speaks to the impact of inviting students' cultural identities into the classroom (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; V. Ellis, 2009; Irizarry, 2007; Jones, 2018).

Furthermore, V. Ellis (2009) conducted a study to determine ELA's contributions to helping students form a gender identity; the researcher had teacher participants write in self-directed journals. One teacher spoke about a student who testified to his English class experience. The student expressed how the provided text options and class discussions surrounding those texts allowed him to grapple with his intersecting identities (white, working class, athlete, and gay). Essentially, the student felt safe exploring their identities within the classroom. This example shows how the ELA classroom, specifically, provides an organic environment for the exploration of identity.

ELA classrooms have traditionally been spaces where students can have deep discussions about serious topics surrounding primary texts they read (i.e., novels, poems, plays, and more.). These discussions challenge the students' thinking (Brauer, 2018; V. Ellis, 2009). Thus, ELA classrooms allow for discussions surrounding student identities as they may relate to the text's

theme. If cultivated correctly, ELA classrooms can offer a safe and inviting environment for students to discuss, contributing to developing their cultural identities (Brauer, 2018; V. Ellis, 2009). When students can learn about themselves in the classroom and elevate their experiences as a part of the learning process, their engagement, academic achievement, and individual growth increase. While this occurs, they can continue learning at rigorous levels. Berry and Candis (2013) wrote about the power of storytelling and allowing students to tell their own stories to enhance engagement and identity development. In their study, they gathered memoirs from two teachers to learn about their personal and professional experiences with cultural identity. Through this process, the scholars discovered that understanding and exploring cultural identities within the curriculum was a beneficial way of connecting to the material.

The literature has described a vast need for schools to have identity development embedded in curricula because students, especially Students of Color, tend to be disengaged in traditional classrooms (Acosta, 2007; Cooper, 2014; Feinauer & Cutri, 2012; Tello et al., 2010). Some researchers found that the best way to engage students is to provide coursework that allows them to explore their identities (Acosta, 2007; Cooper, 2014; Jones, 2018). Connective instruction is a form of teaching where this can take place. This type of instruction occurs when teachers intentionally embed ways for students to make personal connections to lessons in class (Cooper, 2014; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Nakkula, 2003). Citing another scholar (Nakkula, 2003), Cooper (2014) states that students experience the highest engagement when there is a relationship between what they are learning and their lives. Cooper (2014) surveyed 1,132 students in grades 9-12 from a school in Texas to find out how classroom engagement and identity development are connected. The researcher found that students who can develop their

cultural identities and maintain a rigorous learning experience can engage with curricula at higher rates (Cooper, 2014).

The next portion of this review will delve into how to develop cultural identities. Cultural identity development occurs through the lens of the five stages of racial/cultural identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalization, and commitment (Floyd, 2010; Jones, 2018). Teachers can cultivate spaces for students to participate in meaningful cultural identity development when used in the classroom.

Five Stages of Racial/Cultural Identity Development

Exploring these stages and their meaning will provide a deeper understanding of how teachers can cultivate CID in their ELA classrooms (Cooper, 2014). Teachers may receive students at different stages of CID, so grasping the meaning of each stage can help teachers differentiate their instruction based on their students' stages. The goal of CID in the classroom is to get to the fourth or fifth stage by the end of the school year.

The first stage, **pre-encounter**, is when an individual embraces and buys into the dominant culture's beliefs (White/European) and the stereotypes negatively established in mainstream media about their culture. Pre-encounter is the beginning stage of developing a cultural identity where one has yet to find value in their culture. Next is the **encounter** stage, where acknowledgment of race and questioning of the negative stereotypes occurs. The individual finds themself beginning to interrogate the negative stereotypes about their own or other non-dominant cultures. The third stage is **immersion**. Immersion is when embracing one's own ethnic/cultural identity begins. Acknowledgment and acceptance of one's culture start in this stage. Fourth is **internalization**, where the individual embraces both the dominant and their own culture and can create a cultural identity that fits how they see themselves. In the final stage of

commitment, the individual can see themselves as a racial being who tackles issues people of marginalized communities may face. In this stage, people can use their experiences and knowledge from the other stages to inform how they tackle those issues. In this final stage, they brainstorm how to change oppressive systems (Floyd, 2010; Jones, 2018). Reaching the final stage is a focal point of one of the three tenets of CRP (critical consciousness). As the next section will further describe, critical consciousness involves students critiquing what they learned and being able to question and change inequitable systems. The commitment stage is where students can feel empowered to do this.

When adopted in the ELA classroom, these stages help Students of Color connect to classroom content because they actively invest in themselves and their school to achieve self-realization. Students are also able to form identities around their culture. Once they have reached the commitment stage, they will become assets to others in their communities (Floyd, 2010; Jones, 2018). **Engagement** is responding to activities in a class either through behavior, emotion, or cognition (Cooper, 2014; Connell, 1990). Thus, if students participate in these ways, that is a sign to teachers of engagement. The previous study examples show how Students of Color need this type of engagement in school to keep them invested in their education (Cooper, 2014; Connell, 1990). They displayed this need through results from interviews, observations, and surveys. That data allowed researchers to document the experiences that teachers and students have in situations surrounding the development of their cultural identity within the context of ELA classrooms.

Moreover, Martin's 2014 study is another example of student engagement through cultural identity development in the classroom. Martin surveyed 117 students at a public university in New York. The researcher then documented how a multicultural curriculum

positively impacted students' cultural identity. Martin concluded that participating in a multicultural curriculum positively impacts the development of their cultural identity. This study shows how culturally empowering spaces for Students of Color will allow them to have more profound engagement experiences in the classroom (Martin, 2014). The following section in this review will explain CRP and how this framework helps students cultivate CID.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

The foundational framework from which the study in this paper stems is culturally relevant pedagogy. As this paper continues, therein will be a discussion of CRP's important tenets, advantages, and contributions to the field of education. Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term CRP in the 1990s, but scholars discussed the concept before this coinage (Brown & Cooper, 2011). Earlier scholarship on the concept of CRP explained the following: 1. the difference between school and informal learning; 2. the importance of allowing students to explore who they are, how they see themselves, and how the world sees them; 3. and the benefit of acknowledging student cultures in the classroom (Au & Jordan, 1981; Brown & Cooper, 2011; Cazden & Legget, 1981; Irvine, 1990; Macias, 1987; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Moje, 2007).

Historically, Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) developed CRP to provide teachers with a way to support Black students. As it has developed and grown, scholars have recognized the benefit for all students, namely students of diverse backgrounds (Brown & Cooper, 2011; Capper, 2021; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014). There has also been further recognition of the importance of teachers being non-judgmental and understanding their students' backgrounds to create environments where students can learn effectively (Brown & Cooper, 2011; Irizarry, 2007; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014). Teachers everywhere use creative ideas to facilitate cultural acknowledgment and inclusion in their classrooms. Some examples include poetry and podcasts (Gibson, 2022; Kinloch, 2005). Capper (2021) found that culturally relevant classroom materials

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positively impact students. Capper's 2021 study used surveys, observations, and interviews to determine if culturally relevant novels and course material impacted student engagement at a suburban Midwest high school in the United States. The researcher found that students are generally more engaged when the course material connects to their everyday lives. A closer examination of CRP is necessary to see how vital culturally relevant material is to student engagement in the classroom. Thus, illustrating the three central tenets of CRP (academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness) is critical to understanding the importance of embedding cultural identity development through the lens of CRP in the ELA curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b).

CRP is teaching which centralizes the reality, history, and perspectives of students' cultures while simultaneously pushing them to achieve academic success, be culturally competent, and develop a critical consciousness (Bartolome, 1994; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). First, **academic success** demonstrates competence in literacy, mathematics, and technology. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b, 2014), students *should* achieve in these areas, but they are not. This tenet suggests that academic success is possible using CRP and teaching practice. Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) clarifies that students must succeed academically regardless of the utilized framework. The argument is that CRP generates academic success through cultural connection to curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Capper, 2021; Cook, 2019).

Being **culturally competent** is the second tenet of CRP. This tenet means communicating effectively with people of various cultures, even if the culture is not shared. (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). In Ervin's 2021 study, the problem they faced was how to help teachers balance meeting district standards with the standards of culturally sustaining pedagogy

(creating sustainability amongst the skills learned in CRP). The example the researcher provided was when they went from one school where there was freedom to modify the curriculum to another school that provided the curriculum and materials. The solution in this study was to use text pairings. Even though the school provides the main text, teachers can take the reins by pairing it with more inclusive texts, highlighting other voices and perspectives (Ervin, 2021). Furthermore, Belle (2016) exemplifies how teachers can highlight cultural competence in their practice. The researcher performed a self-study to examine the use and impact of Hip-Hop Literacy (HHL) in their ELA classroom at a New York high school where most students were Black and Hispanic. HHL is a form of teaching where hip-hop texts are the focus of lessons and activities. In contrast with Ervin's (2021) study, Belle (2016) sought not to *pair* canonical works with hip-hop works but to *add* hip-hop works to the list of worthy texts to learn from and critique. Belle (2016) found that many of the students connected their engagement within the classroom to the course material and had positive connections with race and cultural identity.

Implementing the five stages of cultural identity development is how cultural competence appears in the classroom. The five stages for the reader's review are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalization, and commitment. In the fourth internalization stage, students have reached an understanding of not only their culture but others. This understanding of other cultures is not a deep knowledge of other cultures but rather an understanding that other cultures exist and hold as much value as their culture. In the final commitment stage, students take the knowledge and awareness gained in class and begin interrogating and tackling the issues facing the cultures they encounter. This awareness is the type of cultural competence CRP promises to develop within students (Floyd, 2010; Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b).

The final tenet of CRP is **critical consciousness**. Those who are critically conscious are achieving academic success and critiquing what they learn (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014). Critically conscious students can interrogate, navigate, and work toward changing oppressive, inequitable systems and processes. They can challenge course content or materials and ask critical questions to ensure learning occurs (Chapman et al., 2011; Dover, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2007). The tenet of critical consciousness requires valuing "the cultural sensibilities and interest of students" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 66). These tenets together allow CRP to help students be more engaged in the classroom and achieve academic success, thus allowing them to develop their cultural identities.

Scholars Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) looked at the third tenet of critical consciousness to understand what it means. Their work with critical consciousness has given the literature a more in-depth analysis of CRP and other frameworks that address CID. Developing critical consciousness is directly linked to **critical pedagogy**, a method of teaching rooted in marginalized peoples' experiences and promotes student empowerment. This pedagogy seeks to empower students to feel a sense of agency over traditional literature and texts. It gives them the authority to criticize the literature and create structures around social change in their communities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Teachers who properly facilitate critical pedagogy can empower their students to critique canonical writers such as John Steinbeck, Sylvia Plath, or Langston Hughes. As a part of critical pedagogy, Cook (2019) points out that teaching classic texts should be partnered with teaching parallel texts of more modern yet similar themes to capture student cultures. Through expanding research and studies on critical consciousness, researchers have shown positive impacts on student learning when students' culture and community are integral to the classroom (Capper, 2021; Cook, 2019; Duncan-

Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In a study by Herrera et al. (2012), the researchers discuss the use of biography-driven instruction, which allows students to talk about their experiences and allows teachers to tailor their lessons to students' cultural backgrounds. Biography-driven instruction (BDI) can be a beneficial CID tool for a student's academic success. Practices like BDI allow teachers to learn about students' "cultural and linguistic" needs within the classroom context (Herrera et al., 2012, p. 4). More recently, the term culturally sustaining pedagogy emerged to determine how the results gleaned from this framework can become more permanent.

Expansions on CRP

Ladson-Billings' 1995 framework later became revamped to add a layer, believing it was necessary to continue evolving a theory of practice as time passed. Thus, **culturally sustaining pedagogy** (CSP) was born (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). This framework stemmed from two places: first, the need to keep adding and growing in educational research, and second, as an attempt to redefine and "remix" the original pedagogy to ensure proper use (Ladson-Billings, 2014; p. 77). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is the act of creating just that–sustainability. Not only to instill the three tenets within students but to guide them in continuing to practice them in their lives and beyond the school walls (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014). As the third tenet seeks to teach students to be critical of the world around them, CSP hopes to give students the skills to be critical beyond the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014).

CSP is also about maintaining and preserving the truth and continuing to grow in one's research. It ensures that educators using this pedagogy can maintain the practice and push students to maintain it outside the classroom in ways that feel authentic to them and their communities. However essential and necessary strategies, Paris and Alim (2014) explain that

culturally relevant pedagogy is about much more than including a book by an African-American author in curricula or hanging up photos of various cultures and races on the walls (using these strategies requires a consistent acknowledgment and use of them with the students, as my study will show in coming chapters). Educators must challenge students and allow them to develop a sense of cultural relevance beyond the classroom, so they must maintain high student expectations (Berchini, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris and Alim, 2014).

Also worthy of note is the culturally responsive teaching framework (Gay, 2002) that stems from Ladson-Billings's (1995) work. Gay (2002) sought how teacher practices can incorporate cultural relevancy to benefit students' development. Gay (2018) states that "teaching is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students, are included in its implementation" (p. 28). Similarly, Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995) highlight the importance of including student experiences in the classroom. This inclusion makes learning a more positive and meaningful experience for students.

Teacher Expectations Matter in CRP

How can ELA teachers achieve cultural relevance and critical thinking in their classrooms? As Ladson-Billings (1995b) contends, all students need to succeed academically regardless of the methods used or social inequities. However, not all students are achieving at the same level. The research on CRP acknowledges that African American students are academically falling behind their White counterparts (Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Additionally, current literature (Howard, 2021) shows how the pandemic, which brought about significant changes for all schools and students worldwide, did not change how many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) students experience the education system. Howard

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(2020) mentions that The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) continues to show academic gaps between White American students and their Black counterparts. For instance, NAEP shows that in 2019, 42% of White students were at or above grade level in reading versus only 15% of Black students. So, what can teachers do?

Much of the literature speaks on expectations and strategies that teachers must have in a successful, culturally relevant classroom. For starters, all students must have high expectations, regardless of background (Howard, 2021; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Samuels, 2018). Johnson and Gonzalez (2014) performed a study that examined one teacher and two of her English classrooms. The middle school this teacher taught served primarily Black students, and the researchers gathered their data using recorded observations and interviews. In this study, they identified the importance of teachers recognizing "the need to include [their] students' cultural experiences and understandings into [their] daily instruction and classroom management" (p. 19). The teacher in this study also focused on relevant learning, high expectations, and teacher accountability (Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014, p.20). These academic expectations provide students with a rigorous learning environment that pushes their thinking and builds on their experiences. Students can only critique high-profile authors or interrogate oppressive systems if taught these skills. Scaffolding these academic skills for students is necessary for helping students meet the expectations of a CRP classroom environment.

Additionally, Samuels (2018) conducted a study highlighting the experiences and perspectives of 200 teachers. Through focus groups done for four months, these teachers shared their experiences with implementing CRP. These teachers taught in low socioeconomic K12 schools in the Southeast region of the United States. The researchers sought to document how teachers experience the effects of CRP implementation on their teaching. Johnson & Gonzalez

(2014) quoted the teacher in their study, stating: "Culturally relevant work is hard work" (p. 23). The teachers in Samuels's (2018) study stated that CRP benefits relationship building, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and inclusiveness and influences more diverse world views. However, they also stated how incredibly time-consuming CRP implementation was and how it required access to resources that may or may not be readily available (p. 24). Thus, teachers seeking to implement CRP must be "committed to cultural competence, establish high expectations, and position themselves as both facilitators and learners" (Samuels, 2019, p. 23). Samuels (2019) also identified the following expectations teachers should hold: leveraging student voice and opportunities for dialogue, encouraging respectful talk, embracing differentiated instruction, and tailoring learning to student interests.

Moreover, these case study examples show the importance of including students' cultures and interests in the classroom curriculum. Johnson & Gonzalez (2014) state that making learning "real" for students allows them to connect to the classroom environment and school community in a positive way (p. 20). Including student culture and interests empowers them to tap into their voice and add to the collective learning of the class community (Gibson, 2022; Irizarry, 2007; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Kinloch, 2005; Samuels, 2018). Implementing these expectations (for students and teachers) increases the effectiveness of a culturally relevant classroom (Irizarry, 2007; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Kinloch, 2005). Using the expectations listed will create space for reciprocal learning: students learn from the teacher, the teacher learns from students, and students learn from each other.

While the framework itself may seem like a simple implementation of a few strategies here and there, scholars such as Johnson & Gonzalez (2014) and Samuels (2018) have highlighted the challenges that can arise even with the best intentions and plans. CRP is about a

proper integration and shift in teaching style; thus, the adage, *practice makes improvement,* is prominent here. The researchers (Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Samuels, 2018) also point out obstacles teachers encounter. These obstacles include classroom behavior, existing biases, a narrow understanding of cultures, handling conflict between students, addressing white privilege, and discomfort/unfamiliarity with specific topics (Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Samuels, 2018). Teachers can encounter the previously listed challenges even without CRP implementation. Considering these studies' expectations is an excellent first step to improving practice. Additionally, the framework of CRP provides teachers with a tool to address these challenges.

Culturally relevant pedagogy can help implement CID and increase student engagement. Valuing student voice and culture in classrooms is essential to both processes (Acosta, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Irizarry, 2007; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014; Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Morales & Hartman, 2019). Researchers suggest that teachers must incorporate some sense of CRP to organically cultivate ELA classrooms where students can develop their cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014).

Student-Teacher Ethnic Matching

During the analysis of this study, it became evident that same-race/own-race teacher-student pairing was a necessary topic to discuss in this literature review. The various amounts of literature on this topic refer to the idea in different ways, for instance, ethnic matching, own-race pairing, same-race pairing, and cultural synchronicity matching, to name a few. This paper will use the term ethnic matching (Easton-Brooks, 2021). Much of the literature on this topic began by citing a study done by Dee (2004), which aimed to seek out the impact of African American teachers on African American students' performance in school; overall, they found a positive influence. Many other scholars have since gone on to support this phenomenon, namely citing the gaps between Black and Latinx students and White students' academic achievement as the

core issue. Wright, Gottfried, Le (2017), and Redding (2019) conducted studies where they discovered that disruptive student behaviors decreased in Black and Latinx students when the teacher shared their race or ethnicity. More specifically, White teachers were rating students lower on social-emotional learning (SEL) scales more often than Black and Latinx teachers. Other studies show the positive impact on SEL, as well as academic achievement when ethnic matching occurs in schools (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Easton-Brooks, 2021; Egalite et al., 2015; Oates, 2003; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Overall, the literature shows a resounding consensus on the benefits of ethnic matching in education and how this practice positively influences students who match the ethnicity of their teachers, whether socially, emotionally, or academically.

Why CRP for This Study?

The literature in this review highlights the benefits of implementing cultural identity development in curricula and, specifically, how the ELA classroom can be a platform for this practice. After reviewing the literature, a few concepts have become clear. First, cultural identity development in ELA has the potential for long-term benefits (Bomer, 2017; Morales & Hartman, 2019; Paris, 2012). One benefit is that it allows students to continuously add valuable knowledge and creativity to the classroom. This benefit increases academic success and motivation because students connect to the course content through CID (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Cooper, 2014). Secondly, educators using teaching methods such as connective instruction, BDI, or HHL will see high student engagement and academic success. Engagement will increase because inviting students' cultures into the classroom and allowing them to feel connected is another long-term benefit of cultural identity development. Through this connectedness, students can learn about themselves while still being exposed to rigorous content and practicing critical thinking skills (Cooper, 2014). Third, advocates of CRP propose that through purposeful centralization of

student cultures in the classroom, students will achieve academic success, become culturally competent, and be critically conscious. Teachers will benefit from adding this pedagogy to their practice if they hope to successfully implement cultural identity development for their students.

CRP is a way for teachers to learn about their students while providing them the space to learn about themselves and their communities. Through CRP, teachers become more aware of their students' interests and the challenges they face. Students can also learn about what interests them while engaging with rigid material. The research highlighted in this study shows how tapping into student interests and backgrounds can help increase student engagement, but it also has shown that teaching with a CRP lens can allow students to grow into active social change agents (Capper, 2021; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Martin, 2014).

There are, of course, intersections of CRP seen throughout broader literature. These intersectional frameworks built upon Ladson-Billings' (1995) work to create more depth and methods to ensure students' experiences are at the forefront in classrooms. Other similar frameworks include but are not limited to culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002, 2018), critical race theory (Zamudio et al., 2011), cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2018), transformative leadership (Shields, 2010), and abolitionist pedagogy (Love, 2019). Though these frameworks are also important in their own right, the study in this paper will focus on CRP to deepen and strengthen the connection between CRP and CID. Thus, it seeks to determine the characteristics of a productive CRP ELA classroom. I aim to support and add to the existing research on CRP's impact on increasing student engagement and overall academic success. As previously mentioned, properly cultivating CRP ELA classrooms will help mold students into social change agents. Being social change agents means they will develop in all areas within the CRP framework (academic success,

cultural competence, and critical consciousness). Additionally, they will become members of

society who will have the capacity to make an impact on positive social change and develop their

own cultural identities in the process.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Review of the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

This study highlights the importance of CRP in ELA classrooms to increase the overall school engagement for Students of Color and allow them to partake in CID. The literature shows how beneficial CRP can be when utilized appropriately (Au & Jordan, 1981; Brown& Cooper, 2011; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Irvine, 1990; Macias, 1987; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). The focus of this study was to find out the characteristics of a CRP ELA classroom, specifically at the high school level. How do these classrooms look, sound, and feel? What are ELA teachers doing daily to implement this framework for their students? Thus, the research questions, again, are as follows:

1. **What are the multiple characteristics of a culturally relevant English Language Arts classroom?**
   a. How does the classroom environment reflect CRP?
   b. How do the teacher's curriculum and instruction reflect CRP?

2. **How do culturally relevant classrooms foster student engagement and cultural identity development (CID)?**
   a. How do students respond to classroom activities and assignments?
   b. How do students perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their CID?

Question number one helped shine a light on the strategies and practices teachers are using to apply CRP throughout their classrooms. I learned what this type of classroom environment looks like and how one teacher includes other pedagogical practices, such as embracing students' linguistic backgrounds and integrating the concerns of marginalized groups in the curriculum to create social change agents. Question number two tackled documenting CID

among adolescents and sought to examine how the use of CRP interacts with students' engagement in class. My goal was to explore the impact of CRP's elements on students' experience in school and ELA classrooms. My research questions aim to elevate both teacher and student voices. Like Capper (2021), I have often struggled to keep my students engaged as an English teacher, especially when the material does not directly relate to their experiences. Thus, these research questions allowed me to understand what course materials and strategies help students stay engaged.

Research Design

I conducted a descriptive case study in which I examined one ELA classroom to add valuable strategies to the already vast amount of literature on CRP and CID, thus making the connection between these two frameworks stronger and more evident. Conducting a descriptive, qualitative case study allowed me to perform an in-depth investigation on the ground level of this classroom. This in-depth investigation provided me with a toolbox of strategies to offer teachers seeking to be more culturally relevant in their classrooms. Scholars such as Capper (2021) and Berry & Candis (2013) also performed qualitative studies, simultaneously allowing in-depth analysis of a few classrooms/teachers. Berry and Candis (2013) used autobiographies to help shape their study. While this was not an aspect of my study, I allowed students to speak about their experiences, which added to the value and validity of the data.

This study took a qualitative look at one high school ELA classroom (tenth grade) implementing elements of CRP and seeking continuous improvement. In observing this teacher, I looked for specific strategies and tools she used to help bring her students' experiences to the forefront of each lesson. I observed the teacher and her class twice a week for three months. This time in the classroom allowed me to see the beginning and end of one entire unit. Additionally, I interviewed the teacher at the study's beginning, middle, and end. I hosted three student focus

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group meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of the study as well. The focus group included four students from the class. These students were also individually interviewed about their experiences in the classroom to gather any further information they did not mention in the focus group meetings. The individual student interviews occurred at the beginning and end of the study.

Observations occurred during the teacher's first-period class, while my interviews with her occurred during the second period when she had planning time. The student interviews and focus groups occurred during class time, with teacher approval and collaborative planning to ensure the students received all the integral instruction. I conducted all interviews and focus group meetings during school time except one. One student was absent during my final focus group meeting; therefore, I emailed him the questions so he could still contribute his thoughts. My study incorporated observations and interviews to explore the participants' classroom experiences. In an article written by Coffey and Wu (2016), the researchers cited Stake (1995) and Yin (2003). Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) assert that "case study research enables participants to craft their own stories, while also providing the researcher the opportunity to interpret data through various critical lenses" (p. 26). I triangulated the data using observations, interviews, and focus groups.

Recruitment

When I began recruitment, I contacted various teachers, districts, and school leaders via email and social media to gather interest (Appendix A). This recruitment method required self-identification as a CRP educator. After the self-identification, an initial meet and greet occurred to gather more information about the teacher, their course design, the demographics of their classrooms, and to learn more about their teaching style/philosophy. This initial meet and greet

helped me determine their qualifications for the study. Two tools helped determine the teacher's qualification to participate in the study: CRP Self-Assessment and Reflections Conversation worksheet from Due East Equity Collaborative (dueeast.org) and teacher recruitment questions found in Ladson-Billings novel *Dreamkeepers* (2009) (Appendix B). Sample questions and statements from each document include the following:

I regularly look at student demographic achievement outcomes and discipline referral data to detect inequitable patterns in my classroom.
I research or design teaching and classroom management strategies that reduce inequitable disparities I notice in achievement and discipline patterns in my classroom.

Figure 19 CRP Self-Assessment and Reflections Conversation worksheet (dueeast.org).

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?
2. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe "works?"

Figure 20 Teacher recruitment questions found in Ladson-Billings novel *Dreamkeepers* (2009)

I heard from two potential teacher participants after various emails and posts on message boards. Once I had a meet and greet with both teachers, I determined Ms. Adame was the best fit due to her curriculum and schedule. She allowed me to observe her and one period of her ELA class twice weekly for three months. I observed her class for three months because it was enough time to gather various information. At the end of the study, I thanked Ms. Adame for her time with a gift card. The time and frequency of observations allowed me to maintain a reasonable scope of the study and I balanced it with my work schedule. My selection process occurred this way because I needed to know who was willing to participate to plan for the study. Thus, the study's success depended on finding a suitable match.

Data Collection

The process through which I collected data for the study was through observations, individual interviews, focus group meetings, and material document collection. Ms. Adame was interviewed three times during the study. Due to the school schedule, my first interview with the teacher was after my first observation, which was impactful because I could deepen our conversation based on practices and procedures I already saw. Afterward, I interviewed her halfway through the process after more observations occurred, then the final interview occurred at the end of the observation period. The purpose of the first interview (Appendix C) was to gather information from Ms. Adame about who she is (cultural background and education), how she teaches, how she sets up her classroom, and her goals for CID with her students. The goal was to obtain a mental image of the teacher's overall objective, the unit, information about her students, what she currently does to implement CRP, her vision for the class, and what she hoped students would learn and gain. The initial interview, which took place during the first month of the study was held in the teacher's classroom during the second period.

The second interview occurred during the second month of the study (Appendix C). This interview addressed connections between the first interview and the observations. Additionally, the second interview allowed Ms. Adame to speak on changes she felt she may or may not have made based on student personalities, engagement, and growth. I also asked what was working and what was not regarding her strategies. As for the final interview, the questions addressed major takeaways: what the teacher felt students learned (about their communities, about themselves), what lessons she learned about implementing CRP or her teacher persona, and what changes she will make in the future (Appendix C). Some of my questions stemmed from the CRP Self-Assessment worksheet. Overall, the interviews allowed the teacher to explain her

decisions and provide reasoning and theory behind her lesson choices. I also had the opportunity

to ask follow-up questions focused on the observations. The interview questions came from

various sources: Dreamkeepers (Ladson-Billings, 2009), the CRP Self-Assessment worksheet,

and the study done by Johnson and Gonzalez (2014). This scope of sources allowed me to

address as many necessary topics as possible during each interview.

Observations were held between nine and ten thirty in the morning, depending on the

type of bell schedule day. The school had regular days and minimum days. Minimum days were

half days that occurred approximately twice a month throughout the course of the school year

and always fell on a Wednesday. The image below shows a visual of this (Figure 4).

Figure 21 Bell schedule for Southern California High.

I conducted ten observations during my time in Ms. Adame's classroom. I used an

observation tool to identify CRP characteristics in the classroom. Figure 5 below shows a sample

of the observation tool; the full version is in Appendix D. This tool was helpful as a checklist to

increase the act of observing and decrease my notetaking during class time. The

notetaking/observation tool combined the CRP self-assessment criteria (Appendix A), the

Culturally Responsive Teaching Walk Through Observation Guide (Appendix A), and Howard's

(2020) 7 Culturally Responsive Strategies for Teachers (Appendix A). Appendix D will show

that the end of this observation tool has a space where I could record memos at the end of each

observation. This space allowed me to gather my thoughts and lasting impressions immediately

after observing.

	What do I see?	What do I hear?	What conversations are happening?
Activation of students' prior knowledge ☐			
Making learning contextual ☐			

Figure 22 Sample observation tool used in my study.

During my time in the classroom, I also facilitated student focus group meetings three

times (Appendix E). There was an initial focus group meeting where I asked students to talk

about their experience in previous ELA classrooms, their experience in their current ELA

classroom, and their connections (if any) to the ELA curriculum and their lives. The second

focus group meeting occurred during the second month of the study (halfway through the

process). It existed as a means for students to talk about their experiences with certain activities

their teacher tried or course material and discussions. Finally, the last focus group meeting

allowed students to discuss what they learned about their community and themselves and the

impact on their engagement.

The focus groups allowed me to gather student voices and insight into how the different

elements of the CRP classroom may or may not have impacted their learning and CID. Krueger

(2014) states how focus groups encourage "self-disclosure" among participants who want to share their thoughts on a common topic (p. 4). In this book, Krueger (2014) explains the importance of focus groups, when to use them, how to prepare and implement them, and much more. He states that the purpose of a focus group is "to understand better how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service" (p. 2). The focus groups in this study held four students and lasted about twenty minutes during class time. The teacher and I collaborated on the best dates to pull students from class for the focus groups. Figuring out the best dates for focus group meetings required planning ahead and possibly adjusting my case study timeline to fit the teacher and student needs during the school day.

Additionally, I thanked the students for their time with the offer of gift cards. Since the focus group interviews occurred during the school day, I provided snacks for the students. In order to identify the students in the focus group, I allowed students to volunteer their time. Having student volunteers promoted creating the most organic environment possible with the group. Once the students volunteered, I gave each of them a sheet of paper and asked them to provide their name, school email, favorite snack, favorite store, hobby, or television show. I used the snack question to identify which foods to bring to the focus group meetings and the favorite store/hobby/television show question to generate conversation with the students to help me get to know them.

I also conducted two individual interviews with each student. The purpose of the individual student interviews was to allow the students to share any insights they may not have gotten the chance to or felt comfortable sharing in the group setting. (Appendix F). Focus groups and individual student interviews occurred during class after collaborating with Ms. Adame on

the best time. Focus group meetings and interviews were audio recorded to maximize listening during these discussions.

After my observations and interviews, I took part in member checking by sending transcripts to the teacher and students so they could verify what I was seeing and hearing. Member checking helped validate my data and ensure I understood the situations I observed. Additionally, the process of multiple interviews allowed the teacher and students to tell their stories and experiences from their perspectives. Providing this type of outlet for my participants is similar to a study by Berry and Candis (2013), where the scholars discussed the importance of storytelling and honoring others' experiences.

Population and Sample

The school where I conducted my case study, Southern California High (SCH), is a small charter school. The chosen pseudonym (SCH) protects the identity of the students and staff. SCH serves an approximate student population of 310 from grades nine to twelve. The enrollment demographics of SCH include: 99% of the student population qualify for free and reduced lunch, 98.1% are Hispanic, 1.3% are Black, 0.3% are American Indian, and 0.3% are White (WEBSITE DATA). For context, students who receive free and reduced lunch come from households with an income below a certain threshold. FeedAmerica.Org states it is when the income is "below 103 percent of the poverty level." SCH was my chosen site for this study due to its high population of Students of Color, primarily of Hispanic and Latinx backgrounds, and the staff's willingness "to create a culturally rich, responsive approach to learning" (Principal of SCH).

Participants

Students selected for this study were from a high school English classroom at SCH. Staff at SCH had been working to include culturally relevant teaching into their practice for two years before I conducted my study. At the time of the study, Ms. Adame had been teaching for six

years. She identifies as a woman of color (Mexican Indigenous and Lebanese) who is a member of the LGBT community. Ms. Adame stated that she identified more with the Mexican and Indigenous side of her identity and is currently trying to learn about her tribe. She also identified herself as a writer with three sisters and two brothers, all half-siblings, and she considers herself the oldest. She grew up in a small town and experienced culture shock when she moved to the city where she teaches. I chose this teacher because her curriculum map displayed units where the students learned about other cultures and themselves (through social-emotional learning skills). She also discussed a unit where the students perform a book study. In this book study, the students chose from five culturally relevant novels (i.e., The Hate U Give or Dear Martin) and discussed common themes among the novels. Additionally, her overall approach to teaching seeks to create an open environment in her class. Her goal was to make her students feel comfortable asking questions and learning about their culture, especially if they did not feel as comfortable being inquisitive on such topics at home.

The students in the SCH classroom reflect the school's demographics, as all the students are of Hispanic or Latinx backgrounds. I asked four students from Ms. Adame's first period to volunteer their time for that quarter. Students volunteered to allow for organic discussion during focus group meetings. The students who volunteered were all in the tenth grade; three identified as male, and one identified as female. The male students were taking the course for honors credit. I measured their level of engagement through questions via individual interviews and focus group meetings, as well as observing them during class time; this allowed me to determine the effectiveness of CRP. For instance, did they feel comfortable participating in class discussions, were the activities in their class helping them in their lives or other classes, and did

they feel empowered to change their community after this class? The student data helped me to answer these questions.

Data Analysis

Researchers such as Cooper (2014) and Irizarry (2007) have utilized coding in their studies to draw out themes in interview transcripts and field notes. Coding is the method I used to analyze my data. I heavily used the steps provided by Annette Lareau (2021) in *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up.* In this guide, Lareau (2021) provides a thorough guide to conducting a successful qualitative study from beginning to end. In the data analysis chapter, Lareau (2021) touches on pre-analyzing while collecting data (often done through memos) and using the data to refine your focus. Then, once data is fully collected, the researcher ensures that it aligns with the research question(s). Essentially, the researcher wants to ensure that the data collected can answer the research question(s).

As the researcher of this study, I took field memos after every observation, allowing me to begin articulating patterns and pre-codes I noticed. Once I had my entire data set, I transferred everything to MaxQDA, a qualitative coding software that organized all my data. I combed through the data to help answer my research questions. This process allowed me to align the data with the focus of the study. Examining the data multiple times allowed me to see patterns and develop codes. I analyzed the interviews, focus group transcripts, and observations for patterns. While reading and relistening, I focused on common phrases and ideas that the participants mentioned. The artifacts were analyzed as examples. I wanted to see which could support the patterns and trends I found in the data.

It is also worth noting that during the data collection process, I audio-recorded interviews and focus group meetings, used Rev.Com to transcribe them, reviewed them for accuracy, and

then sent them to the participants for member checking. Additionally, I took notes by hand for each observation, so in the end, I transferred those notes to Google Docs before uploading them to MaxQDA. Once themes emerged, I used Google Sheets to organize them under the research questions, then placed each one as a subtheme under one of the CRP tenets. For example, one of the themes I identified was meaningful assignments. This theme best answered research question one and was best placed as a subtheme under academic success due to the impact on the students' academic growth. This process was repeated for the student data using the five stages of CID. A deeper analysis of these subthemes will follow in the next two chapters. Lastly, I determined the most significant findings and synthesized them into a case description for the class. The case description helped me outline the most prevalent strategies and tools. As the results will show, I analyzed CRP from the teacher's perspective and CID from the student's perspective. Though unsuccessful, a final attempt to obtain data was performed through a follow-up email asking the student participants about the impact of the final unit (Let's Talk About Race). I sought to know how the activities empowered and inspired them. Chapters four and five will further detail on the teacher's use of CRP and the students' experiences with CID.

Validity

Validity is essential in research studies; thus, I employed several strategies detailed by Maxwell (2012) to help validate the data. Maxwell (2012) expresses how validity is "generally acknowledged [as] a key *issue* in research design, and I think it's important that it be explicitly addressed" (p. 121). Being explicit about threats to validity can assist in making the study more robust. First, I considered validity through "intensive, long-term involvement" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 126). In order to gather as much data and information as possible, I chose to be in Ms.

Adame's classroom for three months. My time in the classroom allowed me to experience a substantial amount of the curriculum in the teacher's classroom. I saw a unit from start to finish, as well as the end of one unit, and the beginning of another. Another validation strategy is "respondent validation" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 126). Respondent validation is when the researcher receives participant feedback to ensure accurate interpretation. In other words, I member-checked my interview notes to ensure I accurately recorded what I heard. A final strategy from Maxwell (2012) is collecting rich data. Rich data is gathered through long-term involvement and conducting interviews. Performing both acts increased the amount of "rich data" I collected, allowing me to make more rich and meaningful connections between what happened and the research questions. Those strategies permitted me to conduct a research study that provided valid and reliable data.

Positionality

My study centered around using CRP in high school ELA classrooms and considering how that impacts their overall engagement, academic success, and cultural identity development. My goal was to create a toolbox of strategies teachers can use when seeking to implement CRP. When conducting this type of research, researchers must consider their subjectivity. Alan Peshkin (1988) wrote about subjectivity in research by explaining how they sought it out in their study. Peshkin (1988) stated, "I would actively seek out my subjectivity. I did not want to happen upon it accidentally as I was writing up the data. I wanted to be aware of it in the process, mindful of its enabling and disabling potential…" (p. 18). Addressing my subjectivity (or positionality) was crucial for ensuring I was aware of my biases in the study.

My positionality comes from my experience as an English teacher and a student, as well as my cultural background as a Black woman. I have worked in education for almost ten years

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and taught ELA for almost seven. During this time, I have seen how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn regarding their lives and cultural identity. Additionally, as a student, my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or college, were those when I could connect what I was learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. Those connections were vital for me as a Black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth and capability in predominantly White environments. Taking part in opportunities at a young age to consider my place in my community helped shape who I am today and what I do as a teacher. This thinking and molding can and should happen in the ELA classroom for students, especially Students of Color. In my own experience, People of Color encounter few opportunities where they see their culture represented. To embed this type of representation in the ELA curriculum and allow students to continue learning about themselves in the process of becoming social change agents is a goal in my career.

The next two chapters will present an in-depth analysis of the data collected and paint a picture of what it was like to be in Ms. Adame's classroom, both as a teacher and as a student.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHER RESULTS

This study took place during the 2022-2023 school year and aimed to determine how teachers can foster Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Cultural Identity Development (CID) in their English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. In review, CRP was developed by Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) to provide teachers with a way to support Black students, but it has since evolved and grown as a way to benefit all students, namely Students of Color (Brown & Cooper, 2011; Capper, 2021; Johnson & Gonzalez, 2014). CID is the exploration of one's own life through class activities. The chosen class activities allow students to create meaningful connections to their lives through validation, critical thinking, and empowerment (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Jones, 2018; Young, 2010). The research questions in this study explore both the teacher and student perspectives when implementing both frameworks in the classroom. Research question one focuses on the teacher's perspective and asks: *What are the multiple characteristics of a culturally relevant English Language Arts classroom?* Culturally Relevant Pedagogy has three central tenets: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. **Academic success** is the demonstration of competence in areas such as literacy, mathematics, and technology. **Cultural competence** is the effective communication between people of various cultures, even if the culture is not shared. Cultural competence exists in the classroom when the curriculum exposes students to literature and ideals from multiple cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Lastly, **critical consciousness** occurs when students are academically successful and critiquing what they learn (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014). Critically conscious students can interrogate, navigate, and work toward changing oppressive, inequitable systems and processes. They can challenge

course content or materials and ask critical questions to ensure learning occurs (Chapman et al., 2011; Dover, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2007).

Research question one helped me determine what the teacher implementing aspects of CRP does to foster this pedagogy among her students—table 1 displays which themes fall under each CRP tenet. What follows will be the evidence drawn from the data to show each tenet and theme in action. I came upon this decision because I noticed in my data that one impacts the other: the teacher's use of CRP affects the student's CID.

Table 2 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Teacher Practices

Academic Success	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
High Expectations	Connection to Students' Lives	Cultural Representation
Classroom Environment: Physical Environment and Pedagogy	Making Learning Contextual/Incorporating Popular Culture	Identity/Identity Development
Meaningful Assignments		
Accessible and fun		

Meet Ms. Adame

The teacher in my study, Ms. Adame, will be the focus of this chapter. She is a woman of average height. When I first saw her, I noticed her business casual dress filled with bright, welcoming colors. She has a soft, inviting voice that makes her students feel comfortable around her, and she always greets those around her with a smile. Her kind demeanor contributed hugely to the outcomes I will discuss here in this chapter.

Academic Success

Academic success refers to demonstrating competence in literacy, mathematics, and technology. This tenet suggests that academic success is possible using CRP in teaching practices because it generates academic success through cultural connection to curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Capper, 2021; Cook, 2019).

High Expectations

In this study, I discovered that high expectations are vital to CRP ELA classrooms. I noticed that Ms. Adame's high expectations of her students meant she believed all her students could be successful in her class. As this theme emerged in the data, it became evident that Ms. Adame sought opportunities to challenge her students' thinking whenever possible. For example, in the first teacher interview, I asked: How do you maintain high expectations for your students? Ms. Adame's response included the following:

> Pushing the kids to go beyond what we could get them to, a simple response. And so, I started doing challenge parts on my assignments where I tell honors [students] they have to do it, but I try to get the other kids to do it anyway. If they turn in the assignment and they don't do the challenge parts, I don't take points off, but I'll be like, oh, you should do this part and unsubmit it, so they have to try it at least (teacher interview #1).

In this quote, Ms. Adame explains how she includes "challenge parts" in assignments to get her students to think more deeply about assignments. These challenge parts are similar to extra credit. One important note about this class period is that it integrated with General and Honors English students. For the few students earning Honors English credit, Ms. Adame would require them to complete the challenge parts. However, since the class mixed General English and Honors English, she also encouraged the other students to complete them. Students completed most of their coursework via Google Classroom, so un-submitting an assignment was a matter of clicking a button so the student could try the assignment again and attempt the challenging part.

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Ms. Adame also believed that "having [the] kids talk to one another" also allowed her to maintain high expectations because they could collaborate and "help them [hear] other ideas" (teacher interview #1). With the integration of General and Honors English students, Ms. Adame often mixed and matched the groups she made for some assignments so the students could hear from one another rather than always only hearing one dominant point of view. Hearing from their peers, who may have different perspectives, was another way for Ms. Adame to challenge her students' thinking and maintain high expectations.

The Classroom Environment: Physical Environment and Pedagogy

I sought to use research question 1A (How does the classroom environment reflect CRP?) to focus on the physical and social-emotional environment and how both elements develop a CRP classroom. Ms. Adame was intentional with what she had around her room to display different identities that her students might hold. Thus, academic success under the guise of research question 1A led me to pinpoint the physical environment as an emerging subtheme. The teacher's intentionality in setting up her classroom became evident during data collection. This intentionality led me to carefully analyze the environment and inquire how she set up her room. Next will be examples of how her physical environment was suited for academic success.

At first glance, Ms. Adame's classroom has three long rows of desks, with every two desks being a pair. This classroom setup allowed for student collaboration (Obs. #3). When asked about her thought process, she added that it was also a way to make sure students stayed focused in her class: "...right now they are in rows…three long rows and facing the front to…help them as much as possible to pay attention because if they can see their friends or they can see someone that they are mad at…that's going to be on their mind the whole time. Their whole day is going to be focused on that" (teacher interview #1). This evidence exemplifies her

intentionality in setting her students up for success. She considers any outside distractions her students might come into the room with and determines how she can counter those distractions with the physical environment.

After the arrangement of the desks, once you have walked further into her classroom, it becomes apparent how much she values different identities, languages, and mindsets. Around her classroom, you will see Spanish posters that translate standard English terms, and an LGBT solidarity flag (see Figure 6). These items, though seemingly subtle, show that she can be a supportive figure for her students who are emerging bilinguals and for those who are a part of the LGBT community as well (Obs. #1). Other posters around the room include self-care and mental health tips. As you will also see in Figure 6, these posters gave students information on coping with anxiety and helpful techniques when feeling anxious. One poster even listed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. I appreciated that right next to this poster was a water dispenser, indicating that students are more than welcome if they need to fulfill a biological neede. You can see the cups for the water dispenser in the figure below.

Figure 23 Classroom environment samples.

In one of my observations, Valentine's Day had just passed, and I noticed Ms. Adame had some decorations for the holiday up in her room. When asked about her classroom setup, she

said, "A lot of the kids will hang out at lunch and… I'll keep buying things that they can hang up and decorate with. They really like to decorate for holidays and stuff" (teacher interview #1). I appreciated her intentionality in allowing the students to contribute to the physical environment to allow them to feel comfortable in a room they took part in arranging and decorating.

The way she continued to make her students feel safe in her room and like they were part of a community set her up for success in her final unit of the school year, "Let's Talk About Race." In my tenth and final observation, I noticed how she cultivated a safe and brave space to prepare her students to engage in a unit about race, which can warrant tough conversations. In her instructions, she mentioned the "Brave Space Journal" (see Figure 7) and its usage to the students. Recognizing that some students may feel uncomfortable or concerned when asking specific questions out of fear of appearing racist, she encouraged them to be curious in their journals, setting the precedent that the classroom would be an open space for discussion and learning for everyone about race. In all, the intentionality of Ms. Adame's classroom environment grants her students the ability to be academically successful because she puts resources in place for them.
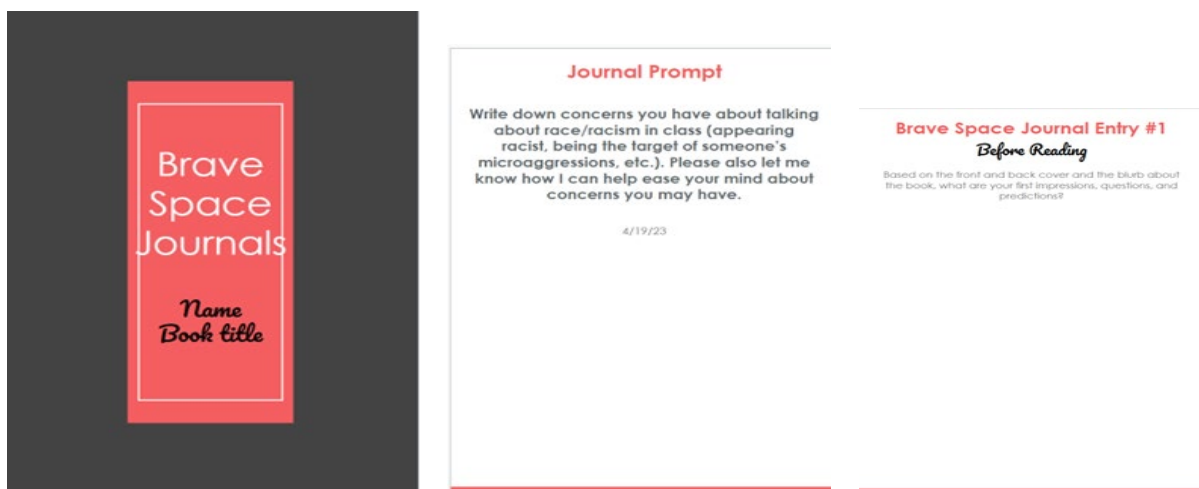
Figure 24 Brave space journal sample.

Curriculum & Instruction: Meaningful Assignments

Research question 1B (*How do the teacher's curriculum and instruction reflect CRP?*) focuses on the teacher's use of curriculum and instruction in her CRP classroom. I explored her thought processes in planning lessons and instructional practices. We saw how intentional Ms. Adame was with her classroom environment; now, let us look at her lesson planning and instruction. While observing this classroom and speaking with the teacher and some students, I quickly realized the importance and significance of the teacher's assignments. Some of Ms. Adame's assignments called for a long-lasting impact, which became apparent after speaking with her during interviews. Thus, meaningful assignments emerged as another subtheme in my data analysis. One of the most significant assignments I observed occurred during observations nine and ten. The class was preparing for a book study with novels dealing with race and other marginalized groups. Students could choose from the following selection of novels: *The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives* by Dashka Slater*, Dear Martin* by Nic Stone*, All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds, and *The Hate U Give* and *On the Come Up* both by Angie Thomas (Obs. #10). To prepare the students for reading their chosen novel, she had them complete a pre-reading gallery walk activity centered around critical race theory (CRT). Once in groups, each got assigned a different article. Each group read and analyzed their article, then completed a "Here's What/So What/Now What" chart to break down the most essential pieces of the article. Figures 8 and 9 show a sample article and the "Here's What/So What/Now What" chart setup.

Rally held in Milwaukee to protest of Republican legislation banning critical race theory in schools
Grace McDermott Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Published 4:00 pm CT June 12, 2021

Figure 25 Sample of an article used during the CRT gallery walk activity.

Here's What / So What / Now What

Directions: Read the text you've been given. Then, fill out the poster according to each section of the Here's What, So What, Now What guidelines. Note: Each person in the group should have their own color and write *only* in that color.

Here's What	So What	Now What
You will need a quote from the text that stands out the most. "_____" (_____). Remember, direct quotes go on the left (in quotation marks) and the author's last name goes on the right (in the parenthesis). If there is not an author, you move on to the publisher or on to the title of the article. You will also need a picture in this section.	Summarize the text. What is going on and what is some background to all of it?	Analysis / meaning making: What does this all mean? How does it apply to real life? Consequences / motivations: What are some consequences of the topic? What motivations might people have to engage with the topic, either favorably or not?

Figure 26 Screenshot of the 'Here's What/So What/Now What' chart the students used during the CRT Gallery Walk.

Once each poster was complete, each student completed a worksheet asking questions about all the articles. Each student then did a gallery walk around the room to learn about and take notes on the articles they did not read. Article topics included racial color blindness, microaggressions, and protests surrounding educational policy changes (i.e.-critical race theory being taught or banned in schools). Students defined the terms and events and determined their significance (Observation #9 memo). Figure 10 below shows a sample of the worksheet.

| Name: _____ | Date: _____ | Class period: ___ |

CRT Gallery Walk
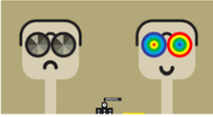
Racial Colorblindness

Before Gallery Walk
What do you think "racial colorblindness" means?

Gallery Walk
What did you learn about "racial color blindness"?

Questions

Figure 27 Sample of the CRT Gallery Walk Activity Worksheet.

In my memo for this observation, I stated, "This activity was so simple, yet so powerful because it provided the students with knowledge about events happening in the country that impact their lives directly. It leaves them with the space to form their own opinions." Ms. Adame, in her final interview, stated, "A lot of the kids aren't going out of their way to see what's going on in the rest of the country except for maybe a small handful. And they're our future [so] I want them to understand these topics so that when they vote, they're more informed on them." An activity of this caliber has the potential to have long-lasting effects on the students because of the relatability of the topics in each article. Some students may have experienced the phenomena or concepts addressed in the articles, and that activity provided them with the vocabulary to describe those experiences moving forward. The importance of this activity also set them up to understand the themes in the novels they would be reading. Figure 11 will show some images from the gallery walk activity and the notes students took as they read the articles.
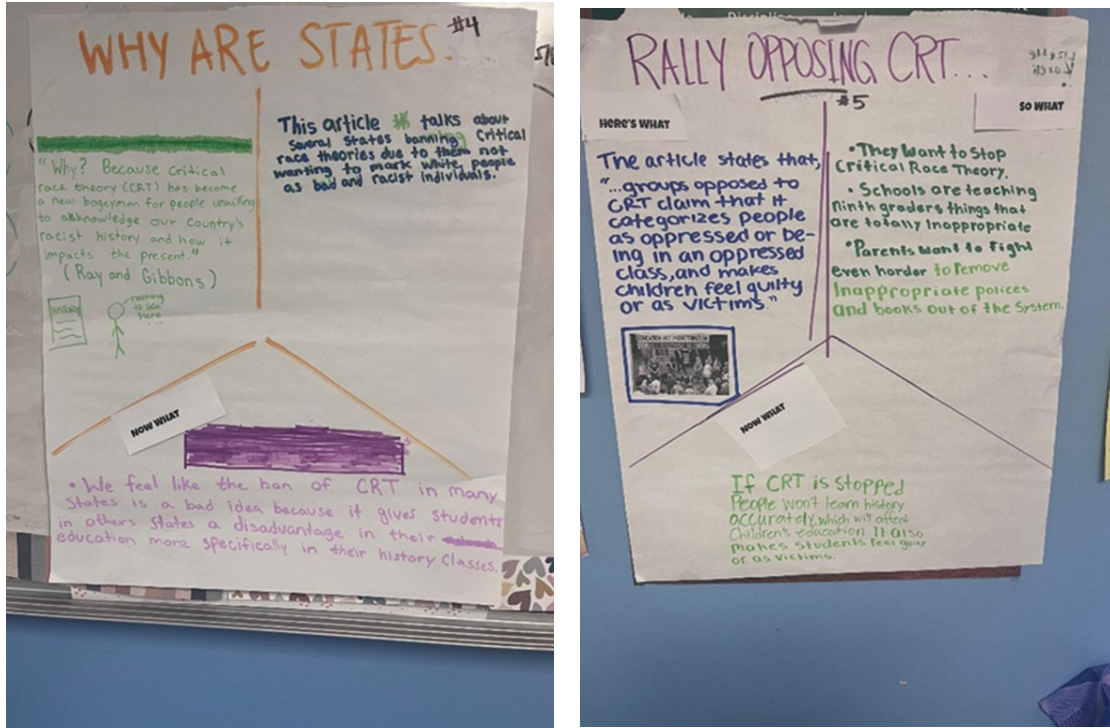
Figure 28 Sample student posters from the CRT Gallery Walk Activity.

Curriculum and Instruction: Accessible and Fun

During my observations, I also noticed two recurring themes in Ms. Adame's instruction: accessibility and fun! When I say accessibility, in this case, I refer to the Merriam-Webster definition: capable of being understood or appreciated. After more observations, it became apparent that these two factors often coincide in Ms. Adame's classroom; thus, I kept them together as one subtheme. When activities or assignments in her classroom were often fun, they were also accessible, and vice versa. Through lesson observations and interviews, it became evident how important it was for her students to access the content and have fun.

Accessibility and fun are subthemes underneath academic success because making activities accessible and fun was the teacher's way of ensuring her students were successful in her classroom. One immediate example of her combining accessibility with fun was using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a graphic novel instead of the traditional prose version (teacher

interview #1). When I began my study in her classroom, Ms. Adame was ending a unit on cause

and effect and starting one that would center around *Hamlet.* In our first interview, as she

provided background information about the unit, she emphasized how the graphic novel version

"helps a lot of the kids…**especially our English as second language kids**, to see what's

happening visually. The graphic novel is more accessible to the students' different reading

levels." Hearing her say this made sense because in this same interview, I asked Ms. Adame

about her teaching philosophy, and she had this to say:

> **I want learning to be fun!** I know it can't always be like you're having a blast the
> whole time. There are things that have to be more rote…But I want it to be
> accessible. I want it to be fun. I want it to be things that matter…not saying that
> classic literature isn't important, but it's also not representative of everyone. So, I
> like to make units that connect to the students, but also things they haven't
> experienced yet, or other groups. [For example,] some of the kids are really
> accepting of LGBT kids, and some of them are really not. And that's cultural. A
> lot of the families, if they're traditional, tend not to be very accepting. And so,
> making this space unapologetically accepting of people who may not be accepted
> otherwise…[is] really important to me.

This response told me how important it is that Ms. Adame's students feel accepted in her

classroom while also experiencing new ways of living and being while they learn ELA content in

fun ways.

After a few observations, I realized how much she embodies accessibility, fun, and

connection. In our second interview, we got to talk about some of my observations about her

teaching practices and reflect on what she does and why. We specifically spoke about how she

kept her students engaged while reading *Hamlet.* Knowing that a piece of her philosophy was to

connect content to her students and make things fun and accessible, I asked how she felt the

Hamlet unit was upholding that standard, and she stated, **"I think they have a lot of fun.** I make

them all read at some point, which is kind of easier to do when it's a play because then you can

assign them a character, and [it is] a little bit more accessible, I think, being able to see what the

character looks like…So it's a little bit easier for them…which makes them able to enjoy it more" (teacher interview #2). Figure 12 shows a sample of the *Hamlet* graphic novel that the class read.

Figure 29 Hamlet graphic novel used in Ms. Adame's classroom.

Next, I will explore Ms. Adame's use of cultural competence within herself and in her classroom and discuss how this impacted her practice.

Cultural Competence

Throughout the study, Ms. Adame helped foster cultural competence through connection to students' lives. This subtheme was one of the most prominent in that it brought forth abundant evidence. Ms. Adame made connections in almost every lesson she taught. Ms. Adame's connections manifested in her classroom environment, intentional class activities, and probing questions. For example, in one lesson, Ms. Adame brought to light the severe topics of love (specifically unrequited love) and suicide/death. She brought forth the seriousness of these themes to help them understand the topic of the play *Hamlet*. She addressed these major themes

to invite the students into the world of Hamlet and a trigger warning for those who may have trauma surrounding those issues. This practice was culturally competent because Ms. Adame showed her awareness of and sensitivity to her students' lived experiences. The students were engaged in this short lecture by the way they responded to her statements. One student even asked, "What is wrong with Hamlet?" when they discussed some of his actions in the play. As the class continued to read, I could tell they were grasping the story because of some of their genuine reactions to certain characters and events (Obs. #5 memo). Thus, through my observations, I discovered that Ms. Adame was culturally competent by incorporating popular culture, contextualizing learning for the students, and connecting to their lives.

Connections to Students' Lives

When observing Ms. Adame, she constantly pushed her students to think beyond the initial answers they would give on assignments or during class discussions. For example, in observation four, I noted, "The clarifying questions the teacher asks help the students make personal connections to the characters and story overall." Additionally, she often asked students: "How would you feel if…what would you do if…" (Observation #6). These clarifying and probing questions allow students to think on a deeper level. During the Hamlet unit, Ms. Adame also gave the students character charts to gather information about each character. The charts helped the students keep track of each character and their motives and desires. In one of my memos, I noted: "The information gathered for each character also allows the students to make connections between themselves, other people in their lives, and the characters in the play. The charts allow the students to make modern connections to an old piece of literature [and] make Hamlet relatable to today" (Memo from Observation #3).

Previously discussed was the unit in the final months of the school year, where Ms. Adame took the students through a unit focused on race. In one of the lessons I observed, she had the students read articles describing critical race theory as a concept, critical race theory protests, microaggressions, racial color blindness, and other similar topics. In this observation (observation #10), I noticed she had the students using what she called a "Brave Space journal." She later explained that the Brave Space journal allowed the students to be curious and ask her questions without fear of judgment from their peers. She still wanted everyone to feel safe enough to explore their thoughts and feelings surrounding the sensitivity and controversial nature of the topic (see Figure 3 for a sample of a few pages in the Brave Space journal).

Ms. Adame also connected to students' lives through the decorations and posters around the classroom. As previously seen, she had a pride flag hanging in the back and bilingual resource posters with English and Spanish on them. She also had an extensive library with books that represented a variety of backgrounds (see Figure 13). I felt incredibly empowered by this as an observer because she intentionally ensured that her classroom represented her students' identities and other identities. A previous quote from Ms. Adame expressed how she even lets her students decorate the room for holidays. Putting up posters that matched her students' identities and allowing them to decorate the room with her was one way she made them feel connected.
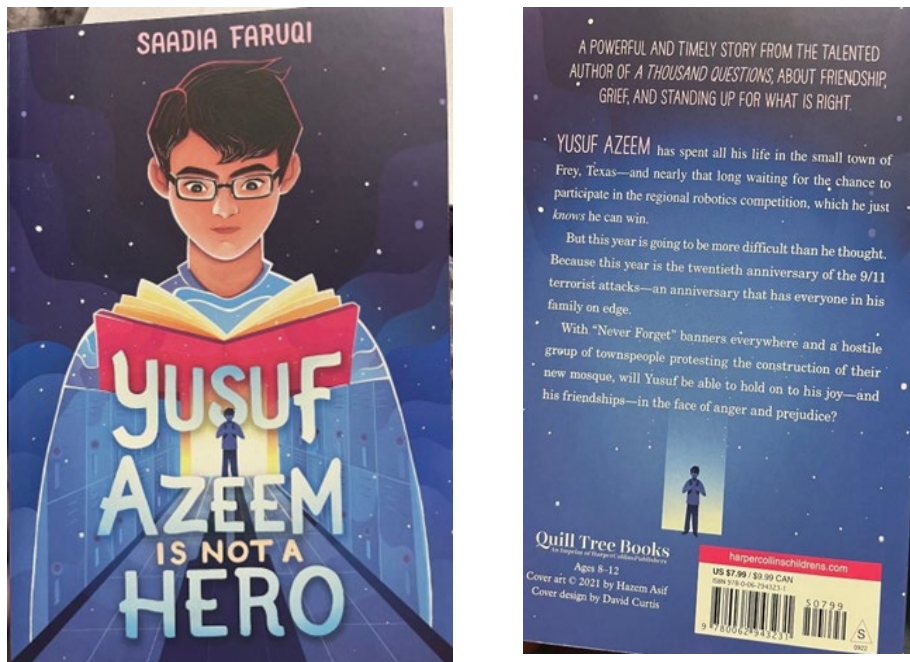
Figure 30 Sample novel from Ms. Adame's classroom library.

During my interviews with Ms. Adame, I heard more about her thought process behind her lesson planning. She stated, "I always try to make them think about what they would do in the situation of a character and to put themselves in their shoes" (teacher interview #2). In interview one, she also mentioned that "... a lot of my assignments ask them to tell me what they think about things and reflect on how it connects to them and how it might connect to other people." When asked about the importance of cultural identity development in the ELA curriculum, Ms. Adame expressed how "...talking about issues that represent you as a person are some of the most important things because it helps you to practice what you would do in that situation [in real life]" (teacher interview #1). In our interviews, I could also feel Ms. Adame being reflective in her teaching, mentioning the journals and how "I would probably [have the students] do more journaling about [the story of Hamlet] and connections to their lives." (teacher interview #3). Hearing this from her showed me how intentional she is in her teaching. None of

her questions, activities, or posters were an accident; everything was in place for the benefit of the students.

Making Learning Contextual/Incorporating Popular Culture

Cultural competence practiced in the classroom can manifest as the teacher exposing students to different forms of literature and ideals through the content. We previously discussed how Ms. Adame connected to students' lives as a form of cultural competence. Another way she attempted to practice cultural competence was by incorporating popular culture references and contextualizing learning. Making learning contextual involves facilitating lessons so students can connect to their current context/environments to deepen understanding. In other words, she was helping them understand how one concept might apply in a different context, even if they seem unrelated. Using popular culture references is one way to build those connections. Ms. Adame mentioned a few times how she wanted to ensure her students could access the content, and contextualizing the material was one way she accomplished that. In my first observation, she used events from Disney movies to explain cause and effect (see Figure 14). When I asked her to elaborate on that lesson in our first interview, she said, "I don't want to make them feel like they're not smart. Sometimes, I'll use children's books or Disney stuff where they likely have seen at least one of the [examples] so that they can start off with something they know, and they can feel successful at [that] before we start moving into more difficult texts…" This way of bridging what students already know and what they need to learn proved effective for her teaching. As the figure below will show, her mini-lesson took events from popular Disney movies (*Frozen*) and placed them in cause and effect statements to allow the students to understand how cause and effect worked in literature. In the image, we see an example where one of the causes is that the King and Queen of Arendale died; thus the event's effect was that

Elsa had to become the new Queen. Using something the student would most likely be familiar with allowed Ms. Adame to help her students apply that knowledge to other assignments.

Figure 31 Cause and Effect Activity

Another example of how Ms. Adame made learning contextual for her students and incorporated popular culture is seen again in the *Hamlet* unit. The graphic novel format effectively kept the students engaged in the play, but she also chose to create an "Investigative Character Case File Chart" (see Figure 15) for each central character. The files gave the impression that the students had a case to solve and needed to gather as much information on the characters as possible. Students had to gather "pieces of evidence" on the characters in each chart, which helped keep story events organized. Ms. Adame stated how she tried "to [include] a picture of each character from the graphic novel so [the students could] refer back to that and then their birth and their hometown [as well]." After finding those details, she had them "start doing direct characterization of hair and eye color and then moving to friends and enemies to being able to identify relationships" (teacher interview #2). Using the "character case files" was relevant to popular culture because it tapped into the students' interests by allowing them to feel like detectives. The charts also made the learning contextual for students because they could connect the experience of investigating the characters to the story's context and thus keep track of events and characters while reading. The examples thus far show us how Ms. Adame

effectively contextualizes learning for her students. By doing so, she is making it memorable for them as well.

Figure 32 Sample Character Chart from Hamlet Character Case Files

There were also aspects of the "Let's Talk About Race" gallery walk activity where Ms. Adame made learning contextual. As mentioned, some articles in that activity were about current protests and policy changes surrounding critical race theory, while others were about terms like racial colorblindness and microaggressions (obs. #9). Simply having the students read the articles was not enough. Through the "Here's What/So What/Now What" charts, Ms. Adame had the students think about why these topics matter and how they will impact students like them, thus giving them context as to the importance of being informed on such issues. This subtheme shows how Ms. Adame provided her students with strategies to improve their cultural competence. By exposing them to different texts with various topics and connections to popular culture and facilitating them through contextualizing the events in those texts to their own lives, she was simultaneously helping them build their cultural competence.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness stems from the theory of critical pedagogy, which involves being able to work toward changing oppressive, inequitable systems and processes. I noticed that Ms. Adame utilized critical pedagogy in the lessons she provided to her students. The teacher

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intentionally was critically conscious while providing opportunities for students to interrogate and question society through exposure to various cultures and examination of current policies. Critical pedagogy integrates the experiences of marginalized communities into curricula and promotes student empowerment (Chapman et al., 2011; Dover, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2007). Thus, cultural representation emerged as another vital characteristic for CRP ELA classrooms to promote critical consciousness and the first subtheme under critical consciousness.

Cultural Representation

Having cultural representation in one's classroom goes beyond the pictures on the wall, and Ms. Adame embodied this by incorporating inclusive lessons into her curriculum. In her first interview with me, she describes a moment in her schooling that led her to believe and see why cultural representation is an essential part of any classroom and why she strives to make it a part of hers:

> My AP lit teacher did have us read *The House of the Spirits;* I think it was by Isabel Allende. So, I started to see [a reflection of my culture]. [My teacher was] white, and so she really made a big effort to learn more about our culture and implement…things that had to do with our identity and our background into our classroom (teacher interview #1).

This anecdote is one example of a moment that impacted Ms. Adame's teaching practice. She strives for critically conscious change in her practice by making her classroom and curriculum culturally representative of the students she teaches. Their identities, but also others, help expand their wealth of knowledge. Around her classroom, there are Spanish posters that translate standard English terms and an LGBT flag (Obs. #1). Ms. Adame shared instances when she did not feel seen by her teachers as a student:

there was a lot of American literature [and that] isn't always a complete picture. In fact, I feel like it's often not…these are a bunch of white dudes… We're missing out on all these other women and other minorities that are creating [literature]…So unless I specifically went out of my way to take a class that was aware of other backgrounds, the majority of it was mostly white (teacher interview #1).

I share this anecdote because it shows why Ms. Adame wanted to ensure that her students had a different experience than she did. Her way of being critically conscious was to have as much cultural representation in her future classroom and make her "space unapologetically accepting of people who may not be accepted otherwise… that's really important to me" (teacher interview #1).

Ms. Adame also included cultural representation within her lessons. The essential question of her final unit of the school year focused on finding commonality and uniqueness and thinking about how culture shapes people's worldviews (curriculum map artifact). Ms. Adame applied this frame of thinking through the race book study in the "Let's Talk About Race" lessons. Remember that I previously mentioned how, in this unit, the students could choose from five novels that deal with race and culture relations. It is worth noting that all of these novels have shown up on lists of banned books in the United States over the last decade, further showing Ms. Adame's dedication to being critically conscious herself and helping her students develop their consciousness as well (Martin, 2022; Jimenez Garcia & Pagan, 2021). She allowed her students to choose to read one of these books by giving them a voice to decide on their own if those topics should be discussed; or have conversations about why they thought the books were even on those lists. Ms. Adame used these book options for this unit and maintained a culturally representative library with various choices for the students to choose from for independent reading. Before students began reading their chosen novel for the final unit, Ms. Adame had them participate in an activity to build schema. In this activity (previously mentioned

CRT gallery walk activity), students read articles about current protests, policy changes, and terms like racial colorblindness, microaggressions, and critical race theory (Obs. #9). In her final interview, she stated the importance of teaching these concepts to her students: "They are our future, and I want them to understand these topics so that when they vote, they are more informed on them" (teacher interview #3).

Identity/Identity Development

In this next section, I dive into identity development regarding critical consciousness in Ms. Adame's classroom. One important aspect to point out is how she identifies herself. Knowing her background and being able to verbalize her identifiers helps her better understand her place in her students' lives and how she wants to support them and operate her classroom. In our first interview, she identified herself as "a woman of color. I am part of the LGBT community, I'm a writer…I have three sisters and two brothers. None of them are full siblings, but I count myself as the oldest…I came from a small town, so when I came here, it was a big culture shock. And a lot of the people I knew, the demographics are very homogenous of where I came from. It's predominantly some sort of Latino background, like myself, my mom's Mexican Indigenous, then my dad… he's Lebanese and English…" Rooting herself in her identity allowed her to facilitate activities that helped her students root themselves. Ms. Adame uses her identity and experience as a student to create alternative experiences for her students to learn and grow. Her final unit of the year ("Let's Talk About Race") began with front-loading on critical race theory (CRT), racial colorblindness, microaggressions, and protests/rallies in support of or against CRT. She spoke on the importance of this in our final interview: "Talking about critical race theory…is important, especially since our current climate right now in the United States and a lot of other states that are banning talking about racism and health phobia and all of that stuff, it

feels so backwards. We're really just going to this intense dystopia, and I want [my students] to know [and] be outside of the bubble of this school." I could sense her urgency in ensuring her students were well-informed on the goings-on of United States events, especially events that may impact them and their peers. We will continue to see how Ms. Adame combines critical consciousness with identity development in other areas of this paper.

Ms. Adame created opportunities in her classroom for students to explore and develop their identities, and based on her curriculum map, I could see how this identity development intensified over the school year. For instance, one of the essential questions for the first unit was: "How do we form and shape our identities?" One of the critical questions for the final unit of the year was: "How do cultures shape our perspective of the world and ourselves?" I placed identity/identity development as a subtheme of critical consciousness because, in my observations and interviews, it became clear that Ms. Adame used identity aspects and identity development to get the students thinking critically about current events and their place in the world. Looking at her curriculum map, I noticed the progression of each unit. The beginning of the year focused on self-reflection and realization, while the end concentrated on how we relate that self-realization to how we view the world. For example, one of the earlier assignments had students in groups researching a holiday from another part of the world. One of the questions Ms. Adame had the students respond to in this assignment was: "To what extent do belief systems shape and reflect culture and society?" One student replied: "I believe that to a certain extent, belief systems shape culture and society by religion and how they shape their culture around them. Many beliefs can influence an entire community" (Holiday Project, Student Sample C). With this question, the teacher was getting her students to contemplate how cultures and identities can impact entire groups of people.

Critical consciousness is another area in which addressing Ms. Adame's "Let's Talk About Race" unit becomes relevant. She had students develop their identities while thinking about their impact on the world through her brave space journals during that unit (Obs. #10). These journals (see Figure 10) first take students through an introduction to race: how race can be perceived, how others may experience and deal with it, and how race may or may not influence their lives. Then, they write productive and meaningful journal entries while they read their chosen novel. She even explains to the students what it means to exist in a brave space to prepare them for unit engagement fully. I saw the Brave Space journal as a way for students to reflect not only on their own identities but also on the characters' identities in their books. They could even use the journals to contemplate how they want to use their identity and voice in the world.

It is also important to note the critical race theory activity here again. One important aspect of critical consciousness is being able to critique oppressive, inequitable systems. Once they knew the terms and more about the protests and rallies [microaggressions, CRT, protests both again and in favor of CRT in schools], they reflected on what was next. After reflecting on the articles, students used the 'Now What' section on the gallery walk chart to consider how they might be motivated by the information they learned. This part of the activity allowed them to consider what they might want to do now that they know these issues. In our first interview, Ms. Adame hinted at her final unit; seeing her original thoughts come to life felt like a full-circle moment. In that first interview, I asked her about the importance of identity development in schools, and she stated, "Talking about issues that represent you as a person are some of the most important things because it helps you to practice what you would do in that situation. The books we will read in the next unit are The Hate U Give and books like that where kids are in really

stressful, high-stakes situations. And a lot of my stuff will ask them, "What would you do in this situation?" (teacher interview #1). Seeing this thought process come to life three months later was reassuring as the observer and researcher. I would add to her statement that in addition to discussing issues that represent you as a person, it is essential to talk about issues that impact your livelihood, which she did masterfully in this unit. Asking her students how they feel motivated after learning about CRT and rallying to abolish it in schools is evidence of her getting them to consider how they would react in similar situations. They are reflecting on how they would react if they knew their identities could not be discussed. These reflection moments are critical because, as Ms. Adame stated, these children are our future; they will vote and make laws someday. Getting them to consider hypothetical situations in the safety of their high school classroom before experiencing them in real life is highly invaluable.

Relationship Building & the CRP Tenets

As I continued to analyze my data, I struggled to place the subtheme 'relationship building.' This subtheme was one of my most prominent themes, yet it felt like it simultaneously belonged everywhere and nowhere. Thus far, my data is organized with the CRP tenets as the central theme buckets and the subthemes being the recurrences I noticed through my observations and interviews. So, where did relationship building belong? Did it contribute to students' academic success; was it helpful in promoting cultural competence, or was it necessary for developing critical consciousness? After further thought and reflection, it became clear that relationship-building belonged everywhere. Overall, through my data collection, a deep-rooted use of relationship building threaded itself through each tenet of CRP. Ripping relationship building away from any of the tenets felt disingenuous to the data and the story of Ms. Adame and her classroom. Through my observations and interviews, I saw how much the teacher valued relationships with her students and the impact relationships had on the students and their learning

and development. I traced the success of almost anything Ms. Adame did in her classroom back to the relationships she built with her students over the school year. With relationship building, the students were more engaged and academically successful. Lack of relationship building would also make it difficult for Ms. Adame to facilitate lessons that developed students' cultural competence and critical consciousness (lessons of this nature often required students to step into some form of discomfort [or "brave space"] to grow and learn). While observing her classroom, I could see evidence of relationship-building throughout.

One of the first things I noticed was how she greeted her students when they entered the room. She would always say hello and good morning with a smile. If she knew about something a student had done or was going through, she would ask them about it (i.e., how was the soccer game, how was the debate club, how are your parents doing?). Once, I even heard her say happy birthday to a student. Following this, when the period began, her lessons started with icebreakers in the form of journaling. Journaling took place within the first five minutes of class, and the prompts were in place to get students to either think about course content, release any stress they might be feeling, or get something off their minds that they wanted to tell their teacher. Ms. Adame always had prompts for the student to choose from, but also left journaling open for students to write anything they wanted. The journaling served the purpose of getting them ready to focus on the lesson. She even allowed them to write down if they wanted her to look at their entries and respond. She would also use this as a point of connection with her students. For example, if a student spoke on an issue they were having, the next time she saw that student, she would ask them how that situation was going as a way to check in and let them know they have her to talk about it with if they need that support. In the daily prompts, she will ask them about their lives, how they are doing, and their goals, if they have any. Then, she will ask a fun

question they can also answer. Figure 16 below shows some examples. As you will see with example prompt four, some questions relate to the current unit.

Journal Prompts
The top is always about how they're doing, what's going on in their lives, if they have goals and any progress related to them, etc.

1. You're stranded in the middle of the forest. You only have a tarp, a blanket, and an arrowhead. How do you survive? How do you get attention from planes flying overhead?
2. You can only eat 3 foods for the rest of your life. What are they? Why?
3. You're Hamlet. What do you do?
4. You're Horatio. How do you deal with Hamlet?

Figure 33 Sample journal prompt questions.

Moreover, when it came to other assignments or activities, I even found that she would check in with students if she knew that content might be triggering for them. For instance, the father of one of her students at the time passed away the year before. As many of us may already know, *Hamlet* is a Shakespearean play about a boy whose namesake is the play's title. The play follows him grieving his father's death and getting revenge when he realizes that his uncle is responsible. Due to the nature of the story, Ms. Adame mentioned how she would continue to check in with that student and assure her that it was okay to take a break if anything triggered her. Considering the "Let's Talk About Race" unit as well, I mentioned in my memo following the observation that "this type of unit is perfectly timed on her part because it takes a tremendous amount of relationship building to get a class comfortable enough to engage in a unit of this depth and at their age." The conversations and content she intended to have the students engage in required deep thinking and enough trust in her and the class community she built. Students had to feel safe enough to have tough conversations; that feeling of safety comes from relationship building.

While observing and listening to Ms. Adame, I noticed she cared about her students' lives and well-being outside school. She often asked what students did over the weekend, shared her own stories, and checked in with students when she noticed they were not their usual selves ("How are you today? You seem stressed?") [Observation #1]. Another aspect of Ms. Adame's relationship-building came through in her classroom environment. I have already pointed out the representation displayed in her classroom setup (pride flag, posters in English and Spanish, and mental health tips). In our first interview, she stated, "I think [the decorations and posters] allow them to feel like this is their classroom. This isn't just my room; it's also a space for them." Stating that the room was also her students' captivated me because I admired her trust and care toward her students. Allowing them to decorate is a great way to help them feel connected to her and the class community, thus building relationships with her and one another.

Through further analysis of the observations, I also discovered how Ms. Adame exhibits trust in her students. During one activity in observation seven, I heard her tell the class that she "trusts this class" and that they could make their groups for the activity without her guidance. This gesture occurred halfway through the spring semester, so her relationship building was successful through this simple act of trust. Additionally, when asked what impact she felt her relationship building had on the students' overall engagement in class, she stated, "I do like to talk to them and joke around with them and stuff; I feel like that does help with the engagement. Even if they don't feel like doing work, they'll at least listen for the most part, which is good" (teacher interview #3). The relationships I saw her building and nourishing during my time in her classroom got me wondering how she managed discipline concerns when they arose. She mentioned that she would talk to the students first to get to the bottom of the issue. She prefers to deal with behavior concerns in-house before escalating to sending students out. In fact, at the

time of this study, she stated that in her six years of teaching, she had only ever sent one student out of the room for extreme discipline concerns. I found this extremely impressive and another testament to her intentional relationship building.

In this chapter, we saw Ms. Adame's point of view and her thought process behind her classroom, curriculum, and lessons. Her intentionality with every detail seemed to have a positive impact on the students. We have heard from the teacher; thus, the next chapter will analyze the student responses and reactions to Ms. Adame's teaching practices and allow us to see if her efforts were effective.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENT RESULTS

While Ms. Adame uses elements of CRP in her practices, the second half of the study seeks to determine how those practices influence the students' cultural identity development (CID) and overall engagement in school. The second research question in the study focuses on the student perspective and asks: *How do culturally relevant classrooms foster student engagement and cultural identity development?* I will answer this question through the student data gathered in this chapter. Figure 17 displays the major subthemes which proved to be strong examples of the CID stages and examples of engagement. As stated in chapter two, CID heavily influences student engagement and individual growth; it is exploring one's own life through class activities. The chosen class activities allow students to create meaningful connections to their lives through validation, critical thinking, and empowerment (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Jones, 2018; Young, 2010).
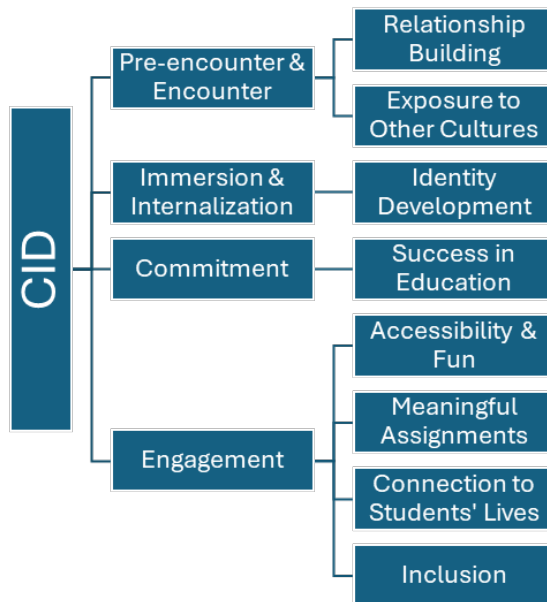
Figure 34 Outcomes of Cultural Identity Development and Student Engagement

Floyd (2010) and Jones (2018) discuss how cultural identity development occurs through the lens of the five stages of racial/cultural identity development: pre-encounter, encounter,

immersion, internalization, and commitment. **Pre-encounter** involves embracing and buying into the dominant culture's beliefs (White/European) and the stereotypes negatively established in mainstream media about non-dominant cultures. The **encounter** stage is where acknowledgment of race and questioning of the negative stereotypes occur. In the third stage, **immersion**, individuals embrace their cultural identity. Fourth is **internalization**, where the individual embraces both the dominant culture and their culture and can create a cultural identity that fits how they see themselves. In the final stage of **commitment**, the individual can see themselves as racial beings who tackle issues people of marginalized communities may face. The final commitment stage is similar to the third tenet of CRP (critical consciousness). Both commitment and critical consciousness aim to help individuals use their knowledge of self and society to create positive change. All of these stages were present in Ms. Adame's curriculum, which the next few sections will further discuss.

Pre-Encounter and Encounter

At the beginning of the year, the essential questions for the first unit are: *Who are we, and why is that important? How do we form and shape our identities?* (artifact: teacher's curriculum map). The first few months of the school year encapsulated the pre-encounter and encounter stages because the students began the year questioning who they were and who others said they were while also learning about other cultures, forcing them to question negative stereotypes. The focus at the forefront of the school year was "awareness and evolution of identity," which is one way to achieve pre-encounter and encounter.

Relationship Building

In the previous chapter, the data analysis concluded that relationship building threads through all the CRP tenets. Research question two wonders how CRP classrooms foster CID within students. The pre-encounter stage involves meeting the students where they are. This

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stages occurs when students have little knowledge about other cultures outside their own and buy into the dominant culture's beliefs. In this case, the dominant culture is White American. This stage also sees students believing the negative stereotypes of cultures outside the dominant one. At this stage, having tough conversations about race or other related topics can be challenging. Thus, relationship building must occur for that to happen. The first step to Ms. Adame fostering CID within her students was her extensive and intentional relationship building. She expressed that the journals were the most significant way she got to know her students.

The student participants mentioned the journals during interviews and how impactful they were. In his first interview with me, student participant Michael said, "She has journals. [In the] Journals, we talk about whatever. And I usually just talk about how my day was, what I ate, what I'm going to do later. So that also helps her understand us better. Also, if we have any problems with the past, we can write that too" (Michael interview #1). Ms. Adame spoke on the journals and said her reason for implementing them was to get to know her students. Michael's words from his interview confirmed their impact.

Oscar, another student participant, said: "Weekly, she makes us write a journal about our personal experiences if we want to…or she can just talk to us one-on-one every once in a while. She…tries to check up on everybody and she's very nice and kind." Writing about personal experiences is a healthy way of expression for the students to practice and a method for Ms. Adame to get to know her students. As we can see from Oscar's quote, Ms. Adame leaves the journaling open-ended so the students feel empowered to write their feelings.

Jose, the third student participant, expressed how the journals are "a good stress reliever because let's say if I have a problem, and I don't want to share it in person, I could write it down, and then she could read it, and I'll feel relieved." Jose also went on to mention how this relief of

stress helps him remain focused in class. Ms. Adame stated in interviews that journals are her most effective method of getting to know her students and the student participants have shown their impact.

Exposure to Other Cultures

The encounter stage involves acknowledging and questioning negative stereotypes, which students accomplished during the first few months of the school year. Through listening to the students, I learned that earlier in the school year (before my observations started), Ms. Adame had the students complete a research project about holidays worldwide. During interviews and focus group meetings, the students spoke about this project several times. Oscar shared his experience with this project, stating, "We did an assignment about national holidays, and you picked whichever you wanted. It could be from all around the world. My team and I decided to pick Dia de los Muertos, which we celebrate because we're all from that background, which helped us explore the meaning behind it and share it with the class." This project emerged as an example of the encounter stage because I saw how students were allowed to learn about other cultures, thus raising questions that challenge negative stereotypes about that culture. From the artifacts I analyzed, I saw the impact of the World Holiday research project. As shown in Figure 18 below, one group researched and taught the class about a Japanese holiday similar to our New Year celebrations in the United States, Omisoka.
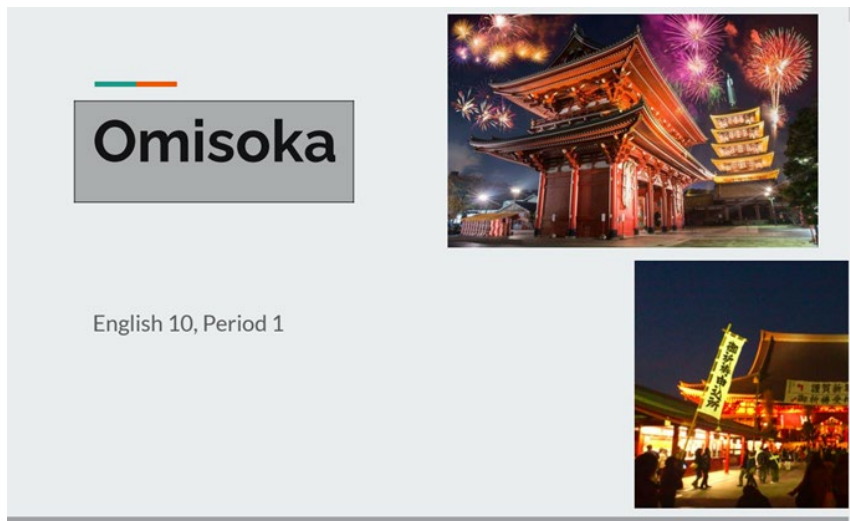
Figure 18 Student sample project from World Holidays assignment.

As noted in the previous chapter, Ms. Adame has a classroom library with various books that had characters from multiple backgrounds. Those books are for students to choose their independent reading book, and this very exposure helps them question any preconceived notions they might carry about cultures outside their own. Jose shared in an interview that "In our English class, we read a lot of books, and different books about different cultures, and learn what they're about…So we get to see our own culture, which makes it more appealing and makes it feel like you're in the right place. So, I mean, it feels good." This student's experience shows that being able to learn about yourself in a school setting has the power to make you feel more comfortable in class.

As the evidence has shown, journaling and exposure to other cultures were tremendous traits that contributed to the success of Ms. Adame's classroom. Journaling was her most effective method of relationship building and it set the foundation for students to embrace the pre-encounter and encounter stages of CID. The more students felt comfortable writing, the more Ms. Adame learned about them. The more she knew about her students, the more she could

personalize her lessons to fit their needs. The journaling continued throughout the year but was most essential at the beginning of the year. The foundation that the journals set allowed Ms. Adame and the students to engage in the following stages of CID. Exposure to other cultures also sets the students up in preparation for the following stages because, as we will see in stages three and four, students begin to form their ideas around their identity and embrace it.

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Immersion and Internalization

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The immersion and internalization stages were the focus of the next few months of the school year. In the following units, the essential questions included: *What do different cultures have in common, and what makes them unique? How do cultures shape our perspective on the world and ourselves? How do rhetorical appeals influence audiences, and how can we use them to get different outcomes in our lives?* Students identified elements of cultures (unique and shared struggles and successes), compared and contrasted their own culture with others worldwide, reflected on those similarities and differences, and practiced rhetorical appeals as they applied to their lives. These units' focus during those months aligned with immersion and internalization because students were embracing their own culture while beginning to create a culture that fits how they see themselves.

Identity Development

Through analysis of student interviews and focus group meetings, I began to notice the impact of Ms. Adame's practices on their identity development, and many of their responses proved this to be true. Identity development exists as a subtheme of the immersion and internalization stages because of the way the students talk about being able to embrace their culture and begin self-discovery. One of the questions I asked the students very early on was how they felt their background and identity impacted their life and experience in school. Michael stated, "I see what my friends are going into and how much they're struggling to find who they

are in this world. So, I don't want to follow in their footsteps…And I don't want that for myself. I want to actually be the first one to go to college in my family. So, I thought, well, I have to try in school. I have to participate in sports, extracurricular activities, and actually try." This quote is the perfect example of a student internalizing what he sees in his community and using that knowledge to choose a different path. In my observations of her class, I noticed Michael's perseverance; he continued to aim for success and create his envisioned identity.

Another moment that stood out to me during interviews and data analysis was when I spoke with Oscar about his background. He states, "For the first seven years of my life, I grew up in Mexico City, Tijuana. Then my parents got me papers. My dad is from LA [Los Angeles, California] and my mom's from Sonora [city in Mexico], so I have dual citizenship. I came here to study, and I've been here since. But just the switch of background or the switch of environment was very confusing to me because I was used to an environment where it was very chaotic." This quote made me understand the importance of students knowing and understanding where they come from to grasp how they are changing and evolving. Although not as vocal during class as Michael, Oscar always paid attention to Ms. Adame. If called on, he typically could follow what was happening in class. Understanding of the type of environment he came from allowed him to begin to adjust, even at such a young age. This adjustment helped him be receptive to the experiences that Ms. Adame's lessons provided.

Those were some testimonies of how the students viewed themselves early on, even before entering Ms. Adame's class. I also saw the importance of pointing out how class impacted their identities after the fact. In later interviews, Michael had a lot to say about this topic. First, he said, "This class has helped me better understand myself, and that has definitely helped me with my other classes, especially since I know my limits." Here, we can see how being in Ms.

Adame's class has helped Michael understand himself better, who he is, and who he wants to be. When recalling the end of the *Hamlet* unit (and units now three-fourths into the school year), Michael also mentioned learning "that every culture has their own different aspects, and they all celebrate the same things differently." He verbalized this further, stating that the class also taught him about "Perspective. We have our own culture, but we also have to understand that there's other people who believe different things. So, it helps me see not only my own point of view but someone else's." The internalization stage comes to mind here as we see Michael come to understand and embrace other cultures. In response to the same question, Paula (the fourth and final student participant) appreciated the daily journals, "...the prompts she gives us in our journals. [They are] a way for us to reflect and talk about ourselves…[and] when I write in them, I reflect on myself." The students also felt that Ms. Adame's class helped them express themselves through the various activities and projects; as Oscar attested to in our final focus group meeting, "This class has helped me explore and develop my own identity because it has helped me express myself in different ways." As the evidence here has shown, identity development was a significant way in which Ms. Adame guided her students through the immersion and internalization stages of CID.

Commitment

The commitment stage occurs through the "Let's Talk About Race" unit in the final months of the school year. Students in this unit grappled with the following essential questions: Who *crafts law and policies, and who do those policies benefit? What are overt and covert ways that systems oppress groups of people? How do our identities afford us privilege and/or position us as members of marginalized groups? What are different kinds of power?* These questions helped students contemplate and reflect on social justice issues in their communities and the world and consider how they can use their power and privilege to make a difference. The

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subtheme most suited for this stage of CID was success in education. In this subtheme, the students spoke of the importance of school, their commitment to a better education, and how Ms. Adame's class has impacted them.

Success in Education

When asked about his general attitude toward school and education, Michael shared, "It's really important to me. I'd say it's my number one priority if anything, especially since I don't want to live where I am right now. I want to be better. I want to live better." Michael believes education is the key to a better life for himself and is committed to continuously improving to achieve that better lifestyle. Another question I asked the students was how they felt their background influenced their life and experience in school; Jose stated, "I feel like it has made me more humble. And it makes me want to achieve greater things because since my parents didn't go to college or even high school, it makes me want to be the first person to graduate high school and go to college. It makes me personally have higher goals." Here, we see another example of how a student commits himself to achieving better in school to reach his goals. The students also had positive experiences regarding how they felt Ms. Adame's class helped them in their other classes. Oscar, in particular, mentioned, "...[Her class] has helped me improve my communication skills because there is a lot of talking out loud. So, when it comes to other classes, I'm not afraid of participating or interacting with others." This example allows us to see the immediate impact Ms. Adame's class has on Oscar's ability to succeed in other areas.

My observation time frame in Ms. Adame's class ended just as she started the "Let's Talk About Race" unit and prepared the students for the coming book study. I was intrigued to know how that unit impacted the students. I emailed the student participants, hoping to understand their biggest takeaways from that unit and how that unit empowered or inspired them. Unfortunately, I

was unsuccessful in this attempt to get responses. However, this is something to consider in future studies. Following up with the students who experience these types of ELA classroom environments (CRP and CID focused) and inquiring how they were empowered or inspired can be extremely valuable for education practitioners.

Advice for Future Students

One of my final questions to the students asked about advice they would give to students taking Ms. Adame's class in the coming years, precisely what they should do to be successful in her class. Paula thought the best advice was to "Engage more…to actually try to enjoy the activities." She felt that if students try to be engaged, it will help them in the long run. Michael expressed the importance of participating, "Participate. It makes it a lot more fun if you're participating." According to this testimony, the assignments may not be as fun without participation. Michael chose to urge future students to make the effort to participate. In congruence with participation, Jose shared that future students should "Pay attention and do [their] work so [they] don't struggle later on." For Jose, paying attention was crucial advice for students to prevent falling behind. Lastly, Oscar spoke on the importance of turning in assignments by stating that future students should "Do the work when it's assigned; it takes stress off of you and the teacher grading it. It is basically benefiting everyone in many ways." These examples show how the students chose to commit to their education and how this class has prepared them for continued commitment and the skills they will use. In the next section, I discuss the subthemes identified as significant proponents of the engagement in Ms. Adame's classroom.

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Engagement

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The second research question in this study also sought to learn how CRP and CID impact student engagement. Cooper (2014) and Connell (1990) define **engagement** as responding to

classroom activities through behavior, emotion, or cognition. Thus, if students participate in these ways, it is a sign to teachers that engagement is occurring. These researchers also determined that students of color need this type of engagement in school to keep them invested in their education. What follows is the examination of subthemes I identified that provide opportunities for students to engage in Ms. Adame's class.

Accessibility & Fun

In response to how she felt students were reacting to the activities during the *Hamlet* unit, Ms. Adame expressed how she thought they had "a lot of fun." Her activities and resources were accessible to her students, enjoyable, and memorable. When observing, I found that many of the activities in her class were accessible *and* fun; these two components typically happened simultaneously. Thus, I merged them as one subtheme. The students provided testimony to these fun and accessible moments through the interviews and focus group meetings.

One significant way Ms. Adame created an accessible and fun environment for her students was by reading *Hamlet* as a comic rather than the traditional prose play. The students I interviewed expressed overall positive feedback for that decision. Michael expressed that he was "Way more engaged [during the *Hamlet* unit]… Since we're reading a comic book, it's actually fun to read. And we're just not reading off of words. It's not dull and quiet in there. We're all participating, we're all reading." During my observations when they were reading the play, I noticed more participation from the students overall. There was general excitement to read their character's lines. Michael also stated, "She chooses people to read a character every morning before we start reading. And people usually want to read actually…Because they have fun playing the character." Jose discussed how "[The comic] makes it feel easier because you could look at the images, and then, while you're reading the text, you can visually see what's going on

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instead of just imagining it." The visualizations he mentions are the drawings in the graphic novel version of the play that helped the students match faces to characters' names while they read. As my interviews continued, there was an overall appreciation for the *Hamlet* graphic novel. Paula stated in one of her interviews, "[The comic] makes it easier. It makes it more engaging for me to read it. I like the illustrations...The fact that I have to look at the characters, I know how they look and how they sound." The students genuinely appreciated and enjoyed the graphic novel as a reading option.

During that unit, there was also a highly impactful long-term activity the students completed, for which the student participants also expressed joy. In addition to reading, the students had "Character Case Files." Ms. Adame gave each student a manila folder with files on each character in the play, and their task was to gather as much information on them as possible. When asked about an impactful activity during the *Hamlet* unit that stood out to them the students mentioned these case files. Paula had the following to say: "An activity that stood out to me the most was the folder with the files of each character. It stood out to me the most because it's kind of like we analyze every character, their motives, their profile, which made it easier for me to identify their personas." Paula found this activity helpful in helping her identify each character, while Michael expressed his excitement about what it felt like to work on those files: "We've been reading [*Hamlet*] like a case. We're trying to solve something. And there's evidence everywhere. . . it's almost like a murder case. That's super fun!" Michael felt like he was a detective, which made the experience of reading the play more memorable for him. Jose also chimed in, saying, "The *Hamlet* [character case files]...the investigation ones. It had different character sheets, and it asked where they were from, the color of their eyes, the color of their hair, all that. I felt like that was very interesting, and it made it easier to know how [each] person

looked and their names because we had the picture and the description." Combining the graphic novel and the character case files helped the students access this traditionally challenging text. The class was also more invested in the story through these methods. During my observations, I often heard students make remarks after certain events occurred. For instance, students would audibly gasp at certain events in the play, whereas I heard a student ask during one reading, "What is wrong with him (Hamlet)?!" The class was very much engaged, and this was due to Ms. Adame's strategies.

The students also felt engaged in other ways throughout this unit. Jose shared how Ms. Adame is "very helpful. She has office hours, which helps me a lot because sometimes I don't get a subject. If I go, and then she takes her time, explains it well, which makes it easier to succeed in her class." This same student also expressed how Ms. Adame asking them probing questions and creating reflection assignments helped keep him engaged. Taking the time to see his teacher outside of class showed me that he was engaged enough to ask for help when confused in order to remain engaged. Oscar appreciated the collaboration opportunities she created in class, stating, "She has also given us the ability to work with partners and collaborate with other people to just exchange ideas and make learning easier." These students' testimonies showed me how impactful accessibility to content and fun activities are when it comes to staying engaged.

Meaningful Assignments

Another way Ms. Adame's CRP classroom fostered student engagement was through meaningful assignments. Ms. Adame always chose and planned each assignment carefully, keeping in mind her students' varying academic levels and needs. Her assignments were meaningful because they tended to leave a lasting effect, and the students remembered them. In his first interview, Michael said, "The assignments that she has are not just writing senseless

stuff. She includes movies like Disney movies and little kids shows. It's not so boring [and] old…she keeps it relevant, and that makes it more engaging." Michael's testimony here shows how Ms. Adame's intention to use specific popular cultural references in her lessons does indeed reach the students. Previously stated on page 77, Oscar spoke about the impact of the holiday traditions project. That example serves two purposes as it also shows how Ms. Adame kept her students engaged in class assignments. From Oscar's testimony, I could tell that some students used that assignment to learn more about other cultures while others used it to learn more about their own culture. These are just some examples of meaningful assignments Ms. Adame implements. When asked what they think other teachers can do to help them stay engaged, Jose stated, "...more hands-on projects; and Paula mentioned, "...doing interesting topics that would…give me motivation to continue."

Connections to Students' Lives

In the previous chapter, we saw how Ms. Adame intentionally incorporated aspects of her student's lives in the environment and curriculum. In this chapter, connection to students' lives emerged as another way Ms. Adame kept her students engaged. During interviews and focus group meetings, I asked students if there were any assignments where they could explore who they were as a person. As mentioned in his first interview, Oscar recounted the World Holidays research project, where students chose a holiday from around the world to present to the class. His group chose Dia de los Muertos, allowing them to learn about something from their own culture. Throughout the student interview process, this project came up with each student, which shows how impactful it was for them to have the opportunity to learn more about themselves and share it with the class.

The unit I observed the most had the class reading *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.

Watching Ms. Adame's creativity with connecting with this archaic, classic text was astonishing.

This practice made me wonder if the students noticed the connections she attempted to make.

Thus, some of my questions had the student participants reflecting on how aspects of *Hamlet*

may have connected to their own lives. One question asked of the students was what lesson

Hamlet could teach them that could apply to their lives. Michael stated, "I feel like [I have

learned] 'don't trust the people you think are closest to you.' [The story] changed my view on the

people I actually talk to and who I call my friends." In the play, Hamlet finds he cannot fully

trust those closest to him, so with this quote, we see Michael picking up on that and applying it

to his life. Knowing that after reading this text, he will be more vigilant of those he calls friends.

Jose shared that his lesson was " that revenge is not always the option. So, think about [revenge]

more closely…The outcome could be bad [and] sometimes it won't go your way." Jose learns

from Hamlet to be careful with enacting revenge and found that to be a valuable lesson he could

apply to his own life. Jose and Paula shared the same thought, and when Paula responded to this

question, she mentioned, "The fact that seeking out for revenge, it's like ... [Hamlet's] actions

had consequences. In my life, if I do something, it's going to have consequences." Both students

understood the potential negative cause-and-effect matters that can occur when one seeks

revenge and felt that was a lesson worth taking away. Oscar saw the play *Hamlet* as a means to

learn about being more rational, stating in his response, "To be more rational and think more

about my emotions. The character Hamlet acted out based on his emotions and didn't think about

the consequences." Asking the students this question allowed me to see that each of them,

though having slightly different answers, understood one main aspect from the central character:

our actions and choices have consequences. Based on those responses, I could see how the

students gleaned a connection from *Hamlet* despite the archaic nature of the story itself. During my observations, I often heard Ms. Adame ask the students, "What would you do if/how would that make you feel if?" allowing them to come to those conclusions independently.

Continuing to allow the students to reflect, another interview question I asked them was if they could relate to any of the characters from the play, and three of them provided very different yet telling responses. Oscar shares why he feels teenagers like him can likely relate to the main character, Hamlet, "I could resonate with [Hamlet] because he's sort of going through many changes. He's going through a lot of things that are making him change psychologically. Like when his father died and when his mother moved on too quickly after his father's death. [Those are] some things some teenagers may be going through. He [feels] anger, [wants] revenge, and [has] emotions like that." While Oscar felt he could relate to Hamlet, Michael shared a connection to Hamlet's friend. He shares the following, "I think [I relate to] Horatio because he's just this supportive person, and he's always there for [Hamlet], and I feel like he's someone that Hamlet can rely on." This statement led me to believe Michael sees himself in Horatio because he is the supportive type of friend.

On the other hand, Paula did not necessarily feel connected to the character she spoke about, but could relate the actions of Queen Gertrude (Hamlet's mother) to a life experience she had: "Queen Gertrude marrying someone else quickly. That was similar to an event that happened in my life not too long ago with a friend that passed, and his girlfriend just moved on so quickly, and we were just so mad." Connecting that moment in her life to the play's events allowed Paula to connect and understand what the characters were going through. These quotes show the student's ability to connect the content to their lives based on the teacher's facilitation

through lessons in the unit. The connections they made allowed them to understand and enjoy the story more.

During the *Hamlet* unit, students often considered events in the story from different perspectives. These moments of reflection led me to ask the students how they felt Hamlet helped them reflect on their lives and cultures. Paula stated, "[I have thought about] the role of a woman…because in modern day it's different. The queen she had to obey everything; today, it's not like that. Women today have their own role." I appreciated that reading *Hamlet* allowed Paula to reflect on her role as a woman within the parameters of her own culture. While Paula shared this perspective, Jose and Michael expressed a different perspective, sharing how they could not relate too much because the events in the book did not relate to their lives. While one student felt she could connect, others did not share the same experience, which made me wonder about other strategies teachers can employ in units such as this when teaching authors like Shakespeare is fundamental and a part of the district standards. Some scholars in the literature assert that a few ways educators can do this are through immersing themselves into the communities of their students, bringing their students' cultures into the classroom, pairing canonical texts with supplemental, diverse texts, and allowing opportunities for student discussion which can bring to light varying perspectives (Ervin, 2021; Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Irizarry & Raible, 2011).

In line with connecting the ELA curriculum to students' lives, I wondered about the students' thoughts on how this English class helped them in their other classes. Oscar expressed his thoughts on the matter, stating that this class has helped him improve his communication skills: "The whole class has just helped me improve my communication skills because there is a lot of talking out loud. So, when it comes to other classes, I'm not afraid of participating or

interacting with others." On the other hand, Jose felt Ms. Adame's class helped him boost his

participation: "I feel like my English class helps me participate more and talk more about my

ideas because [Ms. Adame] makes us participate a lot. I feel like that brings it over to my other

classes and helps me participate even more and express my ideas." Overall, during my time

observing this classroom and speaking with the student participants, there were evident moments

when students were making connections to their lives, whether researching holidays from their

culture to teach the class or reflecting on how their English class helps them in other classes.

Inclusion

Inclusion emerged as another way Ms. Adame kept her students engaged in lessons.

Inclusion involves providing equal access to opportunities and resources for marginalized

groups. One central theme identified in the previous chapter was the classroom environment

(physical environment and pedagogy). In my observations, I noticed how much Ms. Adame's

classroom reflected her students, so I wanted to ask the students how they felt the classroom

environment reflected their cultures and backgrounds. In other words, did they feel the classroom

included their lives and identities? Paula shared the following: "Certain festivities, [Ms.

Adame] celebrates them even though they're not included in her background." Paula expressed

appreciation for this seemingly small gesture because even if Ms. Adame doesn't celebrate a

holiday, she provides space for her students who do to feel they can be themselves around her.

Moreover, throughout interviews and focus group meetings, the students talked about

assignments they felt were inclusive of them, their lives, and their culture. An example of an

inclusive assignment that impacted the students was discussing about inclusive, modern

television shows. Ms. Adame showed the students an example using the children's show *Doc

McStuffins,* then had them complete an analytical paragraph about an inclusive show they watch

(see Figure 19). Michael recounted this experience with extreme enthusiasm: "A few months ago, we did these slides, and we had to find a clip from a video of how [the show is] different from every other TV show. Mine was on Steven Universe and how it's inclusive." This assignment allowed students to research a TV show they liked and analyze what was inclusive about that show.

Genre & Author Response to _Doc McStuffins_

Traditionally, adults writes children's stories and shows. In this case, Chris Ness wrote a children's show about a black child who wants to be a doctor, and has 2 moms. This is normal because she didn't feel represented as a kid watching kids shows. Because Ms. Nee didn't feel represented, the idea was to have a show geared toward children who are just like her, but also for people who didn't feel represented or have someone like them on television. The hope is to make kids feel represented which shows that Ms. Nee wrote this kind of show because she wanted to put something out for the that kids that grew up like her felt something to connect to.

Figure 19 Teacher's example for students to follow during the diverse television show activity.

To reiterate, one of the most prominent examples of an inclusive, meaningful assignment mentioned in the student interviews was the research project on World Holidays. This assignment was an opportunity to learn about other cultures. Paula expressed how learning about another culture was exciting because she learned about something she did not personally practice herself. On page 81, I previously quoted Michael, who talked about the importance of perspective and understanding others' points of view. When I asked what is one thing he learned that school year, Michael cited the holiday traditions assignment, saying, "Every culture has their own different aspects, and they all celebrate the same things differently."

Another significant question was what changes they want teachers to make to the ELA curriculum. Some of their responses revolved around adding even more inclusion. Michael declared, "I feel like every time I hear about English, they're always reading the exact same book

every single year. So, I think a switch might be good." Oscar and Jose felt inclusion needed to match the students' identities. Oscar shares, "If I could change something about what students learn in English class [it would be] for them to learn something more inclusive and something that represents them; for example, Hispanic kids can learn about Hispanic culture, not necessarily about Danish culture." Here, Oscar was referring to *Hamlet,* emphasizing that learning about your own culture more in school would be an excellent way for English to be more inclusive. Jose's following quote further confirms this thought: "I feel like [students can learn] a little bit more about [their] culture, just to feel more involved in the class." He then said, "I feel like what we're learning right now in English class…it's what we should be learning, but I feel like **for kids like us to be more engaged, it would be better if we spoke a little bit more about our culture."** Though all of these students felt Ms. Adame's practices were inclusive and they could connect their lives to the content they were learning, they still wondered and wished for more inclusion to be engaged even further.

Summary

Accessibility and fun, meaningful assignments, connection to students' lives, and inclusion are ways student engagement can improve in ELA classrooms. The student testimonies show how these concepts manifested in Ms. Adame's classroom and how they responded to her practices. Overall, based on these students' experiences and thoughts, the more inclusion and connection there was, the more they felt engaged, and the more inclusion and connection there continued to be, the more they stayed engaged. The engagement that occurred allowed these students to be open to examining and developing their cultural identities.

Overall, this chapter has shown us the impact Ms. Adame's CRP practices had from the students' perspective. Students experienced the five stages of CID through the curriculum map and lessons she planned out each day. They were also highly engaged throughout the school year

due to the type of assignments she created. Starting with relationship building and leading to inclusion, Ms. Adame made her students feel comfortable enough to engage in challenging conversations by the end of the school year. The next and final chapter will discuss the implications of this research.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This study examined CRP practices in a high school ELA classroom and how those practices impact students' CID and overall engagement. Chapter Four displayed the thoughtful and intentional nature of Ms. Adame's practices, while chapter five examined the impact of those practices on her students. This chapter will take us through a review of the problem, research questions, and methodology. There will also be a review of the conceptual frameworks and the introduction of my modified theoretical model based on these frameworks and my findings. Finally, I will showcase the assertions drawn from the results, followed by the implications this study has for future research, educators, and social justice.

Review of the Problem and Research Questions

Chapter One laid out the major problem this study is facing, being that some researchers believe Students of Color are not achieving at high levels in various school subjects compared to their White counterparts. Scholars suggest this academic discrepancy is due to systemic or structural inequities (Acosta, 2007; Capper, 2021; Covell, 2009; Howard, 2013; Jones, 2018; Nasir & Al-Amini, 2006). Several studies that show graduation rates, as well as reading scores, vary tremendously between Black students, Hispanic students, and white students in the sense that Black and Hispanic students tend to have lower graduation rates and reading scores, while their White peers see higher numbers in these areas (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; NAEP report, 2019; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). While scholars have pointed out the challenge of teaching predetermined curricula, they also recognize the importance of connecting students with their cultural identities through coursework (Ervin, 2021; Irizarry, 2007). Additionally, a 2021 survey shows that US adults, in general, are concerned about the academic progress of K12 students in America (Saavedra). These data suggest that Students of Color are not achieving academically at the same level as their white counterparts. Some scholars believe

that Students of Color have struggled to reach the same level of academic success because of the broken connection between engagement, course material, and students' cultures (Acosta, 2007; Jones, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Tello et al., 2010; Young, 2010). This lack of connection and engagement is where my study comes into play. My research questions were as follows:

1. **What are the multiple characteristics of a culturally relevant English Language Arts classroom?**

   a) How does the classroom environment reflect CRP?

   b) How do the teacher's curriculum and instruction reflect CRP?

2. **How do culturally relevant classrooms foster student engagement and cultural identity development (CID)?**

   a) How do students respond to classroom activities and assignments?

   b) How do students perceive their classroom experience as related to their CID?

This study sought to understand the strategies and practices one teacher used to help her students feel connected to the curriculum, thus enabling them to engage more and improve their overall academic success.

Review of the Methodology

I conducted a qualitative, descriptive case study to examine the practices of one ELA teacher. I chose the case study format, which allowed me to deeply analyze teaching practices and their impacts on students in the hopes that other teachers can replicate these practices for their students. Over a three month period, I observed the teacher and students in the classroom; I interviewed the teacher and the students and took the students through focus group meetings. Gathering artifacts was another form of data collection that became highly beneficial during the analysis process. Between ten observations, three focus group meetings, and fifteen individual

interviews, I gathered abundant information that helped lead me to the conclusions and assertions made. Using MaxQDA, I coded the data and created subthemes based on the frequency of certain practices and strategies.

Building Academic Success and Cultural Identity through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The foundational frameworks for my study were culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and cultural identity development (CID). Though these two ideologies stand alone in the literature, in this research I found the benefit of combining them. My study sought to determine how CRP can be used to make a more culturally inclusive ELA curriculum through the lens of CID. CRP, a term initially coined by Ladson-Billings (1995), has three main areas of focus: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (1995) saw a need to improve the educational success of Black students, thus CRP was born. These tenets working together allow teachers to close the gap between Students of Color and their White peers.

Several scholars have written about CID, stating that it is the exploration of one's own life through class activities, whereas the chosen activities provide students with the opportunity to create meaningful connections to their lives through validation, critical thinking, and empowerment (Acosta, 2007; Bomer, 2017; Jones, 2018; Young, 2010). As Chapter Two states, these scholars describe CID as the missing piece to achieving student engagement and individual growth (Ellis & Rowe, 2020; Martin, 2014). The five stages of CID used in the classroom lend themselves to helping students gain a sense of their own cultural identities. These stages are as follows: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalization, and commitment. Students begin this process by confronting negative stereotypes they hold about their cultures and others, then complete the process by committing themselves to face issues faced by marginalized communities. In my research, CRP is the teacher's process to implement a culturally inclusive curriculum. At the same time, CID was the process the student undertook *because* the teacher

was using CRP. All the while, processes that contribute to student learning are occurring. In this study, the combination of CRP and CID is crucial to the student experience, inclusive curricula, and development of their cultural identities. The following section will discuss this process in my modified framework.

Modified Theoretical Framework and Assertions
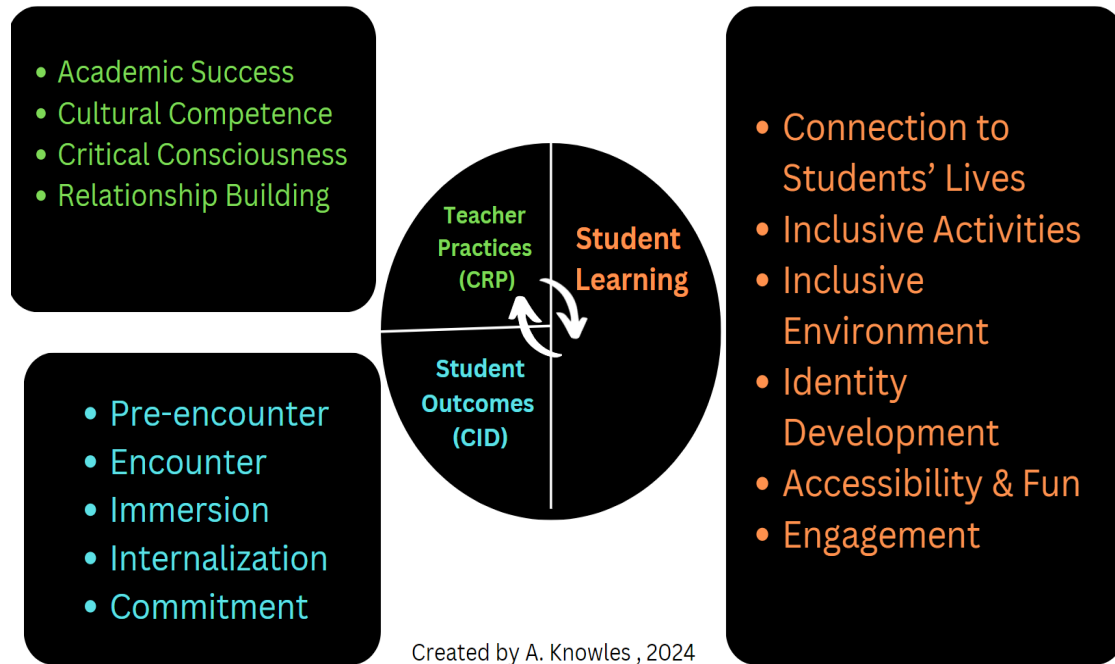
Figure 20 Modified Theoretical Framework showing benefits of CRP and CID

This graphic has three main categories of thought: teacher practices, student learning, and student outcomes. The diagram is read starting in the top left portion, then moves clockwise around the rest of the circle. The teacher practices are the components of culturally relevant pedagogy: what the teacher should implement in their curriculum and daily lessons. The student learning portion of the graphic depicts the events that take place while students are learning and features that contribute to student learning. Lastly, student outcomes are what we hope to see students leave with after experiencing the teacher's practices. The student outcomes are the stages of cultural identity development that result from the teacher's use of CRP. The following

sections will break down the three main findings from this study as they pertain to each component of the modified framework.

Teacher Practices

The first significant finding from my analysis lay within chapter four among the teacher results. The discovery made after analysis was that the implementation of CRP must simultaneously intertwine all of the tenets. While analyzing, it became evident that even though each subtheme could match as an example of one of the tenets, there was still plenty of overlap. For example, in chapter four, I continued to draw attention to the "Let's Talk About Race" unit book study and the critical race theory gallery walk activity. I referred to that unit and particular activity in each section of the CRP tenets. We see first-hand how Ms. Adame intertwined the tenets to support her students' CID process. It was nearly impossible for me to discuss the "Let's Talk About Race" unit and gallery walk activity in any area alone because it belonged in all of them. There were other examples where I referred to evidence in more than one section. The overlap of subthemes and their examples is precisely what the first assertion exemplifies.

Furthermore, I also came to see how Ms. Adame often utilized aspects of each tenet simultaneously. For instance, if she employed cultural competence, it was entwined with a lesson that helped the students succeed academically. This realization led me to understand how the three tenets are interconnected and woven within each other and, thus, cannot be separated. One tenet cannot exist without the other, and the use of all three at the same time is essential. Again, much of the evidence overlapped during my analysis and coding process and many of the data points could apply to more than one subtheme and CRP tenet. The way the evidence overlapped made it very clear to me that if a teacher is to use CRP in their classroom, **a successful CRP ELA classroom must enact all tenets, all the time, simultaneously. These tenets cannot exist**

as an individual checkpoint that will never be addressed again and marked off on an arbitrary teacher to-do list. They must continue to happen all the time and all at once. Ms. Adame proved this possible in her teaching practices as I noticed her choices often supported students' academic success, growth, and development as culturally competent, critically conscious individuals. When trying to enact *only* academic success, *only* cultural competence, or *only* critical consciousness, educators may lose the complete picture necessary to facilitate growth and development within students that this study highlights.

Student Learning

The second finding to emerge from the data comes from the fifth chapter, in which I detailed the student results. Engagement was a huge theme that emerged when interviewing and speaking with the students and throughout our conversations. They continued to provide examples of activities that helped them stay engaged, sometimes even stating those examples unprompted by me. The study shows us how critical engagement is for academic success to occur. When students are engaged, the teacher has a better chance of facilitating activities surrounding cultural identity development.

Additionally, utilizing features that contribute to student learning also creates a space that lends itself to engagement—for instance, having an inclusive environment, implementing lessons that connect to students' lives and are accessible, as well as fun, and building relationships along the way. Thus, the second assertion from the study is that **creating engaging activities opens students up to examining and developing their cultural identities. Those engaging activities involve students having the opportunity to examine work that centers around their interests and personal life experiences.** This connection must also come from the teacher's creativity to build a bridge between the content and the students. In some interviews, students

would share how they wanted to learn about topics they could relate to or expressed excitement when reminiscing about activities they enjoyed where they connected to the topic. Through my analysis, I learned that engaged students feel a sense of familiarity and curiosity within the curriculum. When those elements are absent (familiarity and curiosity), engagement decreases, thus creating a challenge for cultural identity development.

Student Outcomes

The third component of the graphic and my third finding focuses on student outcomes. The student outcomes are the five stages of CID: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalization, and commitment. When the teacher's practices include CRP and the learning that takes place opens students up to developing their cultural identities, the result is CID. The primary outcome of this study is the student's ability to develop their cultural identities in a safe environment. The CRP practices and teacher lessons allow students to go through each step and leave the classroom with a better understanding of themselves. Thus, the third significant finding is that **CRP must take place, in order for students to take part in the process of CID.** Once this process has begun, as the arrows on the graphic show, the student outcomes that occur during the school year lead back into the teacher's practices, impacting her lessons to match them with the stages of CID her students may move through, and the cycle continues. The modified framework depicts the cyclical nature of this process. Just as all tenets of CRP must occur simultaneously, each of the components in this framework occurs at various stages of the school year, at the same time, and repeatedly. The following section will highlight a unique occurrence that emerged within the study.

Student-Teacher Ethnic Matching

A unique feature of this study was the representation of ethnic matching among the students and teacher. Southern California High's population consists of 98% students who identify as Hispanic and Latinx, and the class period of Ms. Adame's that I observed had 100% students from Hispanic and Latinx backgrounds, while Ms. Adame herself identified as Mexican Indigenous and Lebanese. When asked about her background and how that influences her teaching, she spoke about her cultural identity and how she grew up not speaking Spanish at home. However, later in college, she began to learn Spanish, which gave her an understanding of the mental fatigue her students might face from being in a space where those around them are not speaking their first or preferred language. In the same interview, Ms. Adame spoke on feeling as though she did not quite fit in due to her dual cultural identities. While she identified as Mexican Indigenous, she felt she did not entirely fit in with her Mexican peers who spoke Spanish, and on the other end not entirely fitting in with other groups either.

She also spoke about the curriculum she grew up with and how many authors she studied in her English classes were white men (with a few expectations). She used these personal experiences to ensure her students had a different experience in her classroom. Knowing the student population, how some may identify with her experiences, and tapping into the extensive relationship building she conducted, Ms. Adame cites this experiential knowledge when she works on her lesson plans. She wanted to "fill in those boxes and try to make [the content] more accessible for the kids" (teacher interview #1). Ms. Adame's personal experiences allowed her to put herself in her students' shoes. She was able to plan accordingly based on potentially shared experiences. The concept of student-teacher ethnic matching supports this because many of the studies (cited in chapter 2) discuss how ethnic mismatching caused specific categories of

students (i.e.-Black and Latinx) to feel unsupported in school and therefore not perform as high or well as their White peers (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Dee, 2004; Easton-Brooks, 2021; Egalite et al., 2015; Oates, 2003; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2017).

Much of the literature surrounding student-teacher ethnic matching also stated how external, negative behaviors were less likely to occur in classrooms where there was an ethnicity match between the students and the teacher (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Dee, 2004; Easton-Brooks, 2021; Egalite et al., 2015; Oates, 2003; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2017). Chapter Four discusses briefly how Ms. Adame dealt with disruptions in her classroom, and to reiterate, at the time of this study, in the six years she had been teaching, she recalled only ever sending a student out of the room once. This testimony led me to believe that the ethnic match between her and her students helped her understand some of the students' behaviors, thus being able to handle any negative behaviors in-house rather than continuously sending students out of the classroom. Overall, Ms. Adame's personal experiences helped her facilitate CRP through a CID lens. The next section of this chapter will examine the study's implications for social justice, educational leadership, and general practice.

Implications for Social Justice, Educational Leadership, and General Practice

Typically, social justice initiatives aim to bring about equal rights and opportunities for all (TSDF, 2016). This study addresses one of those issues: the need for cultural identity development in schools. Implementing the strategies in this research has the potential to ensure that students will become critically conscious individuals who can challenge and change oppressive systems to benefit their communities, further impacting social justice issues. By allowing adolescents to explore their cultural identities through a social lens, educators are

impacting the critical thinking skills of future change agents who will impact future social justice matters (Acosta, 2007; Cooper, 2014; Jones, 2018; Tello et al., 2010).

This study's benefits on educational leadership can allow for growth within schools. Adding a focus on cultural identity development through the lens of CRP in the ELA curriculum can support educational leaders. This support would come from gathering ideas on increasing student engagement in their schools and building more positive school cultures for all students. Educational leaders can also determine and enhance professional development for their staff, allowing them to implement cultural identity development and CRP adequately. Professional development in the area of CRP facilitation can lead to more engaged students achieving academic success (Acosta, 2007; Capper, 2021; Covell, 2009; Jones, 2018).

In general practice, educators can gain new instructional methods from examining this research, such as connective instruction, biography-driven instruction (BDI), or hip-hop literacy (HHL)--as discussed in the literature review. Educators may also find some of Ms. Adame's strategies helpful as they seek ways to transform their classrooms into a CRP-driven space focused on students' CID. These methods encourage teachers to create moments in lessons where students can connect to the material (Belle, 2016; Cooper, 2014; Herrera et al., 2012; Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Limitations

Though this study produced valuable results, some limitations still presented themselves. The first limitation was the use of the case study model. While the decision to use the case study model was justified, this method holds its limits in the field. Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) assert that case studies give the participants the chance to tell their stories in detail, allowing the researcher to interpret data through several critical lenses. Though this is true, my use of a case study limited me to one city, one school district, one school, one teacher, and one classroom.

While other educators can use the results and strategies found in this case, the case study model makes this study unable to be generalized to other schools and districts. The findings and experiences are unique to the students and teachers at this site. While findings in this study may prove useful for other educators, this limitation should be considered when replicating any portion of the study for personal use. Educators must be sure to adapt based on their environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations discussed bring me to the recommendations for future research. First, replicating and expanding this study would be useful. Performing the research design across multiple classrooms, districts, and cities would cast a wider net and allow more voices and stories to be elevated. Student-teacher ethnic matching was a unique and beneficial feature of this study, and expanding this study would help gain representation and insight from other ethnic groups. I would also build time into future studies to follow up with the students at the end of the school year to gauge the impact of teacher practices. As mentioned in Chapter Five, I attempted to follow up with no success. I performed my study in the middle of the school year and began analyzing afterward. As the analysis unfolded, I wondered about some activities and lessons and how they impacted the students. If future studies can build in time for follow up, it could add to the richness of the data.

Lastly, I recommend further analysis of how other aspects of CRP and a teacher's life influence their pedagogical practices. Originally, my study had three sub-questions underneath research question one. This additional, since removed, research question asked: What other aspects of CRP are present in the teacher's pedagogical practices? The subthemes that emerged with this question were culture shock/experiencing other cultures, isolation/not belonging, motivation to teach, first-generation, ethnicity, and people of color seeking inclusion on their

own. These subthemes were omitted from the analysis due to the small amount of data and evidence they obtained. Despite this, future research could examine more closely these aspects and determine how they impact a teacher's practices.

Conclusion

Every student deserves the opportunity to feel connected to the material they learn in school. As a student, educator, and English teacher, I have seen first-hand the need for representation within the ideas, voices, and texts that are highlighted in the ELA curriculum. Much of the literature highlighted in this study displays the underachievement in academics we see with students of color, namely Black and Hispanic students (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Ladson-Billings; NAEP report, 2019; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Students can achieve academic success if they are engaged, and in order to be engaged, this study asserts that students must be given the opportunity to examine their own cultures and develop a cultural identity. This examination of the self takes much cultivation on the teacher's end to administer successfully. A teacher interested in facilitating this type of learning in their classroom must consider the importance of simultaneously and continuously enacting the CRP tenets and creating lessons the students can access, have fun with, and learn from. The students in this study also help show the importance of cultural identity development in the ELA classroom and how the presence of their identities in the curriculum allows them to feel more engaged with the material, thus making them feel more motivated and ready to learn. Creating lessons and assignments that keep students engaged is a task that burdens all teachers. My goal and hope in conducting this study is that educators will be able to continue bridging the gap between content and engagement by looking to their students. Who are the individuals sitting right in front of you? How can you help them learn the content and better understand themselves, the world around them, and their place in it? This questioning is where the work begins (challenging as it

may be, yet rewarding in the end), with the students at the center of a curriculum that celebrates

kids like them.

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello! My name is Ardisia Knowles. I am a high school English Language Arts teacher currently attending a joint doctoral program in education at the UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos. To conduct my research study, I need some help!

I would like to study the teaching practices and thought processes of high school English teachers who are well versed in the implementation of CRP (culturally relevant pedagogy) OR two teachers working to start or better implement CRP. Thus, I am hoping to conduct observations in classrooms with veteran teachers who have been building culturally relevant classrooms for a while, or teachers who are seeking to improve/start their classrooms using culturally relevant pedagogy.

My research questions are as follows:

- What do culturally relevant High School English Language Arts classrooms look like?
- How do culturally relevant classrooms foster student engagement and cultural identity development (CID)?

My goal is to conduct classroom observations and individual interviews in San Diego during the Spring 2023 semester.

If you are interested, or at least *curious*, about participating please contact me at 619-770-2319 (text) or email me at: arknowle@ucsd.edu.

ALSO, please feel free to share this email with other teachers who you think would be interested in being a part of the study.

-Ardisia Knowles

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATION TOOL RESOURCES

Due East CRP Self-Assessment

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)
Self-Assessment and Reflective Conversations

The purpose of this document is to be a window into our progress and practice as culturally responsive and competent educators. The self-assessment and reflective conversations are designed to inspire inward reflection, both independently and with a peer, in order to improve equitable and high achievement outcomes for our schools, classrooms and students.

- This CRCT self-assessment and reflection tool focuses on 4 components of Domain 5:
  - *5a—Recognizing the Educational Impact of Cultural Diversity*
  - *5b—Addressing Demographic Inequities in Achievement*
  - *5c—Building Relationships across Cultural Differences*
  - *5d—Adapting Curriculum to Reflect Cultural Diversity*

CRP Self-assessment Instructions

1. You may use the prompts in this tool in *any way* that supports your own reflection and growth. This includes for example— journaling to one or more of the reflection questions, completing the indicators of effectiveness rubrics or some combination of both.
   - Rubric Guidance for Indicators of Effectiveness:
     - **Beginning-** This is a new concept or facet of my professional practice.
     - **Developing-** I consider myself to need more experience or learning within this indicator of effectiveness, there is ample room for professional growth for me.
     - **Proficient-**I consistently and systematically attend to this indicator of effectiveness within my professional practice. I continuously seek professional development and new strategies to improve my practice within this indicator of effectiveness.
     - **Exemplary-**While I am always improving, I have significant experience and learning and I consistently and systematically attend to this indicator of effectiveness within my professional practice. I am reflective about my beliefs, actions and impact, and I adapt my practice to meet student needs. I am willing to serve as an example or mentor for my peers on how to professionally implement this indicator of effectiveness.

2. Using your CRP self-assessment, have a reflective discussion with an instructional coach, colleague or PLC team member.

3. Discuss your strengths, areas for growth, curricular, instructional and pedagogical adaptations you could make.

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Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Self-Assessment and Reflective Conversations

5a: Recognizing the Educational Impact of Cultural Diversity
Culturally competent educators recognize the relationship between culture and learning; they continually reflect upon their own cultural experience and the experiences of their students; and they consistently use this knowledge to create learning environments that support students' diverse learning needs.

Self-Assessment:
B-Beginning, D-Developing, P-Proficient, E-Exemplary

Indicators of Effectiveness		B	D	P	E	Examples/Questions
Awareness of Own Culture	I have an understanding of my own cultural background and how that influences my practice					
	I recognize and can articulate the educational impact of culture.					
	I continuously seek professional development opportunities to explore my own and others' cultures.					
Knowledge of Students' Cultures	I create a welcoming learning environment that reflects the cultural backgrounds of my students.					
	I recognize and intervene on my own and others' predisposed expectations about student ability and performance.					
Patterns of Cultural Interaction	I use various strategies to present information to students based on my knowledge of students' learning and participation styles.					
	I consistently and effectively use instructional strategies that build on students' cultural strengths and promote success.					
	I create opportunities for students to reflect on their cultural background and share with each other.					

Reflection Questions:
1. How have you/do you become aware of the cultural backgrounds of your students?
2. How does your awareness of the cultural backgrounds of your students impact/inform your practice on a daily basis?
3. How does your awareness of your own cultural identity impact your instruction and your relationship with your students?
4. What patterns do you observe in the cultural values and norms of your practice? How could you expand the cultural patterns to support the engagement and academic success of more students?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Self-Assessment and Reflective Conversations

5b: Addressing Demographic Inequities in Achievement
Data on students' progress is gathered and used regularly; it provides essential information for designing and differentiating classroom instruction. Disaggregating student data by demographic groups provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their individual instructional practices as well as institutional policies, practices, and programs that may perpetuate inequities in achievement.

Self-Assessment:
B-Beginning, D-Developing, P-Proficient, E-Exemplary

Indicators of Effectiveness		B	D	P	E	Examples/Questions
Knowledge and use of achievement data across demographic groups to inform instructional practice	I regularly look at student demographic achievement outcomes and discipline referral data to detect inequitable patterns in my classroom.					
	I research or design teaching and classroom management strategies that reduce inequitable disparities I notice in achievement and discipline patterns in my classroom.					
	I seek out and analyze data on students' prior academic progress to inform and differentiate instruction.					
	I team with other teachers to review student work, make collaborative decisions about academic performance expectations, and consistently apply these expectations for all students.					
Differentiated instruction	I hold and consistently communicate high expectations for all students. demonstrates, through classroom practices, a commitment to teaching all students					
	I demonstrate, through classroom practice, a commitment to teaching all students.					
	I get to know each individual student in order to determine their skill level and learning needs.					
	I assess student progress frequently and design instruction accordingly.					
	I identify and access resources outside the classroom to provide supplemental learning opportunities to meet students' need.					
	I recognize that students may not have learned grade-level skills as expected so I provide supplemental experiences to accelerate learning.					

Reflection Questions:
1. How do you gather data relevant to demographic inequities in your classroom?
2. What patterns do you observe about the demographic achievement or discipline patterns in your classroom?
3. How do you incorporate this data as you ensure that you are holding students to the same rigorous standards while also differentiating instruction?

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Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Self-Assessment and Reflective Conversations

5c: Building Relationships across Cultural Differences
Teaching and learning are fundamentally relational activities. Culturally competent educators create learning environments that are characterized by caring relationships, high expectations, and a diversity of instructional methods that respond to the learning needs of all students. Culturally competent educators also build strong relationships with families to support student success.

Self-Assessment:
B-Beginning, D-Developing, P-Proficient, E-Exemplary

Indicators of Effectiveness		B	D	P	E	Examples/Questions
Culturally responsive learning spaces, relationships & expectations	I get to know each individual student in order to determine their skill level and learning needs.					
	I regularly communicate to every student, in various ways, my belief in their ability to achieve.					
	I design and adapt my classroom management approach to meet the needs of students and to support relationships with and among students.					
Effective communications with diverse groups of parents	I understand the importance of home/school partnerships in the learning process and actively seek to build strong relationships with students' families.					
	I seek to learn about the family culture and values of my students in order to build relationships that support learning.					
Effective use of communication support resources	I regularly seek to engage and communicate effectively with families through a variety of means and methods.					

Reflection Questions:
1. How do you work to build cross-cultural relationships with, among, and between your students?
2. What do you do to enhance communication and partnerships with families? How do these actions incorporate the culture and values of each family?
3. What patterns do you notice in your relationship building with students and families?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
Self-Assessment and Reflective Conversations

5d: Adapting Curriculum to Reflect Cultural Diversity

Culturally competent teachers ensure that their students are provided with an academically challenging curriculum that includes the contributions and perspectives of the variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that make up our society, and they consistently link the curriculum to the personal cultural resources that their students bring to school. Culturally competent teacher do not assume that because the curriculum works for some, even most, learners, it is adequate for all learners. They are attuned to the curricular needs of all students and they prepare instructional materials that provide equitable learning opportunities.

Self-Assessment:

B-Beginning, D-Developing, P-Proficient, E-Exemplary

Indicators of Effectiveness		B	D	P	E	Examples/Questions
Multicultural content integration and multiple perspectives	I can recognize and articulate cultural biases present in the explicit and implicit curricula.					
	I create opportunities for students to bring their life experiences, cultures, and languages into the classroom as a foundation for learning.					
	I integrate a variety of assessments into the curriculum so that students can demonstrate their individual knowledge, talents, and skills; activating student strengths and amplifying student voice.					
	I present the curriculum so that students understand historical and contemporary events and issues from the perspectives of various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.					
	In my classroom, teaching and learning uses examples and analogies **from** students' lives and applies content and skills **to** students' lives.					
Physical classroom environment	I create a classroom that is accessible and welcoming to all of my students.					
	My classroom environment reflects a diversity of cultures, interests, and student experiences.					

Reflection Questions:

1. What are you doing to embed a variety of cultural perspectives and values into your curriculum and classroom environment?
2. How do you embed student culture, experiences, interests, and expertise into teaching and learning?
3. How have you shifted your instructional practices to meet the variety of cultural values and learning styles of your students?

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Teacher Interviews

Each teacher agreed to participate in an ethnographic interview.[12] Although I devised a tentative interview protocol, my intention really was simply to have a good conversation with each.

My initial interview questions were the following:

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?
2. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe "works?"
3. Can you think of any characteristics that African American youngsters as a group bring to the classroom?
4. What kinds of things have you done in the classroom that have facilitated the academic success of African American students?
5. How much of what you know about teaching African American children did you learn as a result of teacher training, either preservice or in-service?
6. If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be more effective with African American students, what changes would you make?

7. What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American students? How would you describe the kinds of relationships you've had with parents of students you've taught?

8. How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of African American students should know about discipline?

9. How do you handle the possible mismatch between what you want to teach and what you have to teach with (for example, materials or supplies)?

10. How do you handle the possible mismatch between what you want to teach and what the administration (building principal or district superintendent) wants you to teach (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies)?

11. How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach differs from that of white students in middle-class communities?

Culturally Responsive Teaching Walk Through Observation Guide

A Quick and Easy School Visit Observation Guide

Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes cultural ways of learning and cognition rather than focusing on cosmetic "race related" displays. Affirmation of students' cultural roots comes through incorporating deep cultural values and cultural ways of learning (*using the memory systems of the brain, organizing around social interaction (collectivism), and combining oratory skills with academic talk*) rather than through superficial pictures of "heroes" or images of Africa or Mexico or irrelevant mentioning in the curriculum.

What do you see as you walk through?	What do you hear as part of the environment?	What conversations are happening?
• Are there **rituals and routines** that students know and participate that support transitions between blocks or that help open and close learning blocks? • Are students **working in** authentically **communal ways** to get started in a lesson or do thinking together? • Does there seem to be a **spirit of inquiry** in the classroom? Students are doing research and talking through how new information fits with what they already know. There's project-based learning. • Are there **"anchor charts"** to help students **remember** processes and inspirational messages about **grit and perseverance** visible? • Are there **positive messages about** making mistakes and **turning errors into information**? • Does the environment seem to be **"intellectually safe"?** All students are making contributions, not just the same ones. Students can think out loud.	• Do you hear a **humming of student voices** as they work or is it too quiet? • What is the ratio of teacher talk and authentic student talk (not just "getting into groups")? • Is there ample **student discussion** around the lesson? • Do you hear **students smoothly code switching** between home language and academic language? • Is **music incorporated** into the environment? Maybe to signal a transition or as background during thinking time? • When you ask, can **students talk about what they are working on**, why it's important and how it connects to what they already know?	• Is there **"cultural modeling" to help scaffold** students' understanding of the content (i.e., using metaphors, character experiences from culturally oriented music lyrics, TV shows)? • Is there **trust building language** and interactions (i.e., building a rapport and personal connection)? • Are there **one-on-one instructional conversations** (during conferencing around writing or other projects)? • Are there **regular opportunities** to **get** and talk about authentic **feedback** (timely, corrective, actionable, affirming)

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APPENDIX C: TEACHER INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol: Teacher Semi-Structured Interview #1

Objective: Determine teacher's current strategies used to implement CRP and vision for classroom and students.

Researcher's Positionality: As an English teacher, doctoral student, and black woman, I have been working in education for eight years and teaching ELA for five of those eight years. In that time, I have come to see how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn as it pertains to their lives and their own cultural identity development as adolescents. Additionally, as a student I have found that my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or in college, were those when I was able to connect what I am learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. This is especially important as a black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth to society. Beginning to think at a young age what my place can be in my community helped shape who I am today. I strongly believe that the ELA classroom is where this thinking and molding can and should happen for students.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee pseudonym:

Before Beginning the Interview:

Step 1: Confirm that the participant has read and agrees to the guidelines established in the information sheet. Ask the participant if they have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before moving on. Also, ask if interviewee minds being audio recorded and have them sign the consent form.

Step 2: Collect demographic data
1. Ask participants to select a personal pseudonym.
2. Ask the participant for their personal gender pronoun.
3. Ask the participant what grade they teach.
4. Can you please describe to me identities that you hold that are meaningful to you?

Step 3: Read the interview script:

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Ardisia Knowles and I am a doctorate student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos in the Education Studies Department and School of Education at California State University San Marcos.

This is the first of 3 interviews I will have with you and the purpose is to learn how English Language Arts teachers, such as yourself, practice culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. In this interview I hope to learn more about your goals and visions for how you hope to implement and what you hope your students will gain from your practices. Our conversation will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and it will be audio recorded to ensure that I don't miss anything you say during the interview. You can request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts of the interview at any time after the session has concluded. [Only mention if the interview is happening via video call software: If it would make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to turn your camera off for the duration of the interview.]

All of the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any documents resulting from this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular questions, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin the interview.

Step 4: Begin interview

Interview Questions:

A) Culture
1. How would you describe your personal background?
2. How, if at all, would you say your personal background has impacted your life?
   a. Your schooling?
3. Were there any challenges or privileges you experienced in school with regard to your personal background?
4. How closely do you feel the curriculum in your English classes reflected your culture, if at all? Explain.
5. What impact did the English curriculum have on your engagement in class?
6. To what extent do you feel your high school English classes influenced your cultural identity development, if at all?

B) Education: Classroom Practices and CRP
1. Tell me about your educational background.
   a. When and where were you educated?
   b. When and where did you begin teaching?
   c. Why did you begin teaching?
2. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?
3. What do you believe "works" when it comes to keeping students engaged?
4. How do you feel your culture impacts your teaching, if at all?
5. Tell me about the cultural makeup of your classroom?
   a. What ethnic and cultural backgrounds are they bringing to the classroom?
6. What is the outlook/physical set up of your classroom?
   a. Desk arrangement and rationale?
7. In what ways do you maintain high expectations for your students?

8. How do you handle discipline in your classroom? Do you feel your procedures reflect/are sensitive to your students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences?
9. How do you build relationships with your students?
    a. In what ways do you get to know your students?
10. In what ways does your classroom environment reflect the cultures of your students?
11. What is the importance or significance of CID within the ELA classroom/curriculum?
12. How do you address, if at all, cultural biases within the ELA curriculum with your students?
    a. How does this benefit your students of color, if at all?
    b. If you feel you are not doing this, what benefit do you think it would have to do this with your students?
13. Overall, what are your goals for your students this semester in terms of their cultural identity development?
    a. What do you hope they will learn or gain after this unit? Semester?
14. How does your school support your teaching?
    a. Resources?
    b. Professional development?
    c. District resources?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

Step 5: Conclude the interview

That concludes our first interview. Thank you for your time! Once I have my memo and notes finalized I will be sending you a copy for your convenience to verify what I have recorded. If there is anything you think I misconstrued, please inform me and I will make sure to edit so I can represent you and your story appropriately in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions. Observations will begin [insert period of time here].

Interview Protocol: Teacher Semi-Structured Interview #2

Objective: Make connections between interview 1 and observations and allow the teacher to provide any updated info and insights.

Researcher's Positionality: As an English teacher, doctoral student, and black woman, I have been working in education for eight years and teaching ELA for five of those eight years. In that time, I have come to see how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn as it pertains to their lives and their own cultural identity development as adolescents. Additionally, as a student I have found that my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or in college, were those when I was able to connect what I am learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. This is especially important as a black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth to society. Beginning to think at a young age what my place can be in my community helped shape who I am today. I strongly believe that the ELA classroom is where this thinking and molding can and should happen for students.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee pseudonym:

Before Beginning the Interview:

Step 1: Confirm that the participant has read and agrees to the guidelines established in the information sheet. Ask the participant if they have any questions about the study thus far. Also, ask if interviewee minds being audio recorded.

Step 2: Read the interview script:

Thank you for participating in our second interview. In the first interview we talked about your cultural background, education background, and your classroom (unit topic, goals, etc). This is the second of three interviews I will have with you and the purpose is to learn how English Language Arts teachers such as yourself practice culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. In this second interview, I hope to learn how your goals have manifested, how they have changed, and what you are noticing about your students' engagement in class. I will also make connections to or ask for clarification on what I noticed in some observations. Our conversation will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and it will be audio recorded to ensure that I don't miss anything you say during the interview. You can request a copy of the recording as well
as the transcripts of the interview at any time after the session has concluded. [Only mention if the interview is happening via video call software: If it would make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to turn your camera off for the duration of the interview.]

All of the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any documents resulting from this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular questions, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin the interview.

Step 3: Begin interview

Interview Questions:

A.   Culture:

1. What is the topic of the unit your students are currently working on and how long will this unit last?
2. How does this unit connect to students' lived experiences and cultures?

3. How do you envision this unit facilitating your students' CID?
4. What ways will this unit help students further develop their cultural identities?
5. Are there any challenges you have faced while teaching this unit thus far with regard to your own culture?

B) Education: Classroom Practices & CRP:

6. How has your teaching philosophy you described in the first interview been present so far in this unit?
7. What have you noticed "works" when it has come to keeping students engaged?
8. How are your students' cultures and lived experiences shown up in this unit so far?
   a. In class activities?
   b. In discussions?
   c. Other?
9. Has the physical outlook of your classroom changed in the last month? If yes, how and why? If not, why?
10. How have you gotten to know your students more in the past month?
11. What impact do you feel this has had on their engagement/participation in class?
12. In what ways have you seen your students connecting personally to this unit?
13. What more would you want to do to help them develop even more?
14. What strategies have you used so far that you find most successful in reflecting students' cultural backgrounds?
15. How do you feel your students' engagement was impacted in the past month based on your lessons? Were they more engaged or less engaged and why?
16. Can you tell me about [example from observation]?
    a. What was your thought process?
    b. What were your goals with that particular activity?
17. Can you tell me about [example from observation]? Did you feel prepared for [conversation or student responses]?
18. I noticed [form of assessment] during my observation. Can you say more about that?
    a. What impact did that have on students?
    b. Why did you choose that form of assessment?
19. Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Step 4: Conclude the interview

That concludes our second interview. Thank you for your time! Once I have my memo and notes finalized I will be sending you a copy for your convenience to verify what I have recorded. If there is anything you think I misconstrued, please inform me and I will make sure to edit so I can represent you and your story appropriately in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions. I will resume observations as normal after this.

Interview Protocol: Teacher Semi-Structured Interview #3

Objective: Gather final thoughts from the teacher about what worked, what didn't, and what she would change. Also learn how she felt her teaching influenced her students' identity development.

Researcher's Positionality: As an English teacher, doctoral student, and black woman, I have been working in education for eight years and teaching ELA for five of those eight years. In that time, I have come to see how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn as it pertains to their lives and their own cultural identity development as adolescents. Additionally, as a student I have found that my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or in college, were those when I was able to connect what I am learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. This is especially important as a black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth to society. Beginning to think at a young age what my place can be in my community helped shape who I am today. I strongly believe that the ELA classroom is where this thinking and molding can and should happen for students.
Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee pseudonym:

Before Beginning the Interview:

Step 1: Confirm that the participant has read and agrees to the guidelines established in the information sheet. Ask the participant if they have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before moving on. Also, ask if interviewee minds being audio recorded.

Step 2: Read the interview script:

Thank you for participating in 2 interviews so far; this will be our last one. In the second interview we talked about how your practices thus far have impacted your students, as well as any challenges and successes you faced. In this final interview, I hope to learn what you gained from this process and learned about yourself as a teacher and your students; how you feel this method of teaching has impacted your students CID; and what your hopes for the future are (short and long term). Our conversation will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and it will be audio recorded to ensure that I don't miss anything you say during the interview. You can request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts of the interview at any time after the session has concluded. [Only mention if the interview is happening via video call software: If it would make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to turn your camera off for the duration of the interview.]

All of the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any documents resulting from this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we

can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular questions, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin the interview.

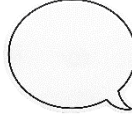**Step 3**: Begin interview

Interview Questions:

1. How has your teaching philosophy described in the first interview shown up in your teaching?
2. Were you satisfied with how you allowed your students cultural and ethnic backgrounds to emerge in class lessons, discussions, and activities?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. What would you change and why?
    c. What would you keep the same and why?
3. What impact do you feel your relationship building with your students had on their engagement in your class during this unit? Explain.
4. How do you feel your physical class environment affected students' engagement in your class during this lesson?
5. In what ways did you notice your students connecting their own cultures and lived experiences to this unit?
6. Please describe ways in which you feel this class helped your students develop their cultural identities?
7. Overall, what do you feel your students have learned and gained in your class so far?
    a. In regard to their community?
    b. In regard to their cultures?
    c. In regard to themselves?
8. What have you learned about implementing CRP and CID in your classroom?
9. How can your school better support your teaching? (Or what has your school done so far that has been supporting your teaching that you would like to keep seeing/see more of?)
    a. Resources?
    b. Professional development?
    c. District resources?
10. I noticed [form of assessment] during my observation. Can you say more about that?
    a. What impact did that have on students?
    b. Why did you choose that form of assessment?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add in regard to any topic we have discussed today or this process?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Step 4: Conclude the interview

That concludes our third and final interview. Thank you for your time! Once I have my memo and notes finalized I will be sending you a copy for your convenience to verify what I have

recorded. If there is anything you think I misconstrued, please inform me and I will make sure to edit so I can represent you and your story appropriately in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

APPENDIX D: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

	What do I see?	What do I hear?	What conversations are happening?
Activation of students' prior knowledge ☐			
Making learning contextual ☐			
Consideration of classroom setup ☐			
Forming relationships ☐			
Discussions on social and political issues ☐			
Tapping into students' cultural capital ☐			

Incorporating popular culture ☐			

After observation Reflection Questions: Howard (2020) Culturally Responsive Teaching Checklist

Did the teacher…

- Recognize the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills of the students?
- Seek to develop dynamic teaching practices and multicultural content, with multiple means of assessment?
- Nurture students' academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being?
- Involve support and input from parents, caregivers, grandparents, and community members?
- Put learning in context for students who can connect a topic to their current lives or community?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Focus Group Meeting 1

Introduction:

My name is Ms. Knowles and I will be the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of this focus group is so I can learn more about your experience in Ms. _____'s class. Thank you for volunteering for this group; this will be the first of 3 focus group meetings. It is my hope and expectation that your opinions and experiences will help me learn more about why English classes can be used to help students explore their cultural identities. I will not share your names, but the information you share may be used in my research.

I am passing around a consent form and a non-disclosure form. By signing these forms, you are agreeing to participate in this focus group and to keep our discussion confidential. That means whatever information is shared here must remain among the people in this room. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason signing these forms, you are free to leave at any time. Let's take a moment to read them over. Then before we begin, I would like to go over a few ground rules for the focus group. These are in place to ensure that all of you feel comfortable sharing your experiences and opinions. I will be audio recording this meeting.

Ground Rules:

1. *Confidentiality* – As per the non-disclosure form, please respect the confidentiality of your peers.

2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.

3. *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.

4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to agree on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Questions

1. Icebreaker Question: What comes to mind when you think of the word culture?
2. Please share a bit about Ms. _____'s class and what you have learned so far this year?
3. What do you like best about her class? (What parts of her teaching have been most helpful to you?)

4. In what ways have you learned about other cultures in this class? What have you learned specifically about other cultures?
5. How has learning about other cultures impacted your learning?
6. What have you felt was the most meaningful activity or assignment in Ms. _____'s class and why?
7. If you could make any changes to what is learned in English classes in high school, what changes would you make?
8. Are there any final comments about your learning experiences in Ms. _____'s class you would like to mention?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating in today's focus group. If you think of any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share, please email me at arknowle@ucsd.edu.

Focus Group Meeting 2

Introduction Text

My name is Ms. Knowles, and I will be the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of this focus group is so I can learn more about your experience in Ms. _____'s class. Thank you for volunteering for this group; this is the second of 3 focus group meetings. In this meeting I hope to learn how you have been experiencing this current unit, as it pertains to your identities. I will share your names, but the information you share may be used in my research. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, you are free to leave at any time. I will be audio recording this meeting. Let's review the ground rules before beginning.

Ground Rules:

1. *Confidentiality* – As per the non-disclosure form, please respect the confidentiality of your peers.

2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.

3. *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.

4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to agree on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Questions

1. Icebreaker Question: What part of your own culture do you most identify with? Explain your answer.
2. How has participating in this unit kept you engaged during class?
3. Do you feel comfortable participating in class discussions? Explain your answer.
4. What impact has learning about your and other cultures in this unit had on your overall performance in school, if at all?
5. In what ways have you been able to connect elements of this unit to your own life experiences?
6. What are some things Ms. ____ has done that has kept you engaged in her class?
7. In what ways has being in Ms. ___'s allowed you to learn about your community*, if at all?
8. Are there any final comments about your learning experiences in Ms. ____'s class you would like to mention?

community: cultural or physical (being the area where they live or attend school)

Conclusion Text

Thank you for participating in today's focus group. If you think of any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share, please email me at <u>arknowle@ucsd.edu</u>.

Focus Group Meeting 3

Introduction Text

My name is Ms. Knowles, and I will be the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of this focus group is so I can learn more about your experience in Ms. _____'s class. Thank you for volunteering for this group; this is the last focus group meeting. I will not share your names, but the information you share may be used in my research. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, you are free to leave at any time. I will be audio recording this meeting. Let's review the ground rules before beginning.

Ground Rules:

1. *Confidentiality* – As per the non-disclosure form, please respect the confidentiality of your peers.

2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.

3. *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.

4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to agree on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Questions

1. Icebreaker Question: If you could give advice to another student taking this class what would it be?
2. Overall, what have you learned about yourself after participating in this unit?
3. Overall, what have you learned about your community* after participating in this unit?
4. Do you feel empowered to make changes in your community after being in this class?
5. Please describe how this class (and unit) has helped you explore and develop your cultural identity overall?
6. What are some things Ms.___ has done in her class that has helped your learning and helped you stay engaged?
7. If you could change anything about what you learn in your English classes, what would it be?
8. Are there any final comments about your learning experiences in Ms. ____'s class you would like to mention?

*community: cultural or physical (being the area where they live or attend school)

Conclusion Text

Thank you for participating in today's focus group. If you think of any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share, please email me at arknowle@ucsd.edu.

APPENDIX F: STUDENT INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol: Student Semi-Structured Individual Interview #1

Objective: To allow students a chance to share any insights they may not have gotten the chance to or felt comfortable sharing in a group setting in regard to their experiences in school and with the ELA curriculum.

Researcher's Positionality: As an English teacher, doctoral student, and black woman, I have been working in education for eight years and teaching ELA for five of those eight years. In that time, I have come to see how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn as it pertains to their lives and their own cultural identity development as adolescents. Additionally, as a student I have found that my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or in college, were those when I was able to connect what I am learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. This is especially important as a black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth to society. Beginning to think at a young age what my place can be in my community helped shape who I am today. I strongly believe that the ELA classroom is where this thinking and molding can and should happen for students.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee pseudonym:

Before Beginning the Interview:

Step 1: Confirm that the participant has read and agrees to the guidelines established in the information sheet. Ask the participant if they have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before moving on. Also, ask if interviewee minds being recorded.

Step 2: Collect demographic data
1. Ask participants to select a personal pseudonym.
2. Ask the participant for their personal gender pronoun.
3. Ask the participant what grade they are in.
4. Can you please describe to me identities that you hold that are meaningful to you?

Step 3: Read the interview script:

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Ms. Knowles. I am a doctoral student in a Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos in the Education Studies Department and School of Education at California State University San Marcos. I am excited that you have volunteered to help me with my research study.

This is one of two interviews I will have with you and the purpose is to learn more about your experience in English Language Arts classrooms currently and in the past. Our conversation will last approximately 30-40 minutes, and it will be audio recorded to ensure that I don't miss anything you say. You can request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts of the interview at any time after the session has concluded. [Only mention if the interview is happening via video call software: If it would make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to turn your camera off for the duration of the interview.

All of the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any documents resulting from this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular questions, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin the interview.

Step 4: Begin interview

Interview Questions:

A) Culture
1. How would you describe your personal background?
2. How, if at all, would you say your personal background has impacted your life?
    a. Your experience in school?
3. What challenges, if any, have you faced with regard to any of your cultural identities?
4. How closely do you feel the curriculum in your English classes reflected your culture, if at all? Explain.
    a. What impact has this had on your engagement in school?
5. Do you feel that your English classes have given you any chances to learn more about your culture or other cultures?

B) Education: The Classroom and CRP
1. Tell me a little about your attitude toward school and education.
2. What do you believe teachers should do to help keep their students engaged in school?
3. How do you feel your cultural identities impact your learning, if at all?
4. What does your teacher do to get to know you?
5. In what ways do you feel your teacher's classroom reflects your cultural identities, if at all?
6. What changes, if any, would you make to your teacher's classroom environment?
7. What are current assignments or activities your teacher has used that have given you the chance to explore your cultural background?
8. Do you feel like this class has had any impact on your overall success in school this year? Why or why not?
9. If you could make any changes to what is learned in English classes in high school, what changes would you make?

10. Do you think is it important for ELA classes to help students develop their cultural identities?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add in regard to any topic we have discussed today?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Step 5: Conclude the interview

That concludes our first interview. Thank you for your time! Once I have my memo and notes finalized I can send you a copy for your convenience to verify what I have recorded, if you like. If there is anything you think I misconstrued, please inform me and I will make sure to edit so I can represent you and your story appropriately in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Interview Protocol: Student Semi-Structured Interview #2

Objective: To allow students a chance to share any insights they may not have gotten the chance to or felt comfortable sharing in a group setting in regard to their experiences in school and with the ELA curriculum.

Researcher's Positionality: As an English teacher, doctoral student, and black woman, I have been working in education for eight years and teaching ELA for five of those eight years. In that time, I have come to see how the curriculum, while it seeks to be inclusive of other cultures, does not always connect to the student sitting right in front of me. I have always felt that students should be able to make meaning from what they learn as it pertains to their lives and their own cultural identity development as adolescents. Additionally, as a student I have found that my most meaningful times in class, whether in my K12 experience or in college, were those when I was able to connect what I am learning to myself, my community, and my experiences. This is especially important as a black woman living in America who constantly has to prove her worth to society. Beginning to think at a young age what my place can be in my community helped shape who I am today. I strongly believe that the ELA classroom is where this thinking and molding can and should happen for students.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee pseudonym:

Before Beginning the Interview:

Step 1: Confirm that the participant has read and agrees to the guidelines established in the information sheet. Ask the participant if they have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before moving on. Also, ask if interviewee minds being recorded.

Step 2: Collect demographic data
1. Ask participants to select a personal pseudonym.

2. Ask the participant for their personal gender pronoun.
3. Ask the participant what grade they are in.
4. Can you please describe to me identities that you hold that are meaningful to you?

Step 3: Read the interview script:

Thank you for participating in this second and final interview. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your experience in this particular ELA class, review what we discussed in the first interview and see if you feel like any of your original thoughts have changed. Our conversation will last approximately 30-40 minutes, and it will be audio recorded to ensure that I don't miss anything you say. You can request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts of the interview at any time after the session has concluded. [Only mention if the interview is happening via video call software: If it would make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to turn your camera off for the duration of the interview.]

All of the information that you share will be confidential and anonymous. Your name will not appear on any documents resulting from this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular questions, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's begin the interview.

Step 4: Begin interview

Interview Questions:

A) Culture
1. How closely do you feel this unit in your current English class has helped you learn or discuss your cultural identities, if at all? Explain.
   a. What impact has this inclusion (or lack thereof) had on your engagement in this class?
2. To what extent do you feel this English class has had on the development of your cultural identity?

B) Education and the Classroom
1. What do you believe teachers should do to help keep their students engaged in school?
2. Do you feel any of your culture impacted your learning during this unit? How
3. Can you summarize the unit that just wrapped up in your English class? What did you learn?
4. How do you feel this unit has connected to your lived experiences and culture?
5. Can you give me an example of an activity or assignment that helped you develop and reflect on your own culture and identity?
6. Do you feel like this class has had any impact on your overall success in school this year? Why or why not?
7. If you could add or change anything about the class, what would it be?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

Step 5: Conclude the interview

That concludes our second and final interview. Thank you for your time! Once I have my memo and notes finalized I can send you a copy for your convenience to verify what I have recorded, if you like. If there is anything you think I misconstrued, please inform me and I will make sure to edit so I can represent you and your story appropriately in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

NOTE: It is expected that some questions may be added based on what is seen during the observations.

"Kids Like Us": A Teacher's Impact on Students' Cultural Identity Development Using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the English Language Arts Classroom

Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

My name is Ardisia Knowles, and I am a doctorate student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos in the Education Studies Department/School of Education at California State University San Marcos. I am conducting a research study to determine how English Language Arts Teachers can incorporate elements of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to aid their students in developing their cultural identities. The purpose of this sheet is to inform you about the study.

Why are you being invited to take part in this study?
You are invited to take part in this study because you have self-identified as being a high English teacher who has been/is attempting to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom or you are a student in said teacher's classroom.

What will you do if you agree to participate?
If you agree to participate in the study, you will participate in three forty-five minute to one-hour one-on-one semi-structured interviews, allow me to perform observations in your classroom once a week (or every other week) for approximately three months, give two interviews to four to five of your students, and allow me to facilitate three focus group meetings with each of those students. All interviews will be conducted in person or using Zoom or Google Meet. Both are cloud-based video communications programs that allow users to collaborate via audio and video conferencing. You will be given instructions on how to obtain and download the chosen program. All transcripts from the interviews will be available for you to review and make corrections to, as well as for them to share new experiences not previously highlighted. All interview data will be recorded, transcribed into text, and kept on a personal laptop that will be password secured.

What happens if you say yes, but you change your mind later?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty, and you will be able to keep any incentives you have earned up to the point at which you withdraw.

What are the benefits to you for being in this study?

The benefits of this study are threefold. First, the teacher may gain outsider input so as to be able to reflect on their practices. The participating teacher will have access to interview and observation transcripts, which they can use to improve on their implementation of CRP. Second,

students in the teacher's classroom will hopefully be engaging in activities which will aid in their cultural identity development. They will also be providing a student perspective to the study, which other teachers can use to add to their practices. Lastly, this study will benefit future teachers by providing a toolbox for tangible CRP strategies they can use in their classrooms.

What happens to the information collected for the study?

Your responses will be confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded data. All the data will be stored on a password-protected laptop that belongs to the researcher. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name, nor your students' names, will not be used. After data analysis, the researcher will delete the recordings.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you? Is there any risk to you by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. However, potential risks include: (1) the time required to participate in the interview, which can be inconvenient; and (2) you may experience emotional distress when answering questions about your culture if your answers will require you to recollect unfavorable memories. To mediate these inconveniences you can stop the interview at any time, skip a question, or take a break.

Who should you contact for questions?

If you have questions about the study, please contact me at 619-770-2310 (please text before calling) or e-mail me at arknowle@ucsd.edu. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Thandeka Chapman at tchapman@ucsd.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at 858-246-4777 or irb@ucsd.edu.

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

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