Cultural Care and Inviting Practices: Building Relationships in an Urban Elementary School. Teacher Perspectives in Forming Positive Teacher-Student Relationships Based on Care and Equity

Eva J. Allen

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Eva J. Allen

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DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
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ED.D. IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. TEACHER PERSPECTIVES IN FORMING POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON CARE AND EQUITY

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. TEACHER PERSPECTIVES IN FORMING POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON CARE AND EQUITY

By

Eva J. Allen

August 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Anne Marie FitzGerald

This dissertation in practice investigates teacher perceptions of the influence of cultural care and invitational education (IE) on the formation of a positive teacher-student relationship with students of color in an urban elementary school. Cultural care is a theory of practice that utilizes a social-emotional approach for school improvement and to promote positive student outcomes. It is defined as a verbal or nonverbal gesture that displays a genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being; simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a vital part of a person’s identity. Cultural care must include respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective. Conducted through qualitative participatory action research, this study examined teacher practices and perceptions in order to evaluate the influence of cultural care. The study utilizes elements of the theoretical frameworks of IE, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical
race theory. The findings were derived from analyses of pre- and post-intervention implementation, recorded observations and notes, and artifacts that were generated as a result of participation in a professional learning community that was focused on equity and care. Findings indicated the importance of teachers listening to students with intentionality; recognizing students’ basic and academic needs; and acknowledging students’ presence, behavior, and growth, including making gestures of concern. Also, emergent in the findings was the significance of educators developing self-reflection and self-awareness as a part of practice, sharing personal experiences and stories, and engaging students in nonacademic conversations to facilitate positive relationships with them. One unexpected outcome concerned student-initiated conversations on race. The participant educators reported that students were comfortable in talking and asking questions about race-related topics that are often difficult to discuss. Recommendations for practice and future research were given.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive, invitational education, critical race theory, care, equity, professional learning community, teacher-student relationships, school improvement, school culture, school climate, social-emotional learning, improvement science, urban education, professional development, self-efficacy, capacity
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Laird Wolfe, who embodied the purest form of love and selflessness; my mother, Paulette Novosel, who showed me life is good and taught me strength even when faced with adversity; and my Nunny, Virginia, who taught me the significance of family in all of its forms.
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Finally, I would like to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to my husband and best friend, Eric Allen. I am forever grateful for his constant devotion to our sons, countless sacrifices, and unwavering encouragement. We are, I and I.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The 2016 Presidential election has exposed a deeply divided nation, emboldened hidden racism, and unleashed a torrent of hostility in schools across the country. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a nonpartisan civil rights organization dedicated to fighting for social justice and against hate and bigotry (Costello, 2016a), conducted a convenience survey of approximately 2,000 K–12 teachers in the United States regarding the effects of the election in the nation’s classrooms. The results of the survey illustrate how the current hostile sociopolitical tone of the United States has spilled over into classrooms. The SPLC reported the influence of the presidential campaign in the nation’s schools, referring to the impact as the “Trump Effect” (Costello, 2016a).

Social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and social media statements of protest such as #ICantBreathe and #BlackLivesMatter have initiated racially charged dialogue, debate, and a neo-civil rights movement. High-profile cases across the country focused on criminal injustice and police brutality, resulting in the loss of lives of innocent African Americans—including Philando Castile, Travon Martin, Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, Leon Ford, and Eric Garner—have prompted heated discussions, causing one to acknowledge an unfortunate reality. The United States is not a nation with liberty and justice for all.

In the context of education, inequities continue to exist among African American, Latino, and White students despite laws and policies created to address and eradicate inequalities. The historic 1954 U.S. Supreme Court landmark decision Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka began the process of providing equality in educational institutions for all students regardless of ethnicity or culture (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts on Behalf of the Federal Judiciary, n.d.). While the law to end educational segregation was decided 6
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decades ago, inequities in resources, access, and opportunities are still widely prevalent (Gorski, 2013; Kozol, 1991), creating a ripple effect of injustices in numerous social contexts. Disproportionate levels of poverty, incarceration, and graduation rates, standardized assessment data, and enrollment in accelerated learning programs and secondary education are prevalent between African Americans and Latinos in comparison to their White peers (Gorski, 2013; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2006; Lewis et al., 2012; Milner, 2016; Noguera, 2003). These imbalances demonstrate inequities that affect adult outcomes and contributions to society.

The Pew Center for Research reported that children in the United States spend on average 943 hours in school during first grade (Desilver, 2014). Students begin to make decisions about staying in school typically between the ages of 11 and 15 (Hattie, 2012), that is, as early as sixth grade. It is essential that a concerted effort be made to ensure that a child’s earliest experiences are as positive and meaningful as possible. There is no greater responsibility in education than that of providing children with support in learning environments where children spend so much time.

In this strategic project, I argue that utilizing invitational education (IE) in highly diverse settings to create a caring learning environment, establishing positive teacher-student relationships, and improving and enhancing teacher practices must be done through a culturally relevant or responsive lens. In addition, I advocate that, when developing and implementing professional development to improve practice, teachers must engage as willing participants in professional learning communities (PLCs) in ways that align with the collaborative aspects of networked improvement communities (NICs) promulgated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Bryk et al., 2015; LeMahieu, Grunow, Baker, Nordstrum, & Gomez, 2017). This is especially vital to develop cultural competence and reflective practices.
on matters of social justice related to topics that are often difficult to discuss, such as racism, culture, perceptions, beliefs, and equity (Milner, 2007, 2010b; Owen, 2014, 2015).

This study investigated the influence of interventions based on culturally relevant pedagogy (Delpit, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2000, 2006a, 2006b, 2009) and inviting practices (Lee, 2012; Pajares, 1994, 2001; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Aspy, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016; Schmidt, 2007). In order to do this, I defined a theory of cultural care. In this chapter I discuss the rationale for the proposed study. Next, I discuss the strategic project as a matter of social justice. This is followed by key terms and definitions. Elements of key theoretical frameworks shaping the strategic problem of practice through improvement inquiry are reviewed. Then, I present the research question and briefly explain the methodology and data analyses. Next, I explain the context of and background for this action research. To conclude this chapter, I describe the role of the researcher in the strategic project.

**Rationale**

A growing amount of evidence shows that teachers are the greatest contributors to student academic success (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Hattie, 2012; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Also, mounting evidence regarding the impact of culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogies on student success is found in scholarly literature (Delpit, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2010). Independently, a growing body of research describes positive outcomes based on IE (Lee, 2012; Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Aspy, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2016; Schmidt, 2007). Despite a connection between the ideology of IE and culturally relevant pedagogy, few studies have involved a direct association between the two theoretical frameworks.
While conducting searches for peer-reviewed academic articles using EBSCOhost with the combined terms of *invitational education* and *culturally relevant pedagogy*, I was unable to locate a single article specific to both theoretical frameworks. Reed (1996) suggested using IE to address prejudices but her consideration was not specific to culturally relevant pedagogy. Additional searches were conducted utilizing combinations of the key terms—*invitational theory* or *invitational education* and *culturally responsive pedagogy* (or teaching)—with the same null results.

Furthermore, teacher voice is often overlooked in many qualitative studies (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Lewis et al., 2012). This study attends to those voids, contributes to the scholarly literature, and offers a framework for implementing interventions that positively influence school climate and teacher practice and promote student growth.

This study investigated the perspectives of five highly qualified educators (based on district evaluations) on the influence of cultural care and IE through qualitative participatory action research (PAR). This strategic project frames the problem of practice as a matter of social justice and utilizes elements of the theoretical frameworks: critical race theory (CRT), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), IE, and self-efficacy.

Noddings (2012) defined *care* as based on a bilateral relationship between the cared and carer but did not address race or culture as part of the definition. Valenzuela (1999) conducted a 3-year ethnographic investigation of academic achievement and schooling orientations of Mexican American students and Mexican immigrants at a high school in Houston, Texas. Through examination of field notes, a reoccurring theme of care emerged, leading to deeper examination of the use and definitions of *caring* or *cariño* as part of effective teacher practice. In connection with efficacy, a study by Lewis et al. (2012) examined the relationship of care on Latino students’ self-efficacy in mathematics. *Care* was defined as “the
ability to listen to, empathize with, and be moved by the plight or feelings of the other person” (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 3).

Gay (2010) devoted a chapter to the topic of care associated with her theory of CRP. Gay (2010) described caring as an essential part not just of CRP but also of the educational process. Care is an engaging practice that “positively affects one’s well-being” (Gay, 2010, p. 48), manifested in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes; it encompasses concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action (Gay, 2010).

Drawing from the definitions described in previous research, I use the term cultural care. Cultural care is defined as verbal or nonverbal gesture that displays a person’s genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. Cultural care must include respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective.

This study explored the influence of interventions based on cultural care and inviting practices on their relationships with students of color in areas related to the context of the study. As PAR, the study engaged educators as active and willing participants to facilitate change. The educators were willing participants in a PLC, using improvement research techniques to implement a “plan, do, study, act” (PDSA) cycles (Bryk et al., 2015; LeMahieu et al., 2017). One goal of the PLC was to develop cultural competence and reflective practices of educational practitioners on matters of social justice related to racism, culture, perceptions, beliefs, and equity with the intent to improve and enhance practice while facilitating authentic and positive teacher-student relationships.

The PLC engaged teachers in reflective practices in an attempt to promote positive relationships through cultural care and inviting practices while intentionally promoting and
maintaining positive mindsets framed by elements of IE (intentionality, care, respect, optimism, and trust [I-CORT]). The small-group collaborative shared in decision making in professional development (PD) sessions conducted in the PLC. This format and process is recommended in research studies that examined and illustrated the benefits of PD conducted in collaborative learning communities to build teacher capacity and leadership and promote student achievement (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b; Hynds et al., 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012).

This strategic project is based on the premise that, when teachers implement interventions based on IE to create a caring learning environment, their efforts must be executed through a culturally relevant or responsive lens. To do this, a theory of cultural care was developed. When educators intentionally use interventions based on cultural care and inviting practices to create a positive learning environment, they facilitate positive teacher-student relationships and build teacher capacity that expands benefits to multiple areas of learning environments.

A classroom climate that is optimal for learning is inviting and generates an atmosphere of care and trust (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2012; Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2016). Prominent scholar and founder of invitational theory William Purkey argued that it is essential that teachers invite students into learning through actions that convey intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (Comer, 1984; Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2012; Lee, 2012; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Aspy, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016; Schmidt, 2007). The way in which caring teachers approach their students has been described as a “facilitated relationship” (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 157).

Participants in this study chose to be a part of the collaborative action for improvement. When teachers work collaboratively in the structured networks, ideas and practices to develop
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solutions to complex problems unfold (Bryk et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015). In conjunction with establishing a productive learning environment based on invitational education, this action research offers practical suggestions regarding the process of implementing interventions based on cultural care and inviting practices to promote efficacy, ultimately addressing academic disparities between White students and students of color.

This study examined teacher perspectives to improve and enhance practice to provide an equitable education familiarly described as a culturally relevant education (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2006a, 2009) that will address students’ lives, maintain academic rigor, and encourage students and educators to view their culture as an asset rather than a barrier (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2006a, 2009; Gay, 2010; Milner, 2007, 2010a, 2010b).

According to Duncan-Andrade (2007), “[Measuring] an equitable education requires greater attention to qualitative evaluation” (p. 618). This study responds to the need for IE to be studied through a lens of culture and diversity (Pajares, 2001; Schmidt, 2004) and it includes teacher voice as part of improvement science and qualitative action research. The strategic project attends to the voids in educational research that have the potential to influence teacher practice positively and, ultimately, student success and achievement when and if addressed.

Strategic Project as a Matter of Social Justice

In this section I discuss historic and current education inequities and attempts to address the right to a quality education through policy. Then I provide evidence and build support for addressing the problem of practice as a matter of social justice.
Historic and Current Inequities in Education

Inequitable economic and human resources, poor building conditions (Gorski, 2013; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Kozol, 1991; Levin et al., 2006; Noguera, 2003; Peguero & Shaffer, 2015; Tatum, 1997), disproportionate graduation rates (Gorski, 2013; Levin et al., 2006; Noguera, 2003; Peguero & Shaffer, 2015), lower rates of enrollment in college preparatory classes, and higher discipline rates (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016) are matters of social justice. Connections between attainment in education have been correlated with quality of life and contributions to society (Gorski, 2013; Levin et al., 2006; Noguera, 2003). When considering that inequities are often amplified in urban school districts through higher rates of poverty, systematic and economic barriers, lack of resources, and higher teacher attrition rates (Goldring, Gray, Bitterman, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015), it is essential that attention be given to interventions and practices that have been demonstrated to be successful in the intended context.

Levin et al. (2016) investigated the costs and benefits of increasing graduation rates. They identified the five most successful interventions for increasing graduation rates and compared the costs of the interventions with the economic contributions that graduates would yield. They reported that high school graduation rates can be correlated with higher incomes, better health, lower government dependent assistance, and overall quality of life. Educational investments to address the dropout rate are economically beneficial and socially just (Levin et al., 2016); the benefits far outweigh the costs.

(2007) research. The evidence in those studies showed a strong correlation (d > .40) between self-efficacy and academic performance relative to the role of the teacher who created a positive teacher-student relationship via inviting practice (positive verbal persuasion).

People’s beliefs in their abilities affect the levels of stress and depression that they experience, as well as their motivation, in a threatening or difficult situation (Bandura, 1993; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Many students who have low academic self-efficacy often struggle academically (Bandura, 1977, 1993; Pajares, 2001; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b) and could be perceived as exhibiting behavioral difficulties (Hyland, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Steele, 1997). Students who feel anxious or threatened by being called upon to answer without knowing the answer, often use coping or avoidance behaviors. Off-task and avoidance behaviors can be perceived as disrespect, defiance, or lack of effort and result in disciplinary action (Bandura 1977, 2001; Milner, 2015; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noguera, 2003).

Based on the disproportionality in academic achievement (which could reasonably be deduced to relate to self-efficacy), discipline rates, graduation rates, poverty (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noguera, 2003; University of Pittsburgh Center on Race and Social Problems [CRSP], 2015; University of Pittsburgh Center for Urban Education [CUE], 2016) and the concept of the school-(or crib)-to-prison pipeline (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2008; CUE, 2016), it is imperative that educators gain an understanding of avoidance behaviors and consider looking beyond behaviors to discover root causes of those behaviors. It is a matter of social justice if educators do not examine inviting practices through the lens of cultural care to change teachers’ dispositions and discourse regarding race from a strengths-based approach to improve practice, strengthen policy, and produce life trajectories that are truly equitable and socially just.
To summarize, the reports from the cited scholarly works have important consequences for conducting research on interventions that promote student social and academic achievement. Evidence to support this claim can be found in a secondary finding in the Usher and Pajares (2006) study, which drew attention to the possible association between self-efficacy and CRP. Usher and Pajares (2006) assessed race as a variable. The researchers briefly mentioned CRP and offered a recommendation for future research to examine the correlations between the two theories.

**Educational Policy, Critical Race, and Cultural Relevance**

Inequities in education policy and procedures are exposed in data showing the disproportionality between students of color and Caucasian students, especially policies and procedures related to discipline (Milner, 2016). The social justice impact is evident through the theorized school-to-prison pipeline (ACLU, 2008). The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the policies and practices that push America’s school children, especially at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2008; Milner, 2016).

Disproportionality in discipline rates is highlighted in Milner’s (2016) essay, “Disrupting Dangerous Narratives in Early Childhood Education: Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor,” in which Milner discussed statistics regarding race and discipline reported by the U.S. Department of Education. According to the report, racial differences play a role in early childhood settings in how children are socialized, disciplined, and evaluated in classrooms and informal settings (Milner, 2016; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). For example, disproportionality in discipline between Black and White children starts as early as Pre-Kindergarten, with African American students comprising 48% of those suspended more than once, even though African Americans are only 18% of that population (Milner, 2016; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and
Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). Many educational scholars link the statistics on disciplinary data to the school- (or crib)-to-prison pipeline. The pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education (ACLU, 2008).

The shift in policy to using a strengths-based approach to provide access to an equitable education is evident in the 2015 national policy Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law by President Obama. The policy includes action to build on assets and indicators of successes of existing programs, and interventions that have been demonstrated to be successful are emerging on multiple levels of governance (local, state, and district) as part of ESSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Critical race theory.** Policies and statutes (laws) are often created, reviewed, and enacted in an attempt to address social issues and public concerns (Fowler, 2014). Fowler (2014) pointed out that laws differ from policy in that they are often created but never enforced and often remain intact for the appeasement of select parties. This opinion is shared by many critical race theorists, who contend that statutes—laws enacted by the legislative powers—are often created to appease the dominant society (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Fowler, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theorists frequently refer to the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* as a prime example, claiming that the anti-segregation laws in education were created to improve foreign policy relationships in the United States, benefiting the White majority and only secondarily appeasing Black interests (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Bell (1980, 1995) referred to this practice as *interest convergence*.

**National-level policy.** More than 10 years after the anti-segregation law based on *Brown* was passed, the U.S. Department of Education was charged by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 to ensure that “poor and minority children” (p. 1) would receive a high-quality education (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015).
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Subsequent educational policy reforms such as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and ESSA legislated equal opportunity for students, especially those who were economically disadvantaged. NCLB was met with great criticism due to the extensive amount of standardized testing required and the punitive nature associated with failure to meet specified requirements (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Rose & Corwin, 2015). However, the continued disproportionality in test scores between students of color and their White peers made the absence of “equality” unmistakable (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). This absence of equality is commonly referred to as the *achievement gap*.

**State-level policy.** The PDE (2015) developed a theory of action to address educational inequities as a matter of social justice and to ensure access to excellent and highly qualified teachers. This was done to fulfill requirements established by ESSA (PDE, 2015). In an attempt to narrow equity gaps between poor and minority students and their more advantaged counterparts, the ESSA ensured that students had access to high-quality educators and invested in interventions shown to be successful in promoting student outcomes and achievement (PDE, 2015).

This research study follows recommendations for educational policy set forth at the state and national levels. The study addresses teacher practice and inequities as matters of social justice. In addition, the inquiry examines effective interventions that involve building positive relationships that can be achieved by giving attention to race and culture through cultural care.

**Terms and Definitions**

*Achievement gap:* The U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2006) defined *achievement gap* as the “difference between average scores for Black students and average scores for White students” (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin, Anderson, & Rahaman, 2009, p. 4)
and reported that “although scores have increased for both Black students and White students on average, Black students do not perform as well as their White peers” (p. 1).

*Critical race theory* (CRT): A theory espoused by activists and scholars who are interested in improving relationships among, race, racism, and power, much like the mission of civil rights and ethnic studies but using a broader lens to include “economics, history, context, group and self-interest, feelings, and the unconscious” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3).

*Cultural capital:* Assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) first discussed *cultural* in terms of *capital*, where culture is viewed from a perspective of having value. In this dissertation, the term *cultural capital* refers to culture being seen as having value in terms of unique belief systems, language, dialect, dress, rituals, and customs.

*Cultural care:* Verbal or nonverbal gestures that displays a person’s genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. Cultural care must include respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strength-based perspective.

*Culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy* (CRP): Using Ladson-Billings’s (1995a) and Gay’s (2010) general theories, the terms refer to the educational practices and resources that reflect the culture, values, customs, and beliefs of students (i.e., they help to connect what is to be learned with the students’ own lives). These terms are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

*Culturally responsive care:* Pedagogical practice that incorporates pedagogy based on cultural relevance and responsiveness but encompasses a combination of concern, compassion,
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commitment, responsibility, and action. Teachers who use culturally responsive caring recognize, respect, and value students as individuals and validate their importance with genuine appreciation (Gay, 2010).

*Interest convergence theory*: The theory and principle by critical race theorist Derrick Bell that held that equity for African Americans is achieved only when goals are consistent with the needs of and benefit the dominant society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

*Other mothering*: Culturally relevant pedagogy, as part of practice, that incorporates a sense of community, often using techniques in which teachers are viewed and act as extended family (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006).

*Persons of color*: Term used to describe people who are of non-Caucasian or non-European descent.

*Professional learning community* (PLC): A collaborative approach to professional development over an extended period of time that, when successful, promotes growth in knowledge, practice, and beliefs with the goal of improving student learning outcomes (Owen, 2015).

*School climate*: Conditions of the learning environment that are based on “patterns of peoples’ experiences of school life and reflect the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (Cohen & Geier, 2010, p. 1).

*School-to-prison pipeline*: Policies and practices that push the nation’s school children, especially the most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education (ACLU, 2008).
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Self-concept: The holistic and composite view of one’s self formed and influenced by interactions with significant others across multiple environments (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Self-efficacy: One’s own judgment of capability, which has a powerful influence on one’s motivation, achievement, avoidance behaviors, and self-regulation (Bandura, 1977).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

In this section I describe the theoretical frameworks used in this research study. Discussed in order, they are IE, self-efficacy theory, CRT, and CRP.

Invitational Theory in Education

IE is a theory of practice designed to create a completely positive school environment (Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016). IE was first intended to “develop or improve human environments that encourage and motivate people to realize their potential” (Purkey & Novak, 2016, p. vii). The theory addresses the overall climate of learning environments through three phases, each phase encompassing four steps (Pajares, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016; Usher & Pajares, 2006). IE can be described as a collection of assumptions based on social cognitive theory and a democratic ethos (Purkey, 1992) that seeks to explain phenomena and provide a means to invite people purposefully by intentionally encouraging them to realize their unlimited potential in all aspects in life (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Embedded in IE are the elements of “intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust” (Purkey & Novak, 2016, p. 14) that can be linked to characteristics of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) and CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Embedded in the theoretical foundations of IE are elements of self-efficacy theory. Bandura’s (1977, 1993) seminal work on self-efficacy speaks to the strong influence of inviting practices on academia and student achievement. Bandura defined perceived self-
efficacy as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993; Bandura et al., 1996; Pajares 1994, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Schunk, 1991; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Research has shown that people’s beliefs about their capabilities were more predictive of their academic achievement than their actual ability (Bandura et al., 1996; Pajares 1994, 1996, 2001; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Schunk, 1991; Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Critical Race Theory

Origins of CRT can be traced back to the 1970s, when legal scholars across the United States took issue and began to voice publicly their discontent with the perceived stalling of progress in civil rights litigation (Bell, 1980, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2009). Civil rights lawyer and the first African American tenured law professor Derrick Bell, one of the most well-known founding fathers of CRT, in collaboration with David Trubek and Kimberlé Crenshaw, initiated the movement in public condemnation (Taylor, 2009) of laws that permitted racism, bias, and economic oppression. From this movement grew a progressive ideology known as CRT (Bell, 1980, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor 2009). CRT has spread to other subgroups (“Latino-crits,” “queer-crits”) and disciplines, including education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Basic tenets of CRT are that (a) racism is ordinary and normal, and difficult to address because there is denial of existence by the dominant culture (colorblind perspective); (b) interest convergence, where change is based only on benefit to the dominant society; (c) social construction; (d) differential racialization, creating the image of race or culture that is primarily
negative because it differs from the norm; (e) intersectionality; and (f) the unique narrative of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**Culturally Relevant or Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Seminal work by Ladson-Billings (1995a) examined the practices of successful teachers of African American children. Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) identified three tenets of CRP: (a) academic achievement, (b) cultural competence, and (c) sociopolitical critique (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Thus, CRP had entered educational discourse.

Gay’s (2010) culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 31)

Both culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies are theories of practice (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010) and the terms are used interchangeably based on the discourse of the research in which it is cited.

**Research Question**

The research that guided this study was, *How do teachers perceive the influences of cultural care and inviting practices on their relationships with students of color?*

**Relevant Literature**

**Invitational Education**

IE offers a framework to begin the process of creating or enhancing a positive, inviting learning environment while fostering educational resilience and achievement. This is particularly important in urban settings, which often face added obstacles of inequity, such as
poverty, lack of resources, and high teacher attrition rates (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004; Gorski, 2013; Karpinski, 2012; Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013). IE is intended to capitalize on the strengths of the learning environment and evaluate domains that need improvement. This is accomplished through inviting practices.

The theories and practices of culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies have an underlying characteristic, which is authenticated through caring relationships. Gay (2010) suggested that culturally responsive caring is not just an essential part of CRP but that it goes beyond the act of practice. Gay (2010) described teachers who care for students as those who honor humanity, hold their students in high esteem and to high expectations, and implement strategies to meet those expectations. Simply put, “failure is not an option” (Gay, 2010, p. 49), and students reciprocate by fulfilling those expectations socially, morally, and academically.

In brief, Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 2009) critical research showed that teachers who implemented CRP created an environment of warmth where students thrived on positive attention, ultimately wanting and working toward educational success and excellence. Ladson-Billings (2009) highlighted the importance of the “simple acts of human kindness” (p. 73) with regard to fostering personal connections between teachers and their students, despite differences in race, culture, or religion.

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

CRT emerged in education through questioning the sincerity and vocalization of shortcomings of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation in education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). Educational critical race theorists began to examine the theory in terms of equality education with extreme apprehension
for fear of jeopardizing their careers and the hostility with which it was met outside of critical friends (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

The term equality is used to promote “sameness” in educational settings (Bell, 1980, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate 1997; Taylor, 2009). Ladson Billings (1998) explained that discussion of the idea of equity in education with the indication of sameness can apply only if “students are exactly the same” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 36, emphasis in original). Gorski (2013) distinguished equity from equality in that equity is carried out in fairness versus sameness. At New York University’s Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality Summer 2016 session entitled “Unleashing the Power of Culturally Responsive Education in the 21st Century,” Duncan-Andrade spoke on equity and equality. He described equity as “getting what you need, when you need it” (Jeffery Duncan-Andrade, personal communication, May 20, 2016). Conversely, to eradicate the idea of colorblind education and “sameness” and provide an enhanced perspective of socially just education, educators must respect and embrace culture, build competence, progress beyond equality, and move toward equity.

CRT suggests that current instructional practices are commonly held from a deficit perspective for African American students. As a result, educators continuously seek “remediation” for “at-risk” students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, recent contributions to empirical research that refutes a deficit perspective and highlights effective teachers of African American students (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010) is emerging through the theoretical framework of CRP.
Methodology

Data Collection

In this section I describe the multiple data sources, followed by details of data collection for this qualitative PAR study.

Data sources included my notes, as well as participants’ and any designated or voluntary recorder’s (note taker’s) information, agendas, artifacts, and information obtained via informal and formal pre- and post-semistructured interviews.

**Researcher’s and participants’ notes.** My notes as the participant researcher and participants’ notes were used as qualitative data to describe teacher perspectives relevant activities and topics related to events carried out in the PLC, culture of the learning environment, and overall school climate. Additional qualitative evidence was collected through a deliberate democratic approach (Shank & Brown, 2013; Shank, Brown, & Pringle, 2014) within a PLC focusing on topics of care, equity, and best practices, with an emphasis on education using the IE I-CORT elements as a guiding principle. My notes included reflections, questions, and information about next steps.

**Recorder’s notes and agendas.** Hand-written or digitally written (typed) notes taken by a designated or volunteer recorder (note taker) at meetings, events, and PD sessions (including PLC meetings) were copied, collected, and transcribed (when appropriate). The notes were reviewed and examined for common threads or themes.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts were collected and kept in my personal binder. Artifacts included notes from school-related events (parent-teacher, parent-student community council [PSCC], and committee meetings) or items for, or as a result of, activities conducted in or resulting from interventions conducted in the PD sessions and workshops. Materials (PowerPoint
presentations, video presentations, and handouts) were kept as electronic and hard copies (if available). Outlined events were recorded in a table (Appendix A).

**Semistructured interviews.** Semistructured interviews elicited data from participants and offered flexibility with questions, opportunity for clarification, and deep understanding (Merriam, 2002, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Interview process.** Each participant was interviewed in a pre-post semistructured interview process (Appendix B). The purpose of the pre-intervention interviews was to remind the participants of the purpose of the study and to obtain personal and professional background knowledge involving CRP and cultural care of the participants. The qualitative data also provided a baseline for participants’ reflections on any changes in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), their teacher-student relationships, and the climate of the learning environment. This engaged the participants as part of the planning in the intervention process.

Post-intervention interviews were conducted to obtain perspectives on the influence of the interventions after 7 weeks of formal implementation and after a semester of participation in the PLC. All interviews were conducted either at the school or at locations that were convenient to the participants. The participants were asked a series of open- and close-ended questions, allowing for immediate clarification and elaboration. The responses were recorded using the voice recorder application on an Apple© (iPhone) device. The recorded responses were then uploaded to my computer for analysis, transcribed, and coded for common themes. In addition, I recorded handwritten and typed notes as anecdotal records that were examined for emergent themes.

**Interview questions.** The semistructured interview questions began with pre-intervention interview by asking participants to describe their backgrounds in education, collegiate and professional development experiences, and familiarity with and knowledge of
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CRP. Also, prior to the intervention, participants were asked to share their perspectives on care as part of practice. During the interviews, the questions were open-ended to allow for detail and clarification with probes and follow-up questions as needed (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Context

Freedom Elementary School (pseudonym), an urban elementary school part of the Lower Western Pennsylvania School District (LWP; pseudonym), is a Spanish magnet school with 429 students. Students are from all neighborhoods within an urban area in Pennsylvania. All students are provided transportation to and from school by the district. Students who attend Freedom Elementary are selected through an application and lottery system. Student demographics are 71% African American, 15% Caucasian, 8% multiracial, 3% Asian, and 3% Hispanic (LWP, Who We Are, 2016).

Freedom Elementary houses three classes at each grade level. Teaching experience at Freedom Elementary ranges from 1 to 27 years of full-time teaching. At the start of this study, the school employed one male administrator of Caucasian descent. However, at the time of completion of the study, that administrator had resigned and had been replaced by a female principal, also of European descent. Freedom has one counselor who identifies as African American, three paraprofessionals, two full-time learning support teachers, and a primary (Grades K–2) autistic support classroom teacher. Staff demographics (Appendix C) are 54% White (Caucasian), 35% African American, and 11% Hispanic-Latino. Teacher demographics are 72% female and 28% male. Of the female teachers, 67% identified as White, 17% as African American, and 17% as Hispanic-Latina. Fifty percent of the male teachers identified as White or of European descent, 33% as African American, and 17% as Hispanic-Latino. The office staff consists of one full-time administrative assistant and one student data support staff.
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member, who is shared between two buildings with an alternating schedule of 2.5 days per week on average.

Data from previous years’ Teaching and Learning Conditions survey (TLC) indicated that fewer than half (43%) of the teachers and staff agreed that Freedom Elementary was a good place to work. Data showed a decline in student performance levels, an increase in absenteeism, and declines in teacher, parent, and staff satisfaction over a 3-consecutive-year time span (A+ Schools, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Data Analysis

Artifacts, interviews, and researcher observations were simultaneously examined for common themes to allow for adjustments, analysis, and further collection. I used a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to analyze data that involved inductive and comparative procedures to acquire conceptual elements of theory and generate findings (Glaser, 1965). The constant comparative method approach to data analysis allows flexibility and assists with development of theory (Glaser, 1965, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used an open coding system to identify, analyze, and examine emerging themes and discoveries (Glaser, 2008; Khandkar, 2009; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidel, 1998).

Researcher Identity: The Role of the Researcher

Milner (2007) discussed researcher positionality and introduced a framework “to guide any research into racial and cultural awareness” (p. 388). Milner (2007, 2015) argued against researchers detaching themselves from the research process. To contribute to the dialogue, empower researchers, and ensure researcher accountability to people and communities related to the research, Milner (2007, 2015) suggested that researchers engage in self-reflection to gain awareness and critical consciousness. This section describes my personal and professional
positionality in the context of the role of a researcher conducting a study that addressed race and culture.

**Personally.** I was raised in a predominantly White community approximately 60 miles north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, until I graduated from high school in 1990. Although there was a stark absence of diversity, the importance of and appreciation for culture was always an integral part of my upbringing. I attribute this to the perspectives, beliefs, and experiences of my mother, who was not openly gay until I was in my late 20s; my father, who was the youngest of eight children who lived in extreme poverty; and my grandmother, a first-generation Italian American who was given up for adoption at the age of 2 years. She shared her experiences of the uncongenial treatment of her parents, who were Italian immigrants, upon their arrival in America in the late 1800s. My family’s perspectives on acceptance and matters of prejudice, race, and diversity led to my journey to become an educational leader for social justice. Having built a solid understanding of cultural competence through personal and professional experiences, I believe that my background offers a unique understanding and multifaceted perspective based on my intersectionality.

Beyond a simple appreciation for diversity and relatively liberal perspective, my perspectives, values, and ideology have been shaped through my experiences of working nearly 20 years with diverse populations, and even more critically, when I became a mother to my three biracial sons. I am agonizingly familiar with nuances associated with passive prejudice and microaggressions inside and outside of the classroom. My “experiential knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21) has driven, motivated, and facilitated my research involving cultural care and inviting practices with the hope of improving practice and positively influencing student success.
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As a 45-year-old Italian American married for 14 years to my husband, Eric, an African American, I have witnessed frequent discriminatory treatment, microaggressions, and stereotyping that persons of color experience on a daily basis. Painful and common occurrences include being followed through retail stores; passive-aggressive, derogatory, and insensitive comments; whispers in paranoia; and numerous incidents of intentionally being avoided, ignored, or overlooked. I must acknowledge and emphasize that by societal standards I am labeled White; with that comes an understood and acknowledged privilege. Because of this privilege, I will never know exactly what it means to navigate as a person of color or experience the deep-seated and painful reminders of inequities. However, my perspectives, narrative, and experiential knowledge as a mother, wife, and teacher are unique to critical conversations about race and equity.

My professional and personal understandings of race, multiculturalism, and pluralism, combined with a strong professional knowledge of teaching and learning environments, have collectively heightened my awareness of (a) race as defined by societal standards, (b) the importance of building trusting relationships, and (c) cultural care. This narrative has offered a unique perspective and facilitated focusing my research through inviting practices, using IE with a lens focused on cultural care, and examining overall student self-efficacy and potential impacts on student achievement.

Professionally. As a veteran teacher in an urban district, I have held numerous leadership roles while maintaining my position as a regular education classroom instructor. As an urban educator, I have learned that developing positive teacher, student, and family relationships, based on trust and care, is necessary to foster a positive and thriving learning environment that produces positive student outcomes. Children have a unique ability to sense a teacher’s likes, dislikes, uncertainty, or genuine care. When students feel disrespected,
unappreciated, or invalidated, they decline socially, behaviorally, and academically. Often mentioned in regular teacher discussions is that “kids know and can sense when you like them and when you don’t.” Purkey and Novak (2016) alluded to this idea when they argued that “students are keenly aware of the nuances in messages they receive in schools” (p. 31).

A grant received through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded educational reform efforts that addressed the conditions of the learning environment as a strategic priority in the LWP (LWP, 2013). Bearing in mind the implications and impact of school culture and climate on student performance, the LWP developed a survey to assess the teaching and learning conditions and provide data for district and school wide improvement (LWP, 2013). Through the collaborative effort of the LWP teachers’ union, the school district created the TLC Survey (LWP, 2013). The TLC is a Likert-type scale survey rating eight constructs with multiple categorical items related to the construct. According to LWP (n.d.), each construct is linked to student achievement and teacher retention. The constructs are Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Professional Development, Instructional Practices and Support, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, and School Leadership (LWP, Discover LWP: Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey, n.d.). This survey is conducted to help educators to recognize strengths, to identify areas in need of improvement, and to set school-wide improvement goals through the formal process of the school improvement plan (SIP).

Results of the TLC Survey (Appendix D) showed a dramatic drop in the overall conditions of the learning environment at Freedom Elementary in the past 3 years. During the 2014-2015 academic year, of 149 items measured under the eight constructs, 140 (94%) showed a decline in favorability. The two constructs that showed the starkest decline in satisfaction were managing student behavior and school leadership (Appendix D. The results
of one section related specifically to the overall school climate at Freedom Elementary and showed the urgency with which a positive learning environment is needed. Question 10.6 related to the perception of Freedom Elementary as an overall good place to work; the results showed that fewer than half of the staff agreed that Freedom is a good place to work, a 33% decline in favorability from the previous year. One can deduce from the literature concerning efficacy, cultural relevance, and school climate that dissatisfaction in the learning environment is an unacceptable result and has a correlational effect on student learning, achievement, and overall well-being.
According to the National School Climate Center (2012), school climate has a powerful influence on the lives of teachers, staff, students, and families. Research shows that the social-emotional conditions of the learning environment can be correlated with levels in teacher capacity, attrition rates, social-emotional health, student engagement, success and achievement, graduation rates, and risk prevention (Cohen, 2010; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 2003). The impacts of school climate can determine social, emotional, and academic successes or failures; it is now considered an important factor in successful school reform programs (A+ Schools, 2014, 2015, 2016; Cohen, 2006, 2010; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Kane & Cantrell, 2010; Markow et al., 2013; National School Climate Center, 2012).

The 2016 Presidential election has brought great attention to politics in education and its influence on the climate of the learning environment. The SPLC, a nonpartisan civil rights organization dedicated to fighting for social justice and against intolerance (Costello, 2016a) conducted a convenience survey of approximately 2,000 K–12 teachers in the United States regarding the influence of the Presidential campaign on the nation’s schools. The results illustrated how the current hostile sociopolitical tone of the United States has spilled over into classrooms, referring to the impact as the “Trump Effect” (Costello, 2016a).

Highlights of SPLC’s report indicated that 67% of students, mainly immigrants and students of color (even though they were American-born citizens), expressed uncertainty and distress concerning the results of the election, fearing what might happen to their family (Costello, 2016a, 2016b). More than half of the respondent teachers reported seeing an increase in hostility and “uncivil political discourse” (Costello, 2016a, p. 4) among students, which has affected teacher practice. According to the study, the election has had a “profoundly
negative effect on children and classrooms; producing an alarming level of fear and anxiety among children, and inflaming racial and ethnic tensions in the classroom” (Costello, 2016a, p. 4). Based on previously cited research, it can be reasonably inferred that the negative effects are also affecting student successes and the social-emotional conditions of those who operate in the learning environment.

Culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogies are positively associated with student success (Delpit, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2010). Similarly, abundant research demonstrates the association of self-efficacy with academic performance and student achievement (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993, 2001; Bandura et al., 1996; Pajares, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Schunk, 1991; Schunk & Gunn, 1986). The same can be said for research and literature about IE, creating a positive learning environment, and motivating student performance (Lee, 2012; Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Aspy, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2016; Schmidt, 2007). To summarize, the extensive amount of existing research substantiates the theoretical frameworks that guided this study.

First, the literature review demonstrates the interconnected elements and characteristics of IE and (a) CRP, (b) positive teacher-student relationships, and (c) self-efficacy. In the next section, the review provides a historical framework of CRT that leads to CRP. Then, the review addresses PD to discuss the format, benefits, and processes of building teacher capacity. The chapter concludes with examination of the relevant research involving care to draw attention to the significance of care as a part of teacher practice and its connection to CRP theories, including the researcher-defined theory of cultural care. In the conclusion of the literature review, key aspects related to this study and the theoretical frameworks are described in detail; they are introduced and defined below.
Definitions and Terms

According to the Center for Emotional Education (now known as the School Climate Center), school climate “is based on patterns of peoples’ experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (Cohen & Grier, 2010, p. 1).

Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) urban-centric classification system, the term urban describes a densely developed area in a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2006). Although that definition is described in terms of population, the term urban is used as a stand-in for high poverty and communities of color (Beachum, White, FitzGerald, & Austin, 2013).

Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 2009) and Gay’s (2010) CRP theories refer to the educational practices and resources that reflect the culture, values, customs, and beliefs of students (i.e., help to connect what is to be learned with the students’ lives).

Culturally responsive care is framed by the pedagogical theory that incorporates practices based on cultural responsiveness but encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action (Gay, 2010). Teachers who use culturally responsive caring recognize, respect, and value students as individuals and validate their importance with genuine appreciation (Gay, 2010). Gay (2010) dedicated a chapter to this area, which is explained in depth further in the literature review. Noddings (2012) defined care in terms of a relationship formed by the mutual and bilateral exchanges between the cared for and the carer. According to Noddings (2012), care is determined by the relationship between the carer and the cared for but does not give attention to race or culture as part of the definition. Lewis et al. (2012) defined caring as “the ability to listen to, empathize with, and
be moved by the plight or feelings of the other person” (p. 3). Drawing from these definitions, I use the term *cultural care* in this study.

*Cultural care* is defined as a gesture that displays a genuine interest for a person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. The term *cultural care* also includes respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective.

IE addresses the overall condition of learning environments through three phases, with each phase encompassing four steps (Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2016; Usher & Pajares, 2006). As described by Purkey and Novak (2016), the foundation of IE is based on democratic ethos, the perceptual tradition, and self-concept theory. Embedded in the theory are what seminal researchers refer to as *elements* (Pajares, 2001; Purkey & Novak, 2016). Elements describe the key characteristics of IE that are most relatable to the formation and continuous exchanges that shape relationships between individuals. The elements described in Figure 1 are (a) intentionally inviting, (b) care, (c) optimism, (d) trust, and (e) respect (I-CORT; Purkey & Novak, 2016). The elements can be characterized as part self-efficacy development and similar to traits described in CRP (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2009, 2014; Milner 2010a, 2015). Each theory of practice offers a solid foundation that contributes to academic, behavioral, social, and emotional growth.
Invitational Education: Foundations of Invitational Theory

In this section I first discuss the interconnectedness between IE and cultural responsiveness. This is followed by a discussion of literature related to the formation of relationships. Next, literature involving the interrelated tenets between IE and self-efficacy is reviewed. Following is a call to action for utilizing IE to address matters of inequity, race, and culture in educational research. Last, I discuss the scholarly research involving the implications of IE.

The Interconnectedness of IE and Cultural Responsiveness

IE offers a framework to begin the process of creating or enhancing a positive, inviting learning environment while fostering educational resilience and achievement. This is
particularly important in urban settings that often face obstacles such as inequities in funds and resources, poverty, lack of resources, and high teacher attrition rates (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gomez et al., 2004; Gorski, 2013; Karpinski, 2012; Kozol, 1991; Markow et al., 2013). IE is intended to capitalize on the strengths of the learning environment and evaluate domains needing improvement. This is accomplished through inviting practices.

Much like IE, in culturally relevant teaching, social interactions in the learning environment foster positive teacher-student relationships through “honoring the students’ sense of belonging” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 82) and promoting self-worth through a sense of psychological safety where students feel comfortable and supported (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 79) while being held to high standards of excellence (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Gay, 2010; Milner, 2010a, 2010b). Genuine care is an underlying characteristic of CRP.

Gay (2010) described culturally responsive caring as an engaging practice that positively affects one’s well-being. Caring is not just an essential part of CRP; it is also a part of the educational process (Gay, 2010). Caring goes beyond merely caring about the personal well-being of students; culturally responsive care, manifested in teacher dispositions, encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action while recognizing and honoring race and culture (Gay, 2010). Gay suggested that teachers who use culturally responsive care recognize, respect, and value students as individuals and validate their importance with genuine appreciation. Again, all key characteristics align with the components of IE, specifically care, respect, and trust.

The influential work by Delpit (2006) initiated discussions about race in the classroom. Close to the same time, seminal work by Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2009) emerged that examined the practices of successful teachers of African American children. The term CRP had entered educational discourse. Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) theorized and identified
three tenets of CRP: (a) academic achievement, (b) cultural competence, and (c) sociopolitical critique (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2006b, 2009). Teachers who implemented CRP successfully created an environment of warmth where students thrived on positive attention, ultimately “choosing academic excellence” (p. 161). Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2006a, 2006b, 2009) reported that effective teachers of African American students set high academic standards of excellence instead of viewing students from a deficit perspective, which demanded, reinforced, and produced success.

Ladson-Billings (2009) highlighted the importance of simple acts of human kindness that foster personal connections between teachers and their students, despite differences in race, culture, or religion. Students’ rationale for enjoying class was “the teacher” (p. 73). When asked, “What do you like about the teacher?” they responded, “She listens to us! She respects us!” and powerfully stated, “She lets us express ourselves” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 73). Smiling, listening, and speaking to students outside of class were modest gestures that solidified the positive relationships between teachers and their students.

Self-efficacy beliefs, as defined by Pajares (1994), are “people’s judgments of their capabilities to accomplish specific tasks” (n.p). Efficacy beliefs influence and help to explain why behavior may differ from knowledge and skill (Pajares, 1994). Pajares’s (1994) research directly linked IE and self-efficacy in a study that explored self-efficacy development through verbal persuasions and the verbal messages that students receive from others; the study also examined the evolution of students’ perceived efficacy beliefs about their writing competencies.

Hobbs (1983) provided strong support for using IE to build strong relationships. Hobbs (1983), past president of the American Psychological Association (APA), described the origins of the nationwide Re-ED program and the 8-year research pilot project’s goal to reeducate
emotionally disturbed children. The program began with a collaboration of psychologists and educators and evolved to include children, families, schools, and communities (Hobbs, 1983). Hobbs explained that education, from the beginning, was a central approach because research and experience have shown the critical importance of academic competence in the adjustment of children and youth (Hobbs, 1983, p. 15). This approach was based on educational, psychological, and ecological strategies. Hobbs (1983) conveyed that the same procedures can be used in public schools to promote success and elaborated on the program’s principles that underlay the psychological and educational strategies, or ways of working with children.

Bandura (1997) discussed invitations as the possible source of self-efficacy in the context of social cognitive theory, which is a foundation upon which IE is built (Purkey, 1992). However, when performing a scholarly search, only a few research studies could be found that directly connected the two principles of IE and student self-efficacy (Arslan, 2012; Pajares, 1994, 2001; Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Lee (2012) confirmed the long-term benefits of using IE (graduating from high school, conflict resolution skills, thriving adult lives), particularly for students in urban public schools where there is a high rate of poverty. Highlighting the results from the original Kauai longitudinal study of at-risk youth in Hawaii by Werner and Smith, Lee (2012) argued that IE should be considered as a framework to change the culture, in terms of the educational climate, in public schools.

**Establishing Relationships**

The presence of an influential adult and a positive teacher-student relationship has been shown to have significant impacts on the trajectories of students. The primary findings of the Kauai longitudinal study conducted with multiracial children exposed to serious risk factors such as poverty, parents with mental health issues, and disruptions to their family units showed
the importance of influential adults for children (Lee, 2012; Werner, 1993). Werner and co-researcher Smith examined resiliency in children who coped with such risk factors without intervention (Werner, 1993). Resiliency was described in terms of overcoming adversity, which includes poverty, racial discrimination, community violence, and disruption in the family unit (Downey, 2008; Lee, 2012; Werner, 1993). The researchers found that many resilient children had formed a close relationship with a nurturing adult other than parent or family member (Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). The study reported that both boys and girls who were considered to be at risk had established a bond with a teacher who became a role model and form of support (Werner, 1993).

Lee (2012) connected IE and resiliency development with the Werner and Smith (1993) Kauai study by providing evidence that using IE offered opportunities that resulted in positive outcomes. The Kauai resilience study offered evidence that, despite personal challenges, at-risk children who had the presence of an influential teacher forming strong bonds and relationships with them experienced positive outcomes in early adulthood (Lee, 2012, p. 47). The outcomes included graduation from high school, long-term employment, and successful conflict resolution skills (Lee, 2012; Werner, 1993). These findings suggested that developing resiliency via personal connections and positive relationships with teachers who were inviting provided the “necessary protective factors to overcome adversity” (Lee, 2012, p. 47). Lee (2012) confirmed the significance of the I-CORT elements in IE and described how they are rooted in the context of the study conducted by Werner and Smith.

Although Werner and Smith (1992) discussed the importance of an influential adult primarily during adolescence, Platz and Arellano (2011) outlined research literature and time-tested theories dating back as far as the 1700s that demonstrated the importance of an influential adult in early childhood education. Pestalozzi (1801), Dewey (1900, 1901), and
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Froebel, the “Father of Kindergarten” (1904), conducted research that provided evidence to support the importance of forming relationships during early childhood education (as cited in Platz & Arellano, 2011). The results strengthen the argument to apply the elements of IE (I-CORT) during the earliest stages of a child’s education.

The context of Hobbs’s (1983) project provides strong support for using IE to build strong relationships. Hobbs (1983) described the origins of the nationwide Re-ED program and the 8-year research pilot project’s goal to reeducate emotionally disturbed children. The program began with collaboration by psychologists and educators and evolved to include children, families, schools, and communities (Foltz, 2011; Hobbs, 1982). Hobbs explained that “education, from the beginning, is a central approach because research and experience have shown the critical importance of academic competence in the adjustment of children and youth” (p. 15). This approach is based on educational, psychological, and ecological strategies (Foltz, 2011). The same procedures can be used in public schools to promote success and elaborate on the program’s principles that underlie the psychological and educational strategies, or ways of working with children (Foltz, 2011; Hobbs, 1982).

The program’s principles stressed ideas that include characteristics aligned with the five assumptions of IE and its elements, as well as self-efficacy. They also described the importance of groups and communities, as well as how children should experience some joy each day (Hobbs, 1983). Hobbs reported the idea that people’s feelings should be nurtured and shared (Hobbs, 1983). Congruently, the assumption outlined by Purkey and Novak (2016) is that education is a cooperative, collaborative process where everyone matters and human potential is best realized through encouragement. Directly connected to the element of trust in IE is the principle of trust in Hobbs’s program. Hobbs (1983) wrote that trust between an adult and a child is a foundation upon which all other principles rest. Purkey and Novak (2016) held
that trust is demonstrated through personal characteristics, including honesty, integrity, competency, and authenticity.

A belief correlated with self-efficacy is the aspect of one’s competencies in a given task (Bandura, 1977). Hobbs (1983) reasoned that competence matters and held that children should be helped to become good at something, especially schoolwork. Hobbs contended that caring adults are essential in children’s lives if those children are to “grow strong in body, quick of mind, and generous in spirit” (p. 14).

The connection between CRP and establishing relationships is demonstrated in Milner’s (2010a) study. Using CRP as a framework, Milner examined the cultural competence of one White male science teacher, Mr. Hall. The study in a diverse urban setting focused on one tenet of Ladson-Billings’ (2006b) research: cultural competence. Milner (2010a, 2010b) noted that cultural competence is typically associated with developing a student’s cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2000, 2006a, 2009, 2014) and is typically defined as “the ability to function effectively in one’s culture of origin” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210). Milner (2010a) observed the manner in which the teacher developed his own cultural competence. Milner’s qualitative study determined that one key feature was related to the teacher’s cultural competence: developing relationships. Mr. Hall established relationships with his students and other students in the school based on care, concern, and mutual respect (Milner, 2010a), all of which are fundamental elements of IE (I-CORT).

**Invitational Education and Self-Efficacy**

Extensive research has demonstrated that self-efficacy predicts academic outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993; Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Bandura (1977) argued that students’ self-efficacy beliefs are formed from four sources: (a) verbal persuasion, (b) performance mastery, (c) psychological states, and (d)
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vicarious experiences. Usher and Pajares (2006) conducted a critical study connecting IE to the sources of self-efficacy beliefs held by sixth graders. The results confirmed Bandura’s hypothesis that verbal persuasion, which he considered to be a source of self-efficacy, was a predictor of student self-efficacy in all students (Pajares, 1994, 2001). Subsequently, Usher and Pajares (2006) concluded that the invitations that others send to students about behavior play an important role in student motivation, confidence, and belief in one’s capabilities.

Bandura (1996) found that the most essential self-beliefs are those around which people structure their lives. An international correlational study examining the role of IE in students’ intelligence beliefs was conducted with high school students in Iran (Hossein et al., 2011). Hossein et al. (2011) used Dweck and Leggett’s (1998) description of intelligence beliefs for their study. Intelligence beliefs are a set of beliefs that have an effect on the way in which individuals perceive their successes and failures and on future goals (Hossein et al., 2011). According to Dweck (1975), individuals with inherent intelligence beliefs believe that their traits are constant and can be measured. In contrast, people with increased intelligence beliefs believe that “intelligence can be increased through experience and effort” (as cited in Hossein et al., 2011, p. 4). An aim of the study was to investigate the predictive role of IE and intelligence beliefs and determine the degree of direct and indirect effects on academic performance (Hossein et al., 2011).

To measure inviting teacher behavior, Hossein et al. (2011) administered Amos, Purkey, and Tobias’s (1984) Invitational Teaching Survey in conjunction with the Zabihi Intelligence Beliefs Questionnaire (2005), which measured students’ intelligence beliefs. The Inviting School Survey (ISS) was designed to assess the total school climate and the five environmental factors outlined by IE: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes (Purkey & Novak, 1996, 2008; Purkey & Schmidt, 1990; Smith, 2015), with people being the
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most critical single factor (Smith, 2015). In 2005, Smith revised the original 100-item instrument to become a 50-item online, computer-scored instrument, the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R; Smith, 2015). The ISS-R provides school communities with a user-friendly, theoretically grounded, empirically based instrument to evaluate schools for future development as it identifies areas of strength and weakness in a school’s climate (Smith, 2015).

Using students’ grade point average as an indicator, the results showed direct and indirect correlations between IE and intelligence beliefs (Hossein et al., 2011). Based on these results, Hossein et al. (2011) concluded that inviting practices and intelligence beliefs affect academic performance and that, as intelligence increases, so does effort. This supports research on the positive influences of IE and self-efficacy (Pajares, 1994, 1996, 2001; Pajares & Schunk, 2011a; Purkey & Aspy, 2003) and the overlay of Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory (Hossein et al., 2011; Pajares, 1994, 1996).

Bandura (1977) considered verbal persuasion to be a source of self-efficacy, which Purkey (1992) would likely classify as verbal invitations based on the social construct of invitational theory (Hattie, 2012; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Pajares (1994) called attention to the results of Hattie’s (2012) and Cornelius-White’s (2007) research, in which they reported a strong parallel between self-efficacy and academic performance related to the role of the teacher. Usher and Pajares (2006) commented on undertones of CRP in their results when referring, briefly, to the variable of social persuasions. The effects of the invitations to African American students showed a stronger correlation with verbal persuasions than those to White students (Usher & Pajares, 2006). The data strongly support the argument for researchers and educators in highly diverse settings to consider the influence of IE as a part of practice (Usher & Pajares, 2006).
Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) conducted research primarily with minority high school students regarding their beliefs about their self-regulatory skills and the influence of their intelligence beliefs on self-efficacy. The researchers concluded that the use of these social influences increased the students’ perceived efficacy, resulting in greater academic achievement and raised personal goals (Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zimmerman et al., 1992). This provides evidence for the need to examine CRP as the key to increasing self-efficacy in an urban setting. It also emphasizes the potential for greater, long-term, and substantial impact on academic achievement. Schunk and Gunn (1986) and Arslan (2012) showed that social factors increased students’ self-efficacy and cognitive abilities. Arslan’s (2012) study was conducted with 1,049 students in Grades 6–8 for 1 academic year. Students in the study reported that their beliefs had originated mostly from verbal persuasion by their teachers.

In an early study, Pajares (1994) examined the role of invitation in writing self-efficacy and student voice. The study revealed the unmistakable and enduring influence of verbal persuasion on development of self-efficacy. Noting Schunk (1991), who expressed the need to gain insight through qualitative methods, Pajares (1994) conducted a qualitative case study through oral history interviews. Students who were interviewed were enrolled in a preservice education program, originated from a separate study conducted by Pajares and Johnson (1994). The study showed highest and lowest scores along the self-efficacy/performance dimensions (Pajares, 1994). The study serves as a catalyst for this strategic problem of practice.

Pajares (1994) used oral history to find that students shared lifelong stories that were relatively compatible with Bandura’s (1977, 2001; Bandura et. al, 1986) description of involving sources of self-efficacy. The findings from the oral histories demonstrated the relationship between development of self-efficacy and inviting or disinviting practices. The
student who was intentionally disinvited, despite displaying writing competency skill levels identified as gifted, reported low self-efficacy (Pajares, 1994). On the other hand, students who displayed competency levels classified as poor but who experienced interactions that were intentionally inviting rated themselves as highly efficacious, even though they lacked the skills (Pajares, 1994).

In both instances, whether intentional or unintentional, students reported lasting outcomes as a result of inviting or disinviting messages (Arslan, 2012; Edwards, 2010; Pajares, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2011; Usher & Pajares, 2006). To summarize, the findings in the cited scholarly works have important consequences for conducting research on inviting practices that promote student growth in achievement, provided those practices are conducted through a lens of cultural care. Evidence supporting this claim can be found in a second finding in the Usher and Pajares (2006) study that draws the relationship of self-efficacy to CRP. In one of few studies that connect CRP to IE, Usher and Pajares (2006) assessed race as a variable in the data collection.

Using IE to Address Matters of Inequity, Race, and Culture in Educational Research

Few studies have combined the theories of CRP and IE. I conducted a search for peer-reviewed academic articles using EBSCOhost with the combined terms *invitational education* and *culturally relevant pedagogy*. I was unable to locate any scholarly literature connecting the two theoretical frameworks, despite IE being theorized nearly 30 years ago. Additional searches were conducted with various combinations of the key terms (*invitational theory/education* and *culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching pedagogy/teaching*), or *culturally (teaching)*, with the same null results. Reed (1996) suggested using invitational theory to overcome prejudice by using Haberman’s model, a five-step approach engaging educators to recognize and reflect on their prejudices. Although elements of race and culture
are evident, the topic differs greatly from CRP as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) and subsequent researchers.

Supporting my call to action for educational research to address the void in research surrounding invitational education viewed through a culturally responsive lens is Dr. John Schmidt, former Executive Director for the International Alliance for Invitational Education (IAIE). More than a decade ago, Schmidt (2004) expressed his concern about IAIE’s lack of research that addressed race and culture. Schmidt (2007) discussed the lack of research and publications on invitational practices and diverse populations, despite the belief that inviting practices “embrace, celebrate, and honor diversity” (p. 16). Similarly, Gay (2010) appealed to educational researchers to consider further examination of topics such as race, diversity, culture, and the need for empirical research.

Although gaining attention, existing IE research does little to account for the aspects of culture, race, or relationships. IE studies conducted through a lens of race and culture are nearly nonexistent (Schmidt, 2004). Schmidt (2007) stated that his intent in writing his article in the *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice* was to address the lack of research using inviting practices to compel broader research and provide a structured schema to aid in such work. Six elements in which to examine facets of diversity and multiculturalism were outlined: (a) equity, (b) expectation, (c) enlistment, (d) empowerment, (e) encouragement, and (f) enjoyment (Schmidt, 2007, p. 17). He reiterated the argument for examining diverse population in studies involving IE to assist in building connections and relationships (Pajares, 1994, 2001) and suggested shifting focus from a defensive deficit perspective model to one that embraces the richness of positive relationships that provide fulfillment, empowerment, and encouragement.
Implications of IE

Shifts in ideology from equality to accountability in education began in the 1970s after a period of slow economic growth, and the shift in beliefs about greater accountability grew substantially in 2007 when the country entered a recession (Fowler, 2014). Resistance to paying taxes and a political concern for financing the Baby Boomer retirement opened the door for harsh criticism of education (Fowler, 2014; Karpinski, 2012). The focus on declining test scores, poor school performance, budget deficits, lackluster performance reports, and poor teacher evaluations have since become a part of political platforms and critique (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Fowler, 2014; Karpinski, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012). Attempts to address these challenges are being made through new guidelines such as strict and interpretative teacher evaluations, policies such as NCLB (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Schmeichel, 2012), and adoption of national standards and the Common Core Curriculum (Karpinski, 2012; Markow et al., 2013). Adding the complexity of challenges faced in an urban environment—poverty, racial inequities, disparities in achievement, dropout rates, and high attrition rates for new teachers—the work seems overwhelming (Gorski, 2013; Karpinski, 2012; Markow et al., 2013). To counter, scholars have argued that the potential for learning and improving while accomplishing goals exists through practices related to IE (Pajares, 1994, 2001; Pajares & Usher, 2006; Purkey & Novak, 2016) and culturally relevant strategies (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2010b), with successful interventions (Bryk et al., 2015; Hattie, 2012; Mintrop, 2016).

A key component of student learning and success is the teacher who takes on a role that “goes beyond professional duties and encompasses his/her own personal view and mind frame” (Hattie, 2012, p. 18).
Fundamentally, the most powerful way of thinking about a teacher’s role is for teachers to see themselves as evaluators of their effects on students. Teachers need to use evidence-based methods to inform, change, and sustain these evaluation beliefs about their effect. These beliefs relate to claims about what each student can do as a consequence of the teachers’ actions. It matters what the teachers do—but what matters most is having an appropriate mind frame combined with appropriate actions in order to achieve a positive learning effect. (Hattie, 2012, p. 18)

IE provides a framework in which teachers embrace and incorporate both mind frame and evidence-based actions to affect learning positively. This combination is key when considering racial inequities in the classroom.

**Critical Race Theory**

This section of the literature review demonstrates how the ideals of CRT support the significance and provide background for the conceptualization of CRP. First, the origins of critical race theory are reviewed to form a historical perspective of the progression into education (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009; Taylor, 2009). Next, perspectives of colorblind racism (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009; Taylor, 2009) are discussed to demonstrate the requirement for educators to consider and reflect on race as a natural part of practice. Finally, matters of race, poverty, and inequity in education (Beachum et al., 2013; CRSP, 2015; CUE, 2016; Gorski, 2013; Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 2003) are examined.

**Origins of Critical Race Theory**

The origins of CRT can be traced back to the 1970s, when a group of legal scholars across the nation realized that the civil rights era had slowed. They expressed their discontent
with the perceived stalling of progress in civil rights litigation (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2009). Civil rights lawyer and the first African American tenured law professor, Derrick Bell—one of the most well-known founding fathers of CRT—in collaboration with David Trubek and Kimberlé Crenshaw, helped to initiate the movement in public denunciation (Taylor, 2009) of laws that permitted racism, bias, and economic oppression. From this grew a progressive ideology known as CRT (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor, 2009).

Basic tenets of critical race theory are that (a) racism is ordinary and normal, and difficult to address because there is denial of existence by the dominant culture (colorblind perspective); (b) interest convergence, where change is based only on the benefit to the dominant society; (c) social construction; (d) differential racialization, creating the image of race or culture that is primarily negative because it differs from the “norm”; (e) intersectionality; and (f) the unique narrative of individuals of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

As CRT spread to other disciplines, CRT in education emerged through the questioning of sincerity and expression of shortcomings regarding *Brown*. Educational critical race theorists began to examine the theory in terms of equality in education, with extreme apprehension for fear of jeopardizing their careers and the hostility with which it was met outside of critical friends (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Since the discussion of equality, equity, and disproportionality was initiated through the lens of CRT, theories such as CRP entered into the discussion about teacher practice (Schmeichel, 2012).
CRT also suggests that current instructional practices are held from a deficit perspective for African American students and that, as a result, educators continuously seek “remediation” for “at-risk” students (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Schmeichel, 2012). “Different” is viewed as a deficit (Schmeichel, 2012). However, empirical research refuting a deficit perspective and highlighting effective teachers of African American students (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010) is emerging through the theoretical framework of CRP (Schmeichel, 2012).

The term *equality* defines the widely expressed intent to promote “sameness” within educational settings (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1998) explained that, when one discusses the idea of sameness in education with the indication of equity, it only can apply if “students are exactly the same” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 36, emphasis in original). Gorski (2013) delineated equity from equality in that equity is carried out in fairness versus sameness.

At New York University’s Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality Summer 2016 session entitled “Unleashing the Power of Culturally Responsive Education in the 21st Century,” Duncan-Andrade spoke on equity and equality. When he spoke, he described equity as “getting what you need, but when you need it.” Conversely, to eradicate the idea of colorblind education and “sameness” and give an enhanced perspective of socially just education, one must respect and embrace culture, build competence, and progress beyond equality and move toward equity (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Milner, 2010b).

**Teacher Perspectives and Colorblind Racism**

Milner (2015) and other critical race and educational scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2010; Noguera, 2003; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early
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Childhood Collaborative, 2016) have suggested that teacher-educators engage in reflective practices. Reflective practices assist in building cultural competence and in developing a critical self-awareness when establishing relationships with students (Milner, 2015).

The ability to connect personally with students is a challenge that many practicing teachers face because of their differences in cultural diversity, perceptions, and experiences (Delpit, 2006; Goldenberg, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2010b). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) projected that, in 2043, the United States will have the first “majority minority” and that current minorities will comprise 57% of the population by 2060. The projected statistic of the first majority minority population is significant, considering that 82% of public school educators are of European descent but more than half of the students differ from them in race and culture (Boser, 2014; CUE, 2016; Goldring et al., 2014; Markow & Martin, 2005; Milner, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2009).

In the local context of LWP’s 24,000 students, 53% are Black, 34% are White, 3.5% are Asian, and 2.4% are Hispanic (CRSP, 2015). The CRSP reported that a typical (not defined) Black student in LWP attends a school where more than half of the students are Black and the majority are poor.

Some educators who have not had adequate preparation or experience in highly diverse areas (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2009; Milner, 2007) have professed a colorblind perspective. CRT adherents have asserted the perspective that being “colorblind” is fundamentally detrimental to the successes of students of color (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). They pointed out that “color blindness can be admirable . . . but it can be perverse when it stands in the way of taking account of difference in order to help those in need” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 26), and that it “will keep minorities in subordinate positions” (p. 27). Understanding multiple viewpoints and
reflecting on experiences, much like the narratives of CRT, provides opportunities to see perspectives of a person that differ greatly from one’s own perspectives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2009). As evident in the literature, consideration of educator preparation, level of understanding, and personal perspectives must be given for educational improvement in highly diverse settings.

**Race, Poverty and Inequity in Education**

Research on poverty, race, and equity has shown that students who live in poverty suffer the most in terms of lack of resources, access, experiences, and, as a result, adult consequences (Beachum et al., 2013; CRSP, 2015; CUE, 2016; Gorski, 2013; Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 2003). A report from the School of Social Work at CRSP (2015) provided data showing disparities among four groups (Asian, Black, White, and Hispanic) in four geographic areas (City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area, and the United States; CRSP, 2015, p. 1). The publication provided indicators of quality of life by race and ethnicity (CRSP, 2015, p. 3). Using data reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010, the report examined racial disparities in the categories of education, criminal justice, economic disparities, health and mental health disparities, interracial group relations, and families, youth, and the elderly. The report showed that Whites earned the highest household income in Pittsburgh and second highest in the county, Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area, and the nation; Blacks earned the lowest household income, while Hispanics earned the second lowest in all four geographic areas (CRSP, 2015).

In 2012 Blacks were the largest number of adult murder victims in the Pittsburgh area, as well as in the nation. Overall racial disparities in criminal justice statistics were higher in the Pittsburgh area than in the nation (CRSP, 2015). Black and Latino men and women had the
highest incarceration rates and a greater chance of incarceration than White men and women (CRSP, 2015; CUE, 2016; Milner, 2016; Noguera, 2003).

Research emphasizing disproportionality in discipline has generated a theorized concept of the school-to-prison pipeline, referring to the policies and practices that systematically streamline schoolchildren, especially the most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (ACLU, 2008; CUE, 2016; Milner, 2016). This pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education (ACLU, 2008).

The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) released a national report in 2016 entitled “Being Black is Not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child.” The report included essays written by experts in the field, points of proof, and data to confront a deficit perspective and highlight the richness, strength, and resilience of children, families, and communities of color (Green, 2016). Taking a grassroots approach, the NBCDI released a state-level report with the same goal: to highlight successes and focus on the strengths-based approach to improve and advocate (Green, 2016).

Delale-O’Connor and Milner (2016) discussed statistical data on race and discipline reported by the U.S. Department of Education. Disciplinary disparities between Black and White children start as early as pre-kindergarten, with African American students comprising the largest percentage of children involved in disciplinary actions (Milner, 2016; Noguera, 2003). Forty-eight percent of those African American students had been suspended more than once, even though African Americans were only 18% of the pre-kindergarten population (CUE, 2016; Milner, 2016). Racial differences play a role in early childhood settings in the ways in which children are socialized, disciplined, and evaluated in classrooms and informal settings (Milner, 2016).
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High school graduation rates can be correlated with higher incomes, better health, lower government dependent assistance, and overall quality of life (Levin et al., 2006). CRSP (2015) reported that only 58% of Black males and 69% of Black females graduated from high school after entering ninth grade, while 80% of White females and 76% of White males graduated. Data show that people of color “lack opportunities to obtain sufficient employment, become adequately educated, live in good neighborhoods, and enjoy a life free of foul treatment from the legal justice system” (CRSP, 2015, p. 1). Longstanding correlations among race, poverty, and graduation rates are unmistakable (CRSP, 2015; Gorski, 2013; Levin et al., 2006). Gorski (2013) challenged approaches that focus primarily on race and culture through his equity literacy framework, which provides strategies for teaching children in poverty. Although Gorski (2013) noted the significance of equity in removing bias, it can be argued that, given disproportional graduation rates, poverty, and income based on race, equity must be kept at the forefront of addressing disparities in education.

Levin et al. (2006) calculated the economic costs and benefits of increasing graduation rates by identifying the five most successful interventions. They compared the costs of the interventions with the economic contributions that graduates would yield (Levin et al., 2016). The net economic benefit to the public for investing in effective interventions related to raise graduation rates was “2.5 times greater than the costs” (p. 1). If the number of students who did not graduate was reduced by half, tax revenues would net an estimated $45 billion, increasing the quality of life, health benefits, and collective contributions to society. This statistic underscores that the benefits gained through educational investments to address the dropout rate are economically beneficial and socially just (Levin et al., 2016). The implications of investing in effective practices to address and eradicate disproportionality have long-term collective benefits that reach far beyond the educational setting.
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Culturally Relevant or Culturally Responsive Pedagogies

CRP reflects theories of practice in which the experiences of race and culture are acknowledged, valued, and reflected on as integral components of teacher pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2010). First, the foundations and ideologies of the two theories are connected to CRT. Next, I draw from research involving establishment of a culturally relevant and culturally responsive environment that is conducive to student growth and development.

Foundations of CRP in CRT

Critical race theorists have maintained that the idea of equality or sameness in education should not be used to address educational disparities for African Americans or any diverse group outside the dominant society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2009). In fact, doing so may have a counter effect and increase educational disparities (Delpit, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010).

CRT suggests that current instructional practices are commonly held from a deficit perspective for African American students and that, as a result, educators continuously seek “remediation” for “at-risk” students (CUE, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007). Recent contributions to empirical research refuting a deficit perspective and highlighting effective teachers of African American students is emerging through the theoretical framework of CRP (Delpit, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a, 2006b; Lewis et al., 2012; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noguera, 2003). Research is beginning to grow that addresses race at the center of pedagogical engagement in the two theories of CRP (Brown, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 2010, 2013;
Ladson-Billings’s seminal work examined the practices of successful teachers of African American children (1995a, 1995b, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2014). Ladson-Billings identified three tenets of what she termed CRP: (a) academic achievement, (b) cultural competence, and (c) sociopolitical critique (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2011). Teachers who have been reported to use a culturally relevant pedagogical style of teaching adhere to the three tenets that hold students to high academic and behavioral standards.

Eight teachers participated in in-depth interviews, unannounced classroom visits, videotaped lessons, and collective research with the other participants (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). Teachers who were identified as successful at implementing CRP held students to a high academic standard through which they “demanded, reinforced, and produced” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160) success. This created an environment of warmth where students thrived on positive attention, ultimately “[choosing] academic excellence” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160).

Scholars often refer to this teacher characteristic as being a “warm demander” (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). A warm demanding approach to practice is described as kind but firm, communicating clear expectations without demeaning students (Bondy et al., 2007). Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2006a, 2009) concluded that effective teachers of African American students set high academic standards and expectations of excellence rather than viewing students from a deficit perspective, which demanded, reinforced, and produced success.
Creating a Culturally Relevant and Responsive Environment

Ladson-Billings’s (1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2006a; 2006b, 2009, 2014) CRP and subsequent culturally relevant and culturally responsive research highlighted the importance of simple acts of human kindness in fostering positive relationships between teachers and students, despite differences in race, culture, or religion, that resulted in academic success (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Hyland, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2011; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2009) reported that students gave as a reason for enjoying class “the teacher” (p. 73). When asked, “What do you like about the teacher?” they responded, “She listens to us! She respects us!” and powerfully stated, “She lets us express ourselves” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 73). Smiling, listening, and speaking to students outside of class were modest gestures that solidified the positive relationships between teachers and students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a).

Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b, 2006a, 2006b) found that in the classrooms where African American children thrived, social interactions facilitated students to meet the three tenets: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Teachers maintained fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrated a connectedness with all students, developed a community of learners, and encouraged students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2009). Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). It is clear that social-emotional aspects of the learning environment deserve strong consideration in strategies for improvement and educational reform.
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There is still a need for research on cultural relevance that gives strong attention to urban schools and highly diverse settings (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2009; Milner, 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2016; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Schmidt, 2004, 2007; Thompson, 2004). Creating a positive and inviting learning environment that fosters educational resilience in the context of CRP is a skill that must be cultivated, observed, practiced, and experienced (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Hyland, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2009; Siwatu, 2011). A recommendation to address inequities and deficit perspectives in education is for early educators to engage in professional development that builds awareness of racial biases, recognizes the rich assets of African American families and all communities of color (Beachum et al., 2013; Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012; Noguera, 2003; Owen, 2014, 2015) and constructs a strengths-based approach that helps all students to realize their potential to learn and succeed (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Noddings, 2015; Pajares, 1994, 2001a, 2001b; Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Professional Development

PD is an essential tool to connect policy goals and promote teacher and institutional capacity to meet these goals (Stosich, 2016). First in this section, a collaborative approach to teacher development is evaluated, followed by a review of research assessing the impact or influence of PLCs.

Evidence shows that highly qualified teachers are the greatest contributors to student academic success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hattie, 2012; Rivkin et al., 2005; Stosich, 2016). Teacher capacity building, via collaborative measures, has been found to be the most productive in teacher development for improving practice (Cooter, 2003b; Rivkin et al., 2005; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). In traditional “sit and get” models of PD, educators are
passive participants and experience results that are typically ineffective and isolating (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). The passive teacher development and in-service training model is still widely utilized despite little improvement in teacher-pedagogy or student achievement (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). Educational researchers have recommended a collaborative and team approach in school improvement (Bryk et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Mintrop, 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015; Rivkin et al., 2005; Stosich, 2016; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). An example of a collaborative approach to school improvement and building teacher capacity is evident in the concept of PLCs.

PLCs are defined by scholars with slight variance in terms (leadership teams, teacher teams, improvement teams, networked improvement communities, shared learning communities). For the purpose of this study and derived from Owen’s (2015) description, PLC is defined as a collaborative approach to professional development over an extended period that, when successful, promotes growth in knowledge, practice, and beliefs with the goal of improving student learning outcomes through an inquiry approach.

Using a case study approach, Owen (2014) explored the concepts of PLCs in three schools, regarded by their districts as highly innovative sites. The researcher concluded that PLCs offered teachers a sense of community and commitment with shared vision and a practical application of interventions. Small learning communities also supported teachers’ interest in leadership roles. Owen (2015) reported that PLCs operate at various levels of maturity but, with support (financial, clear expectations, nurturing leadership), they are beneficial to adopting innovative practices and ultimately promoting student learning.

A collective case study exploring the impact of a collaborative approach to PD showed that site-based teacher teams, another type of learning community, offered new perspectives
and opportunities to reflect on and improve instructional practices (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). Results indicated that teachers felt more empowered and committed to their profession. They were more likely to take on greater responsibilities and engage in problem solving. Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2008, 2012) also reported increased collective efficacy. This supported existing research that showed that these types of results are linked to better learning outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993; Bandura et al., 1996; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Pajares, 1994, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Schunk, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

Care and Culture in Education

Care is a frequent overarching component of effective pedagogical practices that lend to creating a positive learning environment and promote student successes (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Noddings, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). In this section, care in education is examined. I draw attention to the significance of care and its connection to culturally based pedagogical theories, including the researcher-defined theory of cultural care.

Care in Education

The notion of care in education is not new (Lewis et al., 2012). One of the most well-known and self-proclaimed feminist scholars in education who has focused on care is Nel Noddings, who has done so through care theory. Noddings (2010a, 2010b, 2012) defined care in terms of relationships. Care is based on the relationship of the carer and the cared for and requires each party to contribute for the relationship to be considered caring. Noddings (2010a, 2010b, 2012) acknowledged differences in a care-driven approach, but attention to race and culture is vaguely touched on throughout the literature.

Schmidt (2004, 2007) asserted that genuine ability and desire to care are the most important characteristics of IE. In the context of IE, care is defined as “the ongoing desire to
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link significant personal means with worthwhile societal ends and encompasses warmth, empathy, and positive regard” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 15).

Valenzuela (1999) offered a framework for understanding the development of racial identity of immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican students’ achievement and reported contrasting perspectives between teachers’ and students’ meanings of care. Valenzuela conducted a 3-year ethnographic investigation of academic achievement and schooling orientations of Mexican American students and Mexican immigrants at a high school in Houston, Texas. Through examination of field notes, the concept of subtractive schooling emerged. Valenzuela described subtractive schooling as a process that “divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them vulnerable for academic failure” (p. 3). Also emerging from the data of this longitudinal study were students who repeatedly expressed “affiliational needs” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 7) in terms of caring. The frequent and reoccuring discourse involving care led to closer examination of the meaning of care, or cariño, in relationship to student motivation and achievement.

Lewis et al. (2012) discussed care in relationship to Latino students’ mathematics self-efficacy. They defined caring as “the ability to listen to, empathize with, and be moved by the plight or feelings of the other person (p. 3). A connection between care and justice in African American culture through a collection of writings, while using a positive and constructive (strengths-based) approach, is found in Walker and Snarey’s “Race-ing Moral Formation” (Gilligan & Ward, 2004). Gilligan and Ward (2004) suggested that race is a term used to categorize individuals and maintain privilege. They recommended care as a “means for liberating others from their state of need and actively promoting their welfare” (p. 4).

The notion of care is reflected in culturally responsive and culturally relevant research focused on best practices and teacher-student relationships. The idea of care includes
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evaluating its impact on student behavior and academic outcomes. The interwoven components of care, cultural relevance, and relationships are evident.

Culturally Responsive Care

Gay (2010) described culturally responsive caring as an actionable and engaging practice that positively affects one’s well-being. It is not just an essential part of CRP; it is also a part of the educational process. It goes beyond merely caring about the personal well-being of students. It is manifested in teacher dispositions and behaviors and encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action while recognizing and honoring race and culture (Gay, 2010). Gay suggested that, when exhibiting culturally responsive care, teachers recognize, respect, and value students as individuals and validate their importance with genuine appreciation. The interrelated characteristics align with the components of IE: care, respect, and trust.

Care has been a longstanding topic of discussion across education and educational research disciplines (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Gay, 2010; Hattie, 2012; Kane & Cantrell, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Lewis et al., 2012; Milner, 2010b; Noddings, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Pajares, 1994; Purkey & Novak, 2016; Schmidt, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999). However, little consideration has been given directly to care in educational research (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). Noddings (2012) defined care in terms of relationship, locating care with regard to the relationships between the carer and the cared for; however, attention to race or culture was not included in the definition.

Lewis et al. (2012) discussed care in relationship to Latino students’ mathematics self-efficacy. Caring was defined as “the ability to listen to, empathize with, and be moved by the plight or feelings of the other person” (p. 3). For this literature review and study, I use the term cultural care. Cultural care is defined as a verbal or nonverbal gesture displaying a genuine
interest in a person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. Cultural care includes respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective.

All positive relationships develop through interactions that cultivate care (Noddings, 2010b, 2012) and trust (Purkey, 1992). In educational settings, positive teacher-student relationships have the potential to influence student academic self-efficacy and achievement. Meta-analyses by Hattie (2012) and Cornelius-White (2007) measured the level of impact of teachers who demonstrated care as part of their practice.

Hattie (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of more than 900 research studies and reported evidence-based results to determine which approaches in education had the most significant impact on student learning and achievement. Using the term hinge point (h-point), Hattie determined the overall average effect size from all studies was $d = 0.40$. In order for any intervention to be considered worthwhile, the effect size must be greater than 0.40 (high impact) or equal to 0.40 (average gains). When synthesizing research on the contributions of practicing educators, the teacher-student relationships ($d = 0.72$) and PD ($d = 0.62$) had the greatest impact on student learning and achievement (Hattie, 2012).

An earlier meta-analysis of 119 studies with 335,325 students and 14,851 teachers showed an association between positive teacher-student relationships and optimal student learning (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 113). Variables related to person-centered actions (actions toward another individual) by the teacher emerged as empathy, respect, encouragement, and genuineness (Cornelius-White, 2007). Findings associated with teacher ethnicity suggested that differences in race between teachers of color and Caucasians were not significantly related to outcomes in student learning (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hyland, 2009). The way in which
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caring teachers approached their students created what Cornelius-White (2007) referred to as a “facilitative relationship” (Hattie, 2012, p. 113). Practices that establish a facilitative relationship can be described as inviting (Purkey, 1992) and extend to what could be identified as utilizing cultural care within the context of race.

Other scholars have provided substantial research indicating that students’ academic performance was associated with interactions and relationships with their teachers (Bandura, 1993; Bandura et. al 1996; Cornelius-West, 2007; Downey, 2008; Lewis et al., 2012; Noddings, 2010b, 2012; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Poetter, 2006; Schunk, 1991; Schunk & Gunn, 1986).

A growing body of studies of CRP touch on care or caring as part of the pedagogical style (Borman & Overman, 2004; Brown, 2003, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lewis et al., 2012; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Pajares, 1994, 1996; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Cornelius-West (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of facilitative relationships with student-centered teaching. However, the concept of caring as a principle of good teaching in urban studies has not been given necessary consideration (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, 2007).

Found more frequently in culturally relevant research is the concept of resilience. Resiliency is described in terms of overcoming adversity, which includes poverty, racial discrimination, community violence, and disruption in the family unit (Downey, 2008; Werner, 1993). Downey (2008) synthesized findings from current educational studies regarding educational resilience for at-risk students. A set of 12 recommendations was developed to promote educational resilience through teacher practice (Downey, 2008). Recommendations were synthesized using a content analysis approach to data analysis and organized regarding pedagogical practice to foster resilience and support academic achievement by students who
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had been identified as “at risk for failure” (Downey, 2008, p. 56). These findings were
categorized into four clusters: teacher-student rapport, classroom climate, instructional
strategies, and skills possessed by students. The findings provided evidence for future
empirical studies such as those by Cornelius-White (2007), Delale-O’Connor and Milner

Downy (2008) concluded that, in order to address the needs of students, teachers must
“(a) build healthy interpersonal relationships with students (b) focus on their strengths and
increased positive self-esteem, and (c) maintain realistic high expectations for academic
performance” (p. 57). While not clearly stated, the four overarching themes and three
recommendations derived from Downey’s (2008) research align with the tenets of culturally
limitation of the article is the lack of attention to the well-documented scholarly work on
cultural relevance (e.g., Brown, 2003, 2004; Freire, 2014 [original English publication 1970];
ultimately failing to connect CRP to educational resilience.

Teachers and students have offered contrasting definitions of caring (Valenzuela,
1999). In the study by Valenzuela, the teachers’ perspective of care was aesthetic. They
focused on the expectation that students would demonstrate caring about schooling. In
contrast, the students’ perspective of authentic care centered on a mutual relationship between
teachers and students based on trust and respect. Valenzuela offered a composite definition of
caring derived from caring theory, Mexican culture, and the concept of social capital that
“accords moral authority to teachers and institutional structures that value and actively promote
respect, and a search for connections between teacher and student, and among students
themselves” (p. 21).
Valenzuela (1999) discovered that the majority of non-college-bound students’ schooling was deemed subtractive in that did not value students’ perspectives concerning education as strongly connected to ones’ culture, specifically Mexican culture. Failure to recognize or value the totality of a student’s racial and cultural identity increases the risk of that student’s academic failure. The result is a cyclical and generational decline in academic achievement by U.S.-born Mexican students compared to immigrant youth (Valenzuela, 1999).

In relation to Valenzuela’s (1999) research, Lewis et al. (2012) investigated Hispanic elementary students’ perceptions of teacher caring in relation to mathematics efficacy. The research showed that caring teachers strengthened student self-efficacy and improved student performance. The researchers asserted that the quality of relationships was based on the concept of caring; therefore, teacher caring was a form of social capital that increased students’ academic development.

Noguera’s (2003) book The Trouble with Black Boys drew on research to analyze risk factors (poverty, levels of incarceration and convictions, college enrollment, disciplinary action in school) and the influence of environmental and cultural factors of academic performance by Black males. Drawing on research that connected the academic progress of Black males and the hardships that they faced, Noguera utilized a strengths-based approach to examine how the negative trajectory for Black males could be altered and academic achievement could be supported. Through careful examination of the literature, several results related to care emerged. Noguera (2003) found that effective schools for low-income African American students attributed their success in part to the relationship between teachers and students and to a school culture based on caring and accountability. Research has shown that, for students who perceived that their teachers did not care about them, the chance of success was greatly diminished (Hattie, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Markow & Martin, 2005; Noguera, 2003).
Noguera (2003) expressed the need for further research to examine effective school practices that allow for successful conditions for teaching and suggested including student voice in the process to counter negative risk factors (poverty, single-parent households, low educational attainment by parents) in the interest of addressing negative perceptions held by African American males. “There is no doubt if schools were to become more nurturing and supportive, students would more likely perceive schools as a source of help and opportunity rather than an inhospitable place that one should seek to escape and avoid” (p. 455). The tone of the classroom is based on the relationships between teachers and students and is largely responsible for creating an environment that promotes student success (Brown, 2003; 2004; Cooter, 2003a; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a; Milner & Tenore, 2010).

Chapter Summary

In summary, the body of scholarly literature suggests the need for future studies that examine the influence of cultural care, IE, or CRP. The current study adds to the scholarly literature on school improvement and considers successes beyond the classroom that lead to socially just outcomes. The review of the literature provides evidence that connects the theories of CRT, CRP, and IE to address the climate of learning environment and effective PD. These conditions promote a positive teacher-student relationship and build teacher capacity and opportunities for student growth and achievement. Considering Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, teacher practice must include reflection on practices that meet the child’s physiological safety, need for love, and esteem needs as a prerequisite to attending to academic requirements and student achievement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter reiterates the purpose, context, and background of the study and the theoretical frameworks in which the study was situated. First, it describes the methodology, the participants, and the role of the qualitative researcher. Then, it explains the process of data collection and analysis. Finally, it details the protection of the participants in the study.

**Purpose of the Study**

Drawing on thematic analyses of semistructured pre- and post-intervention interviews, participant observations, and artifact examination, this study describes the processes and events experienced by five educators at an urban elementary school and their engagement in a PLC focused on equity and care. This study investigated the influence of cultural care and inviting practices on six key areas with strong consideration of the formation of relationships with students of color: (a) teacher practice, (b) interactions, (c) climate of the learning environment, (d) teacher-student relationships, (e) student behaviors, and (f) student academics. Also, participants’ experiences with PD involving CRP were examined and analyzed.

This strategic project is PAR that framed the problem of practice as a matter of social justice and utilized elements of the interrelated theoretical frameworks of IE (Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2016), CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Milner, 2010a), CRT (Bell, 1980, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Steele, 1997; Taylor, 2009), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993; Pajares, 1994, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a).

Noddings (2012) defined care in relational terms. According to Noddings, care is based on bilateral exchanges between the carer and the cared for. However, her characterization of care does not give attention to race or culture as part of the definition. Lewis et al. (2012)
conducted a study examining care in connection with mathematics self-efficacy in Latino students. They defined caring as “the ability to listen to, empathize with, and be moved by the plight or feelings of the other person” (p. 3). Gay (2010) described caring as an essential part not just of CRP but of the educational process, as well. Caring is not merely caring about the personal well-being of students; it is an engaging practice that is displayed in teacher beliefs and attitudes and encompasses a combination of “concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action” (Gay, 2010, p. 48).

Drawing from the definitions in the literature, I use the term cultural care. Cultural care is a theory of practice that utilizes a social and emotional approach to promote a positive school climate and student growth. Cultural care is defined as a verbal or nonverbal gesture that reflects a person’s genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. Cultural care must include respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strengths-based perspective.

This study used improvement science, or improving inquiry, in a PLC focused on the topic of equity and care. Improvement science uses quick cycles of change to guide and “accelerate learning by doing” (Bryk et al., 2105, p. 8). The PLC focused on engaging teachers in reflective practices, thereby promoting positive teacher-student relationships through cultural care. The activities conducted in the PLC concentrated on promoting a positive learning environment through the elements of intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust as outlined in IE. Race- and equity-related topics included disproportionality in relation to discipline, learning support referrals, standardized test scores, and recommendations for accelerated learning programs. Participants in the PLC also engaged in reflective practices and discussions involving stereotyping, unconscious bias, and microaggressions.
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As PAR, this study engaged educators as active and willing participants to facilitate change. The educators were willing participants in a PLC that functioned in ways that were consistent with the principles underlying the Carnegie Foundation’s model for networked improvement communities or NICs (Bryk et al., 2015; LeMahieu et al., 2017; Mintrop, 2016). Four established goals of the PLC were to (a) build teacher capacity involving equitable practices, (b) assist in the formation of positive relationships, (c) develop a greater cultural competence, and (d) encourage reflective practices involving matters of social justice related to racism, culture, perceptions, beliefs, and equity.

This work suggests that using intentionally inviting practices and implementing cultural care to create a positive learning environment and form positive teacher-student relationships will positively influence students’ social and academic behaviors. Perceptions and practices to evaluate the influence of cultural care, as it is situated in the context of this study, were investigated. In addition to IE, the framework of this study was situated in two theories: self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1991, 1993; Pajares, 1994, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a; Schunk, 1991; Schunk & Gunn, 1986) and CRT (Bell, 1980, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Steele, 1997; Taylor, 2009).

I maintain that educators must participate, uncoerced, in supported PLCs for the purpose of effective change and school improvement (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b; Owen, 2014, 2015; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). To develop educators’ cultural competence and reflective practices in matters of social justice related to racism, equity, perceptions, and beliefs, participants must be open to engaging in professional development and must participate by choice (Milner, 2007, 2015). When teachers work collaboratively in structured networks, ideas and practices to develop solutions to complex problems unfold (Bryk et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2016). In combination with the theoretical frameworks that allow for building
collective capacity and addressing school climate, action research invites suggestions to assist in an effective process of introducing cultural care as a means for school improvement. The educators in this study freely selected to be a part of the collaborative action for school improvement.

Teachers are the greatest contributors to student academic success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hattie, 2012; Rivkin et al., 2005; Stosich, 2016), and their voice is overlooked in many qualitative educational research studies (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Lewis et al., 2012). This dissertation addresses voids in educational research that have potential to positively impact teacher practice and, ultimately, student success and achievement. According to Duncan-Andrade (2007), “Measuring an equitable education requires greater attention to qualitative evaluation” (p. 618). This study considers the need and responds to the call for teacher voice and collaborative learning networks as an integral component of qualitative research.

**Context**

Freedom Elementary School (pseudonym, hereinafter Freedom), a K–5 urban elementary school, is part of the LWPSD (pseudonym). Freedom is a Spanish magnet school serving 432 students. The students come from neighborhoods in a city in Pennsylvania. All students are provided transportation by the district. Students are selected through an application and lottery system for enrollment. Student demographics are 71% African American, 15% Caucasian, 33% multiracial, 3% Asian, and 3% Hispanic (LWP, 2016).

At Freedom, there are three classes at each grade level, a learning support classroom, and a primary (K–2) autistic support classroom. Teaching experience ranges from 1 to 27 years in full-time teaching. The building employs one administrator of Caucasian descent, one counselor who identified as African American, three paraprofessionals, two full-time learning
support teachers, and an autistic support specialist. Staff demographics (Appendix C) are 63% White (Caucasian), 31% African American, and 6% Hispanic-Latino. Teacher demographics are 83% female and 17% male. Of the female teachers, 80% identified as White, 10% as African American, and 10% as Hispanic-Latino. Half of the male teachers at Freedom identified as White or of European descent and half were African American. The office staff consists of one full-time administrative assistant and one student data support staff member who is shared in two buildings with an alternating schedule of 2.5 days per week on average.

**Background**

The PDE (2015) developed a theory of action to address educational inequities as a matter of social justice and to ensure access to excellent and highly qualified teachers. This was done to fulfill requirements established in ESSA (PDE, 2015). In an effort to narrow equity gaps between “poor and minority students” (p. 1) and White peers, ESSA ensures that high-quality educators, root causes, and interventions are addressed (PDE, 2015). The PDE (2015) defined *poor students* in terms of the poverty level in a school as determined by the number of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The PDE also noted that “minority students” are not categorized purely based on ethnicity and may include characteristics of disability, gender, or religion (PDE, 2015, pp. 2-3).

PDE activities to improve education include building cultural sensitivities, ongoing professional learning, research-based teaching practices, celebrating success, and investing in innovation (PDE, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The planned activities set forth by the state of Pennsylvania, as part of the requirements of federal policy, support the significance of this strategic project.

As part of ongoing PD at Freedom, teachers were invited to join a PLC focusing on culturally responsive care and kindness at the end of the 2015-2016 school year. During the
introductory meeting, teachers were given a brief explanation of the purpose of the PLC, along with seminal literature on CRP by Gay (2010). As a researcher and lead facilitator, I introduced IE to the PLC through a PD presentation. Teachers and staff were then invited to become members of the PLC of their choice. Staff members were asked to indicate their preferred learning group and were then notified by the principal regarding in which PLC they would participate.

**TLC Survey**

Considering the implications of school culture and climate on the learning environment, the LWPSD developed a survey to assess teaching and learning conditions and to provide data for district and school wide improvement (LWP, 2013). A grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided support to address the conditions of the learning environment as a strategic priority in the district (LWP, 2013). Through collaborative efforts by the LWPSD teachers union, the school district created the TLC Survey (LWP, 2013; Appendix D). This expedited the role of Teaching and Learning Environment Liaisons (TLEL) who facilitated data-driven school improvement efforts based on the TLC Survey’s eight constructs (LWP, 2013).

According to the LWPSD (2013), eight constructs are correlated with absenteeism, student growth and achievement, and teacher retention: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Professional Development, Instructional Practices and Support, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, and School Leadership (LWP, 2013). The TLC Survey is administered to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement in order to set schoolwide improvement goals. Goal setting and progress are completed through the formal process of the SIP.
Previous Results of the TLC Survey

Results of the TLC Survey (Appendix D) showed a stark and continuous decline in the overall conditions of the learning environment from 2014 to 2016. During the 2014-2015 academic year, of the 149 items under the eight constructs, 140 (94%) showed a decline in favorability. In addition, data from the state standardized test have shown that Freedom ranks fourth highest in disproportionality in the district at the elementary level. The two constructs that showed the greatest decline in satisfaction were managing student behavior and school leadership. Data from 2015-2016 TLC Survey revealed an inhospitable learning environment. Less than half (49%) of the teachers and staff agreed that Freedom was a good place to work. Data reflected a decline in student performance levels, an increase in absenteeism, and declines in teacher, parent, and staff satisfaction over a 3-consecutive-year time span at Freedom (A+ Schools, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Results of the Inviting School Survey

The ISS was designed to assess the total school climate and five environmental factors outlined by IE: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes (Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016; Smith, 2015), with People being the ultimate and distinct aspect (Smith, 2015). The original 100-item instrument was updated to become a 50-item online, computer-scored instrument: the ISS-R (Smith, 2015). The ISS-R provides school communities with a user-friendly, theoretically grounded, and empirically based instrument for evaluating schools for future development as it identifies areas of strength and weakness in a school’s climate (Smith, 2015).

As part of a collaborative decision-making network, teachers in the 2015-2016 researcher-led PLC, focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy and equity, sought to identify domains that required improvement. Using a quantitative analysis of the school climate, the
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ISS-R was administered under suggestion by the leadership and administrative team as part of normal data-driven practice. Directions were explained at a staff meeting and in writing via e-mail, wherein a link to the survey and password were provided. The survey was administered at the conclusion to the 2015-2016 academic year. Twenty-six of a potential 35 participants (74%) responded to the survey (74%). Of the 26 respondents, 23 satisfactorily completed the ISS-R: 17 teachers and 6 others. According to the ISS-R, Freedom scored an ISS-R score of approximately 64%. Subscales ranged from 57% (Program) to 74% (Policy; Appendix E). These data were shared with staff and faculty of the school during the first 2016-2017 PLC meeting to provide continuity into the current year’s work.

**Type of Study**

In this section, the design of the study is described, followed by identification of the sources of the data analyzed in the study.

**Design of the Study**

The design of this study was PAR, with elements of improvement inquiry and intervention design (Bryk et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2016).

**Improvement science.** Improvement science is a methodology designed to improve practice through innovative projects that allow for continuous improvement (Bryk et al., 2015). Mintrop (2016) identified a version of improvement science as design development. Design development is systematic problem solving based on inquiry built from empirical research and ideas that are tested in short cycles, with the goal to identify effective practices leading to improvement (Bryk et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2016). Particular acts of inquiry are called “improvement research projects” that are focused on quality improvement (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 10) and are sometimes referred to as “intervention designs” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 15).
**Intervention design.** Intervention designs are “a series of activities that intervene in existing knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, or routines to improve or promote new learning and foster new practices” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 134). Formal activities of inquiry, materials, tools, or procedures are designed for a set period of time with specific goals (Mintrop, 2016). The current study followed a “method of inquiry . . . [guiding] rapid learning” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 14) and built on prior knowledge and understanding in a PDSA cycle as outlined by Bryk et al. (2015).

**Participatory action research.** PAR is a form of applied and solution-oriented research common in education where practitioners are involved in efforts to improve practice (Freebody, 2003; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). Based on Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) description, this approach was used to engage participants in a PLC to challenge power relations and initiate change. Kemmis et al. (2014) explained that, in PAR studies, participants are interested in their practice and consider whether or not the conditions in which they practice are appropriate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). PAR projects have the potential to engage others to take control, make conditions better, and transform individuals from social and individual perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants in this PAR study engaged educators to take action to understand perspectives of effective teachers, the caring teacher-student relationship, and the manner in which those relationships are formed.

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is that of a participant and instrument. Although limitations of bias are present, the benefits (immediacy and adaptive ability to clarify, expand, and explore) are the ideal means to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 2002). Action researchers keep self-reflective journals, engage in communication with critical friends (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), or make the study participants co-designers.
(Mintrop, 2016) to provide ongoing critical feedback. They “reflect on their own positions of authority and their own desirability biases before the study begins” (Mintrop, 2016, p. 193).

This research utilized a microethnographic (Shank & Brown, 2007, p. 65) method of data collection. **Microethnography** is defined as a specialized form of ethnography in which the researcher conducts a study in a narrowly focused, shorter period of time than in traditional ethnographic studies (Shank & Brown, 2007).

**Data Sources**

Data were collected from five educators (including the researcher as participant observer): pre- and post-intervention semistructured interviews, participant observations, and artifact examination. Data sources also included my notes and participants’ notes when assigned or volunteered as recorder during meetings, agendas, and information obtained via informal interviews as part of work done in the PLC. Each is explained in detail in this section.

Researcher’s and participants’ notes were used to collect qualitative data describing the teachers’ perspectives on self-reflection, the culture of the classroom, and the learning environment (Shank & Brown, 2007). Additional qualitative evidence was collected through a deliberate democratic approach with a PLC guided by cultural care and the elements of IE (Purkey & Novak, 2016). The I-CORT elements (intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust) were used as a guiding principle. Notes included anecdotal records, reflections, questions, and information on next steps.

Notes taken by a recorder (designated note taker) at meetings, events, and PD sessions (including PLC meetings) were copied, collected, and transcribed (when appropriate). The notes were reviewed and examined for common threads or themes.
Artifacts were collected and kept in a binder. They included notes from school-related events (PTO, PSCC, and committee meetings) and items generated for or as a result of events, including PD and workshops. Materials (PowerPoint presentations, video presentations, and handouts) were kept as electronic or hard copies.

Semistructured interviews elicited data from participants and offered flexibility with questions (Appendix B) and opportunities for clarification and understanding (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each teacher participant was interviewed prior to and following the intervention. One purpose of the pre-intervention interviews was to remind the participants of the purpose of the study. Other purposes were to gather data on personal and professional background knowledge of the participants, to provide a baseline for reflection on changes in practice, and to engage participants as part of the planning in the intervention process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Post-intervention interviews were conducted to gain participants’ perspectives on the influence of the 7-week intervention and a semester of participation in the PLC. All interviews were conducted at either the school or locations convenient to participants. The participants were asked a series of open- and close-ended questions to encourage clarification and elaboration. The responses were recorded using an cell phone’s voice memo application. The recorded responses were uploaded to a computer for transcription and analysis. In addition, I recorded handwritten notes as anecdotal records. The notes and interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes.

In the semistructured interviews, the questions were open-ended to allow for detail and clarification, with probes and follow-up questions when needed (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions were designed to assess the impact of participation in six key areas: (a) teacher practice (b) interactions, (c) climate of the learning environment,
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(d) teacher-student relationships, (e) student behaviors, and (f) student academics. The interviews began by participants describing their personal background and experience in education, familiarity with and knowledge of CRP, and perspectives on care as part of their practice.

The interview questions underwent peer review for feedback regarding clarity and understanding. Following review of the questions, pilot interviews were conducted with two scholarly practitioners in my cohort at Duquesne University.

The interviews were conducted in private locations convenient to the participants, before or after school. I reviewed the interview process, the approximate length of time needed, and types of questions that would be asked. At the time of the interview, I asked participants for permission to record the interview and presented the required consent form for signature.

Research Question

The research question was, How do teachers perceive the influence of cultural care and inviting practices on their relationships with students of color?

Participants

At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, teachers were invited to join one of four PLCs in an area of their interest. As the researcher and lead facilitator of the PLC focused on equity and care, I introduced the theory of IE, gave an explanatory summary of the purpose of IE, and provided literature on culturally responsive care by Gay (2010). Then, staff members were asked to indicate their level of preference among the four offered PLCs. After selections were made, the teachers were notified by the principal in which PLC they were assigned to participate. All teachers in this study were willing participants in the focused PLC, referred to as the Care Team.
Participants in this study were five educators who agreed to participate in the research project as a result of their interest and commitment to a PLC focused on care and equity. The participants were highly qualified in their teaching practices, according to the district’s RISE evaluation system. All participants—four teachers and one counselor—had received ratings as either proficient or distinguished in consecutive years. The participants were a female social worker/developmental advisor of African American descent, a male learning support teacher of African American descent, a female fifth-grade mathematics teacher of European descent (with four biracial sons), an untenured (less than 3 years of experience as a contracted teacher) learning support teacher who identified as White, and myself, the researcher as a participant observer and female second-grade teacher who identifies as White (with three biracial sons).

Role of the Researcher

Milner (2007, 2010b, 2015) argued against researchers detaching themselves from the research process and Mintrop (2016) wrote, “Action research embraces transformative leaders while placing them at the vent of the research endeavor” (p. 193). This section describes the role of the researcher. The section begins with the researcher as an instrument and includes my personal and professional background leading to this strategic project.

Researcher as Instrument

Milner (2007, 2010b, 2015) suggested that researchers engage in self-reflection to gain awareness and critical consciousness to contribute to the dialogue, empower researchers, and provide researcher accountability to people and communities related to the research. Milner (2007) discussed researcher positionality and introduced a framework “to guide any research into racial and cultural awareness” (p. 388). I grew up in an all-White, rural town where exposure to diversity was not common in the close-knit community. Yet, the importance of
providing experiences that involved exposure and appreciation for diversity was always an integral part of my upbringing.

My core values and beliefs are influenced by (a) my father who, despite my parents’ divorce when I was 5 years old, was an ever-present and devoted role model; (b) my mother, who was not openly gay until well into my adulthood; and (c) my grandmother, a first-generation Italian American. My family’s perspectives on diversity, equity, and acceptance shaped my journey to become an educational leader for social justice and offered a distinctive perspective based on my intersectionality. As an Italian American married for 13 years to my husband, who is African American, I have experienced and been witness to common discriminatory treatment and stereotyping regularly endured by persons of color.

As a teacher and mother of three biracial sons, I am heartbreakingly familiar with passive prejudice and microaggressions inside and outside of the classroom that lead to negative student outcomes. This “experiential knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21) motivated me to focus research on teachers’ utilization of cultural care and inviting practices and its influence (based on teachers’ perceptions) in multiple areas of the learning environment. The areas of concern are teacher practice and capacity, the formation of positive teacher-student relationships, student behavior and academics, and ways to promote improvement in the learning environment.

My personal and professional experiences have provided a unique perspective on negative misconceptions, stereotyping, unconscious bias, and unintended colorblind racism in multiple settings. My professional and personal understandings of race, multiculturalism, and pluralism, combined with a strong knowledge base on teaching and learning environments, have collectively heightened my awareness of systematic oppression and social prejudices. This experiential knowledge has also provided a strong understanding of a positive mindset for
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trusting relationships and the significance of cultural care, race, relationships, and the role of care as part of teacher practice.

Data Analysis

Artifacts, interviews, and researcher observations were examined for common themes to allow for adjustments, analysis, and further collection. I used a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) to collect and analyze data involving inductive and comparative procedures to gain conceptual characteristics of theory and to generate findings (Glaser, 2008; Glasser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 229; Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The findings are reported in the form of case study vignettes. Interviews were transcribed on my computer. An open coding system was used to analyze and identify common themes (Khandkar, 2009; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Seidel, 1998). Data were coded using a combination of a priori codes derived from the theoretical frameworks and emergent themes.

Codebook Development

I created a codebook of a priori analytical codes that were “compatible with the study’s purpose and theoretical frameworks” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 212) of IE and CRP. Peer review was used to gain suggestions for addition or removal of codes.

Validity and Reliability

Participants were given an opportunity to conduct member checks on emerging themes and findings throughout the study for greater reliability and validity. Third-party peer review of emergent themes from coded interviews, with a minimum of 85% code agreement, was conducted for interrater reliability. To support greater reliability, an audit trail was created (Appendix A) to record activities conducted in the PLC.
To adjust for limitations and to ensure transferability, reliability, credibility, and validity, I conducted member checks for clarification, elaboration, and respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks were conducted with all participants with the interview data and my observation notes. Participants were provided an electronic copy of their individual responses and researcher’s notes in a chart format. Participants were offered an opportunity to review significant findings during a 10-day time frame for any potential misinterpretation. All participants communicated and verified the information as accurate.

**Protection of Participants**

Participant selection and protection are described in this section. First, the method for participant sample selection is described, followed by the process of informed consent and removal of identifiable data to maintain confidentiality of participants.

Participants were purposefully invited to be a part of the research study as a result of their willing participation in the PLC known as the Care Team. All participants were verbally invited to participate. Upon agreement, confirmation and correspondence thanking them for their participation was sent via email.

I described the background and purpose of the study in a letter electronically (or in hard copy, if requested) to participants. Participants were informed verbally and in writing that their participation in the research was optional.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms that were used to label electronic files. A list of the pseudonyms was kept in a secure and locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home.

Methods for collecting data included recording of participants’ responses and my notes, direct quotes, narrated observations, and background information on members of the PD community and this study. Data also included recorded interview sessions. Member checks were conducted for clarification and review of information to avoid potential bias and
misinterpretation of information. The qualitative data were screened in search of emerging themes. My typed notes and transcribed data were stored in a password-secured computer and will be destroyed 5 years after the date of submission of the study for approval by the Institutional Review Board. My handwritten notes were kept in a secure location at my residence and will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the study.

Participants were offered light snacks and beverages during the interviews. Upon completion of the study, participants were given a small token of appreciation (gourmet coffee or tea and a copy of Inviting Students to Learn: 100 Tips for Talking Effectively with Your Students by Jenny Edwards).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this action research study, I investigated teachers’ perceptions of the influence of cultural care and invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 2016) on the formation of positive teacher-student relationships with strong consideration of students of color in an urban elementary school. Drawing on thematic analyses of semistructured pre- and post-intervention interviews, participant observations, and artifact examination, I describe in this chapter the processes, experiences, and viewpoints of five educators engaged in a PLC focused on equity and care.

First, I report the findings from the data from pre-intervention implementation questions (Appendix B) in seven key areas: (a) professional development and background knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy (at collegiate and district levels), (b) perception of the school climate, (c) rationale for joining the PLC, (d) perceptions of students’ behavioral and academic needs, (e) building relationships, (f) demonstrating care, and (g) considerations of race and culture, including the value of recognizing race and culture in teacher practice.

The limits in amount and quality of culturally based PD at both the collegiate and district levels and the presence of an inhospitable, unstable school climate emerged in the pre-intervention findings. Also, there was an overlap in the methods by which educators formed relationships with students and how participants demonstrated care for their students. The importance of a social and emotional approach to forming relationships (sharing personal stories, talking to students about non-academic topics, providing basic needs and making personal connections) was evident in the data.

Next, I present the findings from the post-intervention interview data. The results are outlined in association with the perceived influence of cultural care and inviting practices in
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five major areas: (a) teacher practice, (b) teacher-student relationships, (c) school climate, (d) student academic and social behaviors, and (e) classroom management. Next, I identify the findings related to the PLC members’ perceived benefits of participation in the PLC for themselves and for students of color.

Emergent themes from the post-intervention implementation data analysis indicated the importance of the physical setting in which PLCs operate, teacher self-reflection as a part of practice, social and self-awareness by teachers regarding word choice, and the students’ perceptions of their approach. Showing concern for students’ needs and well-being as a priority and a holistic awareness of race and culture were commonalities in the teachers’ beliefs concerning the influence of cultural care on student motivation, effort, and the frequency of avoidance behaviors. Participants reported an improvement in students’ academic and social behaviors. They reported an increase in student effort and motivation in subjects that are often difficult, a reduction in avoidance behaviors (off task, intentional distractions, asking to leave the room, out of seat), and positive student-student interactions (complimenting each other, kind gestures, and being polite). One unexpected finding that emerged from the data indicated occurrences of student-initiated conversations on the topic of race (or racism) and cultures.

To conclude this chapter, I identify the perceived limitations and inhibitors of relationship formation. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: How do teachers perceive the influences of cultural care and inviting practices on their relationships with students of color?
Participant Demographics

Participants were five educators, identified as highly qualified based on the district’s teacher evaluation system. All agreed to join the research project as a result of their interest and involvement in the PLC. All participants—four teachers and one counselor—had received teacher ratings as either proficient or distinguished for 3 consecutive years via the district teacher evaluation system. The participants’ experience in urban education ranged from 3 years to 20 years. Freedom’s staff demographics are reported in Appendix C.

Pre-Intervention Findings

Members of the PLC who were part of this study were asked a series of questions before the formal implementation of culturally caring and inviting practices as an intervention. The questions were related to the participants’ professional development background, perceptions of the current school climate, and the rationale for joining the PLC. The questions also elicited information about the educators’ thoughts concerning students’ behavioral and academic needs, approaches to building relationships, and demonstrating care toward students. Demonstrating care included recognizing, acknowledging, and validating students’ races and cultures.

The thematic findings related to educators considering race and culture in the formation of teacher-student relationships when demonstrating care, along with the perceived value and influence of recognizing student race and culture on (a) student behaviors and management practices, (b) teacher-student relationships, and (c) teacher-educator practices and student interactions. The following sections report the findings based on participants’ responses to the pre-intervention interview questions.
Professional Development and Background Knowledge of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Participants were asked a series of questions involving professional background and PD on the topic of CRP at the collegiate and district levels. Significant findings indicated an absence of availability and lack of quality in the PD sessions at both levels. To conclude this section, I discuss significant findings related to the participants’ perceptions of district-level PD sessions.

Collegiate Level

Two participants, Mrs. Washington and Ms. Paul, indicated that they had elected to take coursework related to culture and diversity at the collegiate level. Both stated that it was a personal decision based on their interest and not a requirement of the university. Ms. Paul shared that she had noted the difference between the required courses in a specialized urban track program. She discussed her experiences at the university level.

I found that the generic, not generic, it seemed generic to me, the multicultural education class that we had to take . . . the entire education group of education majors had to take that course, and I felt like the people that maybe were teaching it, all came from the same area that I was from.

I spent a few weeks in Philly just voluntarily with a group that was urban track focused, and we went into the schools there. Then, based on that experience, I decided to do a year-long student teaching at [school name] in [neighborhood]. That really prepared me just to be a city teacher, and I got more of a feel for the difference between rural and urban schools and . . . I did, there were some courses that were required just based on being urban track focused, and before you could come to the yearlong student teaching experience in the city, you had to do that course work. Actually, the 2 weeks in Philly that I spent ended up being a requirement of the urban track, so I had already taken care of that after my freshman year. Then, I was able to add more classes. I had a man named [professor’s name], and he’s taught in so many different areas, and he’s been in the city schools. Now he’s retired, but he worked with urban schools for 14 years building the urban track cohorts, so he really prepared us. Just he was getting us into the schools more than the multicultural education class was.

Mrs. Washington’s undergraduate coursework on the topic of diversity differed in comparison to the graduate coursework.
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In undergrad, I had a ton of courses focused on diversity, learning about different cultures, understanding what are some customs that would make you more inviting and more willing to understand different cultures so that you’ll be able to understand how to impact students in a positive way. In undergrad, I had a lot of experiences but that was very intentional, for me. I just felt like that was important for me to get out of my undergrad experience.

Mrs. Anderson noted the lack of diversity in the collegiate peer group. She stated that she was the only African American in her graduate school cohort for school counseling. She reported that in the “counseling program, [they] could have done a better job preparing counselors across the board.”

In grad school, I had one course but it was very similar to undergrad. I think that, in my school counseling program, they could have done a better job of preparing counselors, across the board, to understand the needs of students that are urban, in that environment. To help counselors to understand that, in spite of your background, which may be suburban and you may have people that look all like you, you have to be intentional about it, you have to go outside of yourself to understand that everyone doesn’t look like you and everyone doesn’t have the same religious background as you. I think a lot of my cohort members struggled with that. Not many of them teach in an urban setting, which is indicative of their lack of training. At the same time, may be their preference, too.

Mr. Wolfe’s preservice field teaching experience involved multiple settings that were diverse in location (suburban, urban, and rural) and student demographics. Yet, he specified that he had had no required or coursework at the collegiate level on topics of diversity or CRP. He also stated that he did not recall whether it was even offered at that time he was in college (1993–1998). Mrs. Anderson noted that she had no coursework or preservice experience teaching in urban education until she was employed by the LWPSD.

As a participant researcher, my undergraduate coursework was not in the field of education. The graduate coursework at the collegiate level offered one required course on multiculturalism that did not include any discussion of culturally relevant or responsive teaching. My preservice and student teaching experience was part of an urban program conducted in an LWPSD elementary school.
District-Level Professional Development

The participants were asked to describe their PD on CRP since working in the school district. No member of the PLC in this study had received any PD on the topic of CRP at the district level. However, all recalled having only one professional development experience that might have been similar.

Mr. Wolfe said, “The only PD that would even parallel that would be a couple of years back, it was a big one. Cultural something, I can’t remember the name of it.” A follow-up question confirmed that he was referring to the Beyond Diversity training session. Mrs. Washington said, “The only topic focused around that that I can think of that I’ve had for professional development was the Beyond Diversity training.” For Ms. Paul and myself, the Beyond Diversity training was a source of motivation to join the care team due to a lack of PD on topics on or related to CRP. Ms. Paul stated,

I’ve been to beyond diversity training, which I would actually like to do again in a smaller group . . . just because I feel like I could get even more out of it just doing it twice because it was a lot packed into just 2 days when I did that. Then that’s why I joined the care team because other than that I don’t know what else I really was receiving from the district as far as professional development training.

The PD sessions entitled Beyond Diversity Training, using the Courageous Conversations protocol (Singleton & Linton, 2006), was introduced to district leadership in the 2012-2013 school year prior to being introduced to teachers. Although this PD session discussed matters related to race, culture, and equity (bias, stereotyping, privilege, perceptions, narratives, etc.), it did not include CRP as part of the PD sessions. All participants deemed the Beyond Diversity PD, and those similar to them, to be necessary but expressed strong beliefs regarding the way in which sensitive topics were presented. Mr. Wolfe and Mrs. Washington expressed anger and irritation while taking part in the district PD from the perspective of individuals of color. Mr. Wolfe said,
Yes . . . it was Beyond Diversity training at [name of PD center]. Big conference room. Just a lot of people, and too many people, I think, for what it is they were trying to tell, or trying to share. . . I thought it seemed to put people on defense, because I looked at it like there is more White people than Black people in here, you just coming at all these White people, and now is everybody going to turn around and be mad at me, at my group, or table, when I really didn’t do anything. Some of them are sitting there kind of like . . . It made me feel uncomfortable, because I just think that in that large of a setting, especially being outnumbered, it’s not that I don’t want to rock the boat, but I think you have to go about it a certain way, especially when there is only a handful of Black people, then you are kind of coming at the White people like, “Ha ha ha,” like almost a finger pointing. That’s unfair to people who were just generally sitting in the audience. That’s unfair to them. I think because race is such a sensitive topic, you can’t just hop out at somebody with it. It’s just, “Whoa, you just jumped out of the closet, you’ve got to ease your way out.” I think you should do that not only for the people who are sitting there, but who may be exposed to tendencies that they have, and they may know it, but for somebody who may not realize, “Oh, I had some tendencies.”

When asked to elaborate on what he meant by “tendencies,” Mr. Wolfe explained,

Maybe to treat somebody differently, or maybe look at someone differently based off of their race, maybe you didn’t know you were doing it, and now you hear this, and you are thinking to yourself, “Do I do that? I do do that.” Again, I think with certain topics you’ve got to ease people into them, because they are sensitive to a person.

His response described what would be defined as racial stereotyping and unconscious bias.

Mrs. Washington also described a defensive stance by numerous educators of color during the PD session:

I don’t really like using the term minority but I think that those that were of African descent, Latino descent . . . were irritated with the same dialogue, the same information, feeling like we’re always having to defend or explain certain things where everyone else doesn’t have to, but we’re expected to sit through the same training of information we already know. . . . There were definitely aspects of it that I appreciated. I always feel, going into those kind of trainings, that I’m angry. It’s just a constant reminder of feeling like things are not going to change. That was my main take away from it.

Like Mrs. Washington and Mr. Wolfe, other negative experiences with the Beyond Diversity training were recorded in my notes and reflections during a conversation with a staff member after a PLC meeting.

Following the PLC meeting, I encountered one of the PLC participants, (Participant 1) in the hallway and we talked about the conversation and dialogue that had begun in the PLC
earlier in the day. I thanked for her participation and appreciated her insight and interest in the subject. We also talked about the “training” in terms of changing the mindset with the district’s interview activity. I think that she and I had the common understanding that how information is presented and where it is presented is just as important as the subject matter to change and shift mindsets. When describing the beginnings of the conversation about race and equity in the district, she and the former principal went to the PD session on equity through courageous conversations as it was the first topic. She said that it had been very hostile, with tension in the room. She described the session as “very resistant and walls were immediately built in defense.” I also noted that some participants had been forced to attend the PD session a second time. After such a negative experience with the Beyond Diversity training the first time, it is easy to imagine the mindset as they began the second session.

I attended the Beyond Diversity PD session on the same dates and times as Mr. Wolfe. The two days slated for this PD were added at the end of the year as make-up days due to school cancellations. People were ready to wrap up the school year and begin a much-needed summer recovery session. I would describe the 2 days of training as tense, defensive, and uncomfortable. I felt that I had to defend and support what the presenters were attempting to express and share.

As a White female with biracial children, I had a duality of knowledge and shared experiences. I had an awareness and understanding of White privilege, unconscious bias, and stereotyping from a personal and professional perspective. Understanding that not everyone shared these experiences, I felt an “obligated guilt” to explain the uncomfortable reality of what my family and I experience. Often, it fell on deaf and defensive ears. It was both liberating and painful. It seemed that someone was finally speaking out but not everyone was
willing, ready, or able to digest the reality of our lives. Several times, I choked back tears of frustration and anger that stemmed from unacknowledged hurt.

During a part of the PD session, we were placed in affinity groups. I was the outlier in terms of positionality and philosophies but not in terms of race. The group consisted of 10 to 12 White people. It was an unfriendly and unwelcoming feeling. Eventually, I tired and shut down in quiet exhaustion. I listened intently to points of view that differed greatly from my own. The setting, space, and learning environment were very uninviting. The session was large and impersonal, with many people from all over the district whom I had never known, met, or worked with prior to this day. It was far from a safe space that was needed to have difficult yet critically important conversations. At the end of the second day, I was determined to continue the dialogue in a productive setting and safe space. My incentive to continue the work was facilitated, in part, from this experience.

Participants in this study did not obtain a strong background in culturally relevant pedagogy training from PD sessions in the district. Some participants found the PD experiences to be negative and largely ineffective.

**Perceptions of the School Climate**

All participants communicated levels of concern related to teacher support from administration when asked to describe the tone or atmosphere of the school climate. All stated that the tone of the learning environment and how teachers felt influence students. One participant said, “I think there is just a lot of distrust between teachers and teacher, administration and teacher, and that’s carried over to students and teachers.” Another commented,

Okay, so I wouldn’t say there’s an overall negative tone in the building. . . I don’t want to keep sounding like it is, like there is a negative tone, but when there’s a lack of
communication and all these other things that are stressful to the teachers it’s hard not to let it affect how we’re teaching or how we’re interacting with kids.

Three of the four participants described the learning environment as tense. One participant discussed stress that was felt by teachers:

They’re really trying their best to make sure everything stays afloat, make sure they have their grades in, make sure that they’re getting all their paperwork in. At the same time, [they’re] expected to have a positive attitude with students. I think it’s constantly a balancing act for everybody to really make sure that things are getting done and the students are getting everything they need.

Of those three, two participants spoke of the uncertainty felt by teachers and staff and the feeling of distrust among teachers, as well as between teachers and administration. Mr. Wolfe said,

I think this year . . . it’s tense. I feel like people in terms of staff are on guard. I believe that the administration has just checked out, and I really can’t tell what the administration’s motive, or motives are.

Another participant reported a change in the tone of the building and its influence on the students.

It’s easy to take things out on the people closest to you, and who is closest to us but our children . . . we’re with them all day . . . I’m noticing, I don’t know when this came into play but it seems like I’ve heard different adults comparing, “Well, so and so doesn’t have a homeroom, or they don’t have this,” but when did it become us comparing the duties that we have to other people? Aren’t we all just in this together? You’re working just as hard. I might not see everything that you’re doing and all this effort that you’re putting in.

But it’s really scary because that’s the tone of our building. It’s starting to rise and you’re now this one who I used to think had respect for everyone in the building and we were working together, which we do. The staff supports each other, but when did it become now we’re comparing workloads and things like that?

That’s scary to me because I didn’t see that last year. There is a camaraderie still amongst the staff but is it going to get worse now that I’m seeing, well, this person saying they don’t have this type of a duty and they don’t have a homeroom, so it doesn’t matter they shouldn’t care and . . . Now that I’m in this position I felt that I was sheltered last year, I will say that maybe it was surface level, maybe it’s not actually just changing, maybe all along it was surface.
On the other hand, all of the teachers reported clusters of positivity in the school climate. Mr. Wolfe said,

I can honestly say that my particular little room, it’s quiet, it’s a place kids want to come. Physically it’s not always the most attractive . . . but I just think in terms of the energy in the room, it is pretty positive.”

Ms. Paul described her setting as a “smaller, close knit little group of kids,” while Mrs. Anderson stated that the overall tone in her classroom and on her team was positive, stating, “I feel like it’s very positive with our team. I think our team’s working well together with the kids.” However, Mrs. Anderson perceived a discrepancy in terms of the level of support and treatment when describing the climate of the building.

I see more the primary team struggling with behavior than us. I think that we get more support upstairs than you do downstairs. From the administrative point of view, . . . I don’t think you’re getting the support. We’re getting kids, we’re getting people to help us that I don’t think you’re getting the help that you guys [the primary team] should be getting. . . . I don’t think you guys are being treated fairly down there. And your hands are tied.

Participants provided both positive and negative feedback when asked about their school’s climate, expressing concern over tension caused by the lack of communication or understanding the administration’s and teachers’ needs. Participants’ reflections indicated a need for the PLC to improve the climate of the learning environment.

Rationale for Joining the PLC Focused on Care and Equity

Three participants reported that their reason for joining the PCL was to support and improve their practice. Mrs. Anderson’s reason for participating was to support teachers’ and the researcher’s movement with the goal of school improvement for the benefit of the students and staff.
Teacher-Educators’ Perceptions of Students’ Behavioral and Academic Needs

Participants were asked to reflect on and discuss students who stood out in terms of needing additional behavioral support. The same question was asked regarding academic support. All participants reported that some students needed support in both academics and behavior, but they approached the question from varying angles.

Mr. Wolfe made a connection between avoidance behaviors, motivation, and academics for the students with whom he works. He said that his students often lack motivation and confidence, leading to avoidance behaviors.

Like on my caseload, in terms of behavior, I will say like [Student 1] in fifth grade. The kid is an intelligent kid, I can see when he puts his mind to it, he does some pretty good work. He is a good thinker [but] . . . when he is around certain groups, he will follow the wrong crowd. It’s interesting this year with fifth grade, the academic support is a little different. It’s one extreme or the other. [Student 2] does really well. [Student 2] just needs the confidence boost. [Student 3] just needs to be motivated to do it.

Mr. Wolfe stated that, in larger settings (regular education classrooms), he frequently observed avoidance behaviors (not completing work, expressing a dislike for work during instruction, asking to go to his room or the restroom or to get a drink). He shared that students were observed putting their heads down, engaged in self-distracting behaviors (e.g., touching classroom objects, playing with a pencil) and he noted a lack of student participation. He hypothesized that students preferred the smaller, quiet setting that his classroom offered.

Ms. Paul said that inappropriate student behaviors were a result of extreme behavior issues going unaddressed and resulted in less severe behaviors being ignored, normalized, and then escalated.

Because of the extreme behavior sometimes, these kids I noticed do get away with so much more than they should. And they’re not extreme behavior problems or they’re not doing something real severe, but maybe if we could just have the extra time to help them or problem solve with them like I talked about before. If we had more time to do
that kind of stuff, they wouldn’t maybe later on end up becoming, coming to this point, where they are exhibiting extreme behaviors.

Based on conversations with students, Mrs. Washington questioned whether challenges in student behavior and academics were related to teacher practices or students’ perceived biases held by staff members. She reported that some students related that racism was directed toward them but noted that it was difficult to distinguish. She stated that she was unsure whether it was legitimate, reflected a lack of culturally relevant practices, or was voiced by the student to avoid consequences:

Some of the older students that I have at the intermediate level. Where this constant conversation where students feel like certain staff members are racist toward them. This is the language that the students are using. It is very difficult sometimes to discern is this because they’re upset because of a consequence that they’re about to receive? Is it because they’re upset that they genuinely feel that there are certain practices that certain staff are using with them that are not receptive to who they are as an individual and to their culture. I do think some of the students do have legitimate reasons. I just think that they have a difficult time verbalizing what they’re experiencing.

Mrs. Anderson discussed her concern about one student’s behavioral challenges and the academic struggles faced by three students who, at the time of the interview, were failing or in danger of failing mathematics. She reported her response to each.

[Student name] is one. The other day I just stayed with him during lunch time because he was having a bad day. Instead of me sending him to lunch, I went down and I got his lunch for him and I just stayed upstairs with him. I have about three this year that are failing math. The one I told you, I shared about where I’m in constant contact with his mom, sharing tests, and he’s actually moved his grade from an E to a D. He’s a new student. [Student name] is another one. He struggles. I thought mom and dad were kind of more on board, because I was texting them and they were texting me and he was getting better, but he’s still not where I want him to be. The new kid, [student name], the lunch lady’s son. I go down and I talk to her almost every single day.

To summarize, participants provided both positive and negative feedback when asked about their school’s climate, expressing concern over tension caused by the lack of support, lack of communication, or miscommunication between the administration and teachers.
Approaches to Building Relationships

Educators were asked a series of questions concerning their approaches to building relationships with students. Findings from participants’ responses revealed the following themes: (a) talking to and with students (especially about nonacademic topics), (b) giving additional responsibilities to students, and (c) intentional listening to students’ concerns. Participants did not make distinctions regarding how they formed relationships with students of color, but all indicated that they used their approach to engage with students to build relationships.

Engaging in conversations. All participants said that one way of forming relationships with students is based on small gestures, sharing personal stories, and talking to students about nonacademic topics in order to engage with them positively. Mr. Wolfe stated, “I think talking, making an effort to talk to them about nonacademic things. I think just sharing my own stories about my own life. Being a parent, and just talking about what it is I do on the weekends.” Similarly, Mrs. Anderson said, “I give stories of my own, of myself. . . I think that you make a connection with your kids when you share your own life stories with them. . . . I constantly put my life with them. I share my whole life with them.” Two participants related that they used small gestures to engage students while establishing positive relationships. Ms. Paul said, “It’s just . . . sometimes it’s something as simple as saying good morning, or just acknowledging that they’re there” and included talking to family members outside of school.

Just talking to their families. That’s another big one, just building relationships with their families and say, “Hey, I saw your mom yesterday. How’s she doing?” Asking about the important people in their lives. A lot of mine is talking to build relationships.

Mrs. Washington had initially formed relationships through verbally greeting, being visible, checking in, and engaging with students.
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I think it starts with the small things and then, eventually, when there is an issue or something comes up, they feel more comfortable talking to you because you already did the groundwork, initially, to let them know that you’re available to talk to.

All of the teachers expressed the importance of initiating positive interactions as the foundation for forming relationships with students. I began to establish a relationship with students before the beginning of the school year. Over the summer, the principal provided teachers a class list of the incoming students, as well as the contact information. Two weeks before the start of the school year, I sent a personalized, colorful letter and poem through the postal service to welcome them to the classroom. The gesture eased the first-day jitters and let the students know that I looked forward to them being a part of our class. Reaching out to students before school officially began offered a good starting point to talk to students and their families. Giving careful attention to word choice, communication, and regular discourse associated with a community (our, us, friends, neighbor, families, together) facilitates a positive environment. A community and family-like setting is an important characteristic in CRP for effective promotion of student successes, in particular for students of color.

During the welcome back meet-and-greet night with parents and students, parents frequently commented that their child was happy to get the mail. They added that the letter helped to lessen the uncertainty, fear, and anxiety that often come with starting a new school year. All of the participants indicated that talking with students was a key aspect of the student-teacher relationship.

**Giving additional responsibilities to students.** Three teachers reported that they had established a positive rapport with students by providing opportunities to take on additional responsibilities. They stated that, by selecting students for greater responsibilities outside of regular tasks, they were demonstrating trust, respect, and a belief in the students’ ability to complete tasks. Ms. Paul emphasized that she used the time that students help in her classroom
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as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the students and to promote meeting expectations.

She stated that giving students an opportunity to do something outside the norm gives them a sense of being appreciated and valued.

I think it gives them a sense of . . . “she needs me,” or they feel important. So why not [choose a student for special jobs] if “you did everything that was expected of you, or you even did half of it, and that’s good for you then, yeah, I’m going to let you do something, too.”

Mrs. Anderson said that she often asked students to help and “be the teacher.” She reported a student’s response that helped to promote student self-efficacy:

I’m constantly getting students to help . . . “I need my teacher; I need my teachers! You’re all teachers in here.” Just like I had [student] do it the other day. I was like, “[Student], you did great on this quiz, I need your help, can you just help me?” He was floored, he was like, “I’ve never really helped anyone like that before.” I said, “Well, now here’s your chance, buddy.”

I reflected in my notes my perspectives on providing students with opportunities for additional classroom responsibilities:

Giving students responsibilities with classroom jobs or helping in the classroom assists in providing students a sense of community and team work. Each week in my classroom, students are randomly selected to work either independently or in partnerships. Students are “paid” at the end of the week via the token economy system in my room that correlates with the positive behavior incentive plan. This provides opportunities to contribute to creating an inviting space in our learning space, shows a level of trust in capabilities, and motivates students behaviorally. I also believe that this provides an opportunity for relatable and real-life consequences. Students are held accountable for having additional responsibilities and if unable to meet the expectations have the potential to be removed from their “jobs” as well.

To establish an open line of communication, efforts begin prior to students’ arrival in the classroom. Throughout each school year, I make a concerted effort to interact and engage with students in kindergarten and first grade. The intentional interactions and engagement with the students are part of a proactive approach to establish a foundation for positive teacher-student relationship and rapport in subsequent years.
Participants noted that, by talking with students and providing responsibilities, they saw positive outcomes in terms of building relationships with students, an important aspect in the discussion of student behavior and academics.

**Demonstrating Care for Students**

Educators who participated in this study were asked how they displayed care for students. The data revealed that the way in which teachers demonstrate care for their students overlapped with their approach to establishing relationships. Their approach to showing care included conversations (personal stories, positive engagement in discussions of nonacademic subject matter, small gestures, and listening), active listening, and providing students with materials to meet basic needs. All participants noted that their approach to demonstrating care for students included acknowledging, valuing, and recognizing students. They noted that, when they listened with intentionality, they formed positive relationships with their students.

**Duality of listening to student voice with intentionality.** Four participants stated that being an active listener to students’ personal perspectives and concerns helps to build relationships and demonstrates interest and care. Mr. Wolfe said, “If you can remember a little something about a kid, I think that helps.” Mrs. Anderson said, “I think just listening to them when they have problems or something like that. Not all the time can I stop and listen; but . . . if they have something to share, I’ll stop my class.” This illustrated the act of listening to students to assess their needs as a way to demonstrate care.

**Providing basic needs and academic materials.** Four of the five participants reported providing students with basic needs. The teachers reported that they offered, shared, and purchased items such as clothing, snacks, or school supplies for their students.

Prior to the official pre-intervention interview with Mrs. Anderson, a former student, now an adult, approached Mrs. Anderson at the location where the interview was conducted.
The former student, who reported that she was in her mid-20s, referred to Mrs. Anderson by her maiden name. Mrs. Anderson had taught the young woman during her first teaching position in the district. She and Mrs. Anderson recalled their time together nearly 20 years earlier. During the interview, Mrs. Anderson elaborated on the experience when asked about the aspect of caring for her students.

I think they just understand how much I care about them. Just like today, when I saw that girl that knew me from when she was 6 years old. I remember when I first started, they didn’t have breakfast at [school]. They didn’t start that breakfast program. My mom would go out and buy milk, gallons of milk for the week for me and buy breakfast food. I would make breakfast every day for my kids. . . . I had this one classroom, they weren’t ready for kindergarten but they were too old to be in preschool. So, I had eight kids in this classroom and she was part of it. I would bring in milk, I would bring in doughnuts one day. The next day I’d bring in cinnamon rolls, the next day I’d bring in eggs. I’d make eggs for them. That class was off-the-hook crazy, like threw computers across the room. I took over this woman’s position because she broke her arm because one of the kids pushed her down the step. I took over her classroom and the principal couldn’t believe they were behaving.

One participant noted that, if teachers can lessen the burden for a student or parent, especially a financial burden, it shows that the teacher cares.

Certain students, they may not have the opportunity or they may not have resources at home. If they ask me for a binder, usually, if I have a binder, I’ll give it to them right there on the spot or I’ll go buy a binder. Little things like that, because I don’t want them to feel like, “Okay, I need to go home, ask my parents for something.” If they’re asking me for it, then clearly there’s a need there. I’ll go out of my way to intentionally help that student, knowing most of the time, if their parents could afford to give them a binder, they would have already done it.

The participants’ statements showed that they demonstrated care for their students simply by helping students meet their basic needs.

**Recognizing, acknowledging, and validating.** A common theme among all participants was recognizing (noticing) and acknowledging students and their behaviors. Ms. Paul compared her personal experiences as a student when asked about the importance of recognizing her students. She suggested that noticing a change in a student’s behavior could be an outward display of a situation that required attention.
Sometimes it’s something even more serious like, “Hey, I noticed that you’re doing this. This isn’t like you, but I’m here, what can I do to help you get back to how it was before?” Or “What’s going on?” Just like I said about myself, maybe no one noticed the things that were going on with me but if hey, I noticed that maybe you’re not acting like you normally do, is something extra going on? Just being that person that they can talk to and sometimes I thought that’s going to be hard with the fifth-graders or, but they’re still kids and you can still find little ways to interact with them, or you hear them talking to their friends about baseball, bring it up, maybe just keep the communication open is a big relationship builder and showing up to stuff. Like going to a basketball game or being in the community, or seeing them at Target and not trying to hide, just talking to their families.

Mr. Wolfe spoke of showing his students that he cares by noticing students’ actions, recognizing students, and acknowledging students’ feelings.

I think it’s cool if I can bring up “old stuff” in terms of old stuff that was good. Even if it was just Tuesday morning, if I recognize . . . . I’ve had students open doors for somebody, if I recognize [Student] by saying, “Thank you for helping Mrs. [teacher] carry her bags up. She told me about that yesterday.” Sometimes bringing them, if they are doing work in class . . . maybe it was something that they did on their own, they get a good grade, then physically taking them to another teacher and say, “Hey look, I want to show you this.” I think when they get recognized, especially from other teachers and I say, “Mrs. [teacher] saw you yesterday help with kindergarten, that was a really big deal, thank you.” When they know that there are other people who are watching them, and they get acknowledged for something that they do, even if it is not in terms of grades or what have you. I think that goes a long way in letting them know, “Hey, I’m watching you, I care about what you do.”

He noted that he corrects students respectfully and simultaneously demonstrates care.

Being fair and equal in terms of not only acknowledging them for the good things that they do, but at times correcting them in a constructive manner. . . Not go all in with the criticisms, or with the corrections, I think. I’ve had to learn how to correct somebody without just totally defeating them. I think that goes a long way, too. It is like, “Hey, Mr. Wolfe could have really went all in on me, he didn’t. That’s going to be my motivation to try to make better choices.”

This practice depicts a “warm demander” approach described in CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 57). A warm demanding style of practice is described as kind but firm, communicating clear expectations without demeaning students (Bondy et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2006a, 2009). Mrs. Anderson cited verbalizing care in combination with a warm demander approach when she discussed the climate of the learning environment. “My
classroom, I’m very strict but I’m also a very caring teacher and they see that side of me in my classroom, but they also see the strictness I have in my classroom.”

In summary, participants reported that they demonstrated care for students in the pre-intervention implementation period when they recognized and acknowledged students’ behaviors, provided students with basic and academic needs, and intentionally listened to students.

**Consideration of Race and Culture**

In this section I discuss the thematic findings of the participants’ consideration of race and culture in four areas: (a) formation of teacher-student relationships; (b) demonstrating care; (c) the value and influence of recognizing student race and culture on student behaviors, management practices, and teacher-student relationships; and (d) teacher-educator practices and student interactions.

**Formation of teacher-student relationships.** Participants were asked whether the way in which they formed teacher-student relationships varied by race and culture. Four participants conveyed that approaches to building relationships varied when forming positive teacher-student relationships. Mr. Wolfe, who is African American, noted a self-awareness of how things are presented to students and the use of culturally centered topics of conversation:

> I think I will ask everybody the same questions, and try to find out about them in the same way. Maybe with how I say something, I think it may be different in terms of race. For instance, with [a student of color], I might say something like, “Oh bro, did you just get your edges done?” Where I probably wouldn’t say that to [student identified as White].

He specified that he was more aware of his race and culture in consideration to how he approached his students:

> But then I realize I couldn’t say something like that to another student, because they might take it personal, or they might not get it. Being that I’m involved with, feels like,
everybody in the building, it also has to be seriously person based. Again, you can’t always say something to one kid that you can say to another.

Similarly, Mrs. Washington expressed the importance of acknowledging variance in races and cultures from a strengths-based approach, and she viewed the differences in race or culture as an opportunity to gain understanding and teacher growth. “I just felt like they can teach us about who they are and about their backgrounds.”

Ms. Paul’s perspective also included the position of a student-centered approach for mutual benefit of student and child. “I think if I can learn more about their cultural background, that specific child, and bring it into the lessons that I’m teaching, it definitely influences their behavior.” She recounted an experience with a student that allowed him to be “the teacher.”

For example, one kid last year came from a completely different country. His parents did. They go there in the summers, and just bringing that into teaching the other kids about his culture and where he comes from, and it’s different than this area, but it’s also very similar, helping them to recognize that, though we have all of these differences, we also have huge similarities.

When asked whether she noticed any academic changes in the student, Ms. Paul said,

I would say that he was definitely more on task because a lot of the times I allowed him to be the teacher. I don’t know his experiences or his culture. I wanted to learn just as much as the other kids. And when they saw that, “Hey, they are interested in me and what I’m about or what my family has done or what they’ve experienced,” then even his academics started to improve because he was more on task.

Student learning and academics are explored further and discussed in greater depth in the post-intervention implementation section.

Mrs. Anderson stated that she recognized race but prioritized building a relationship based on needs first. She did not agree that this varied depending upon race or culture.

No. I build relationships with students based on what I think they need not by what . . . I don’t think by what color they are, I just think that . . . I know what color they are. I recognize that they’re Black, I recognize they’re biracial, I recognize that but I don’t think that I base a relationship on that. I base the relationship on what I feel that they need from me.
In this study, I acknowledged my perspective of building positive teacher-student relationships with an awareness of intersectionality, varying approaches, and recognizing differences in race and culture. My interest in exploring other teachers’ perspectives was influential in the purpose of the study and in the goal of improving the learning environment. As previously discussed, motivation to explore matters of race and equity began based on my experiential knowledge gained from personal and professional experiences.

**Demonstrating care.** All participants stated that they considered race and culture when demonstrating care toward students. Themes emerged from the data: teachers acknowledging students’ culture as a vehicle to build connections, teachers’ self-awareness, and a connection between student behavior and teacher practice.

Two participants’ responses (Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Anderson) indicated their interest in their students’ cultural perspectives and backgrounds to offer enrichment and an opportunity to connect personally and provide a student-centered learning experience. Mrs. Washington clarified, “We don’t know everything, as educators, and we should admit if we don’t know something. We should have them teach what their customs are so that we can better connect with them.”

Two participants, Mr. Wolfe and Ms. Paul, indicated a level of self-awareness related to race. Both reported that they considered how students could potentially perceive their approaches. Mr. Wolfe explained that he considered how well he knew the students prior to deciding how to engage with them.

I guess my first inclination, I guess race is a part of it, but then a big part of it is . . . . “Am I even cool with you to do something?” I would be I guess cautious, I guess race would play a part in it. I think the first thing is, do I even know the kid well enough before we even look at that, because we could be both Black males from [city neighborhood]. I guess then I would have to adjust, well, how am I going to show you that I care? I might just have to stand back afar and wait and say, “Hey, you did a great job on that spelling test, way to go.” Whereas somebody else, I can give them a fist
bump, we’ll do a handshake, a dance, and what have you. I guess race and culture do
play a part; but I think for me my initial thing is just first of all, “Am I even cool with
you like that?”

Mr. Wolfe described his perspective of how students may view him.

I try and bring in some information outside of being that teacher with the room that has
no room number and no key with a curtain in the back of the library. Or the one you
always see at lunch duty. Like, “Oh, there are some other elements to me.” Or getting
kids to see other elements that outside of “Well, Mr. Wolfe comes here, he takes just a
certain group of kids, or he is taking the badass kid, because nobody else can come and
get him and he happens to be in a hallway. Oh wow! There is this other side to him,
they do some different stuff.” I think a lot of times it helps having two kids in the
building. A lot of times I will say to the kids, “Hey, this is no different than what I tell
[his children’s names].” I think again, if I am telling you a little bit about myself
outside of just being a teacher, they find that to be pretty cool.

When asked whether she considered race and culture when showing her students that
she cared about them, Ms. Paul confirmed that she reflected on race and culture and did so with
an awareness of potential bias. She shared her prior experiences in professional work settings.

She explained that other educators considered her to be “too nice” to the students. The
comment implying that Ms. Paul was too nice is an example of stereotyping of students of
color and an example of teacher bias at the day care center where she had worked previously.

Ms. Paul described the biases in her discussion.

Not necessarily in this school, but in other schools, and in day cares that I’ve worked in,
I’ve been criticized sometimes for the way that I talk to kids. Especially in the day care
that I worked at because a lot of the other workers said, “Well, they’re not going to
respond to that because at home they’re used to someone talking to them this way.” I
can be aware of that but I feel the way that they were talking to kids, to me, I felt like
they were . . . it was degrading.

I don’t even know if that’s their real culture at home or if that is just something that [the
workers] lumped them all together. Because these are Black students so they’re . . .
“this is the way they’re treated at home.” But it’s so far from the truth. Like you have
to get to know each individual based on just them. They’re not lumped into this
stereotypical generic little category. Like these kids, they’re used to be talked to like
this but the White kid, which is so far from the truth because I’m a White kid and I
wasn’t talked to like that.

I feel like I do change up how I talk to one kid and then another kid and that could be
based on grade levels. It is based on, I would say, age and culture too, because
[Student], he sees I’m younger as a teacher and we had a different relationship; but then
these other kids, maybe the kindergartners, they see Ms. Paul as old. So, it’s the age culture thing, too.

Ms. Paul’s account illustrates how young children who attend day care are exposed to racial stereotyping and bias prior to entering a formal school setting.

**Teachers’ beliefs on the value and influence of recognizing student race and culture.** Educators who participated in this study were asked whether they considered recognizing a student’s race and cultural background influenced the three domains: (a) student behaviors and behavior management practices, (b) teacher-student relationships, and (c) teacher-educator practices and student interactions. All participants agreed that recognizing students’ races and cultures influences each of the three domains. The perceived value and influences of the participants is elaborated in this section.

**Student behaviors and behavior management practices.** Participants reported that recognizing student race and culture influences the educators’ behavior management and student behaviors. Ms. Paul recounted an instance in which a student who was exhibiting many off-task and disruptive behaviors demonstrated improvement in time on task, a lessening of disruptive behaviors, and an increase in academic growth when given an opportunity to share aspects of his culture.

That influences his behavior because I feel like he was acting out. This one student in particular was just doing some things, activities based on his culture. And allowing him to teach the kids about himself, I wasn’t seeing the . . . constant disruptions to the learning. He felt like maybe he was important to all of us.

Mr. Wolfe said that it was important to have established a positive relationship. He maintained that the fact that he is a teacher of color is a strength when managing student behaviors.

Because I think if I tell them that I’ve done the same thing, the fact that we look alike, sound alike, a lot of them have an idea of where I’m from, where I have a general vicinity, it can be a little bit more believable, because while I’m not in the exact same
boat, again, I’ve been there. They might buy in. Sometimes it doesn’t always work, though. I think they may react differently in terms of being corrected, kind of like, “All right.” Instead of maybe yelling or getting defensive. I think I have to be aware of how I come at a student, too, because again, just because where I’m a Black male, you are a Black male, you still might not want to hear from me what it is that I have to say. Especially if it comes to correcting, or just giving a piece of advice. I think there are other males who will get it, and maybe react differently. Instead of if a White teacher was saying that exact same thing to them, they might be on defensive. Matter fact, it just happened this past week.

Based on an established relationship, Mr. Wolfe recalled his approach and responses to an interaction between a White teacher and a student of color who was visibly upset.

It was a Black student who I saw was upset. He’s not on my caseload but I know him personally from just establishing a relationship with him. He told me about how a White male teacher corrected him, in terms of getting in line. I told him, “I get it, I understand.” He was really upset. Now, the White male teacher I think saw me talking to him, and got nervous, and called him up, but did it in a calm way, I think to apologize.

I told him I understood. I said, “I don’t like getting yelled at either,” and I said, “Mr. Wolfe has a difficult time even as a grown-up, with how people talk to me.” I said, “I know, it hurts sometimes, and you get mad.” I said, “But it’s all right now, your class is up here, it wasn’t your teacher that said anything.” I just kind of gave him a little punch in the shoulder, and I said, “Head up, wipe your face.” He kind of nodded his head yes and he just quietly walked into class.

As described in a preceding section, it is worthwhile to note that Mr. Wolfe indicated at the time of this study that students did not initiate conversations on the topic of race. He stated that he could not offer an explanation for this. He conjectured that perhaps it was “understood.” This is also discussed in a preceding section regarding student-initiated conversations related to race.

**Relationships.** All participants agreed that their recognition of students’ race and culture influenced teacher-student relationships. Three participants discussed the influence of recognizing culture on the formation of relationships. One participant approached the question based on her potential biases that could prevent a relationship from being established.

Like I said before, me being aware of my own biases that I bring to the table, maybe some things that I was taught growing up or I didn’t even realize I was being taught,
just being aware of that instead of hiding it and saying I don’t have these things that are . . . that helps me so that I’m not blocking a relationship with that child.

Mr. Wolfe asserted a strong opinion about students’ race being recognized, acknowledged, and noticed. When asked whether recognizing race and culture influenced teacher student relationships, he firmly stated,

Oh, without a doubt. Then I think if you can recognize a student’s culture as a part of who they are, as a total person, I think that can let the student know, “Hey, you have a general interest in me.” Everybody wants to be acknowledged, and recognized, and noticed.

Mr. Wolfe also discussed an awareness of his approach to students with consideration of their race and background:

Just recognizing that your approach or interactions with kids may be different, but I think the intent still needs to be the same. That sometimes culture can play a role in how you interact, or maybe how you lend support to the student. It should never deter you from trying to help a kid. Sometimes you might have to adjust your ways, or maybe you and this kid just don’t click. That’s okay. I think just being aware of somebody’s background, being aware of who they are as an individual.

Mrs. Washington explained her rationale for consideration of students’ race or culture when engaging.

How I may engage and interact with the young lady that was an Indian student, I may not engage with an African American male in the same way or fashion. To me, I feel like I need to take that into consideration.

Mrs. Anderson conveyed the importance of students gaining an understanding of cultures outside of their own. “I think that’s a great experience for kids to understand different cultures, especially even just between White and Black cultures, it’s different, too.” Regarding recognizing race and culture, Mrs. Anderson discussed a perception of student-student interactions between Asian students and students of color.

I feel struggle between the Asian students and the Black students. I don’t feel like there’s a struggle between the Asian students and the teachers. I feel like it’s more like a struggle with the kids between them because I think the kids treat them differently.

[Researcher: Who treats whom differently, though?]
Both ways. You can see from the Asian students’ point of view, they feel maybe the Black students are lower than them. Then I feel the Black students don’t want to be around them, the Asian students, because they’re different looking than them. I see that in the dancing classrooms. I have [Student] and [Student] in my classroom for fifth-grade math and they come down, they dance with the fifth graders. Well, some of the boys won’t dance with them because they’re Asian.

In this light, acknowledging race and culture not only plays an important role in how teachers form relationships with students but also in student-to-student relationships.

**Teacher-educator practices and student interactions.** All participants agreed that students’ racial and cultural backgrounds influenced their practices and interactions with students. Although Mrs. Anderson indicated that she recognizes race and culture, her responses reflected a slight hesitation and were more specific to her pedagogical style. Conversations guided by activities through the PLC revealed that Mrs. Anderson’s family (mother, brothers, and sister), outside of her husband and children, was not typically open to discussion or drawing attention to differences in race, even though her husband is African American and her four children are biracial. The discomfort in drawing attention to race and culture was evident in interview data. Noting high teacher self-efficacy in classroom management along with characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., other mothering; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006), Mrs. Anderson indicated that knowing students’ individual circumstances takes precedence.

I guess you have to be sensitive of what their culture is. You can’t always bring up the same things that you would talk to a white student as opposed to maybe a Black student. Again, knowing your students is the key. . . . I make sure I try to know all my students; and I may not give as much time with this student as I give that student because this student may need me more; and I know that that student has two parents at home that are keeping an eye on him and doing what he’s supposed to be doing. As opposed to this kid, who has a grandma who’s 77 years old who is trying her best just to get by to raise that child. I may take more time to be more motherly-like to that kid. Does it depend on if they’re White or Black? No, it doesn’t depend on if they’re White or Black. It just depends on what their situation is. I would say I recognize their race, of course.
Mr. Wolfe affirmed the influence of recognizing race and culture related to teachers’ approach and interactions: “Sometimes we have to look at a person’s culture, because it can go a long way in determining how we recognize them, or engage with them. Maybe how to not engage with them, as well.” Specific to teaching, Mr. Wolfe shared,

When I was interacting with the one kid who was upset, he understood that I got it. Because of our relationship, I was able to kind of talk him through what he was going through. Same thing could happen with teaching. Say, “Hey, look, here is why we need to learn how to do this.” Maybe hearing it from me because we are of the same gender, and race, a kid might buy into a teaching style, or a lesson a little bit more.

Connecting back to statements that Ms. Paul made previously on the influence of recognizing and embracing student culture as part of demonstrating care and building relationships, she spoke to the increase in instructional time and student and teacher interest, through incorporating students’ background into the curriculum:

First of all, we don’t have all of the little behaviors. So, it allows you to teach more. You’re still going to have behaviors . . . that’s multifaceted, but it definitely influences my interest, too. Because it’s not just this Pathways [curriculum] that I’m giving. It’s, “How can I make it more to where they’re going to remember what I’m teaching for a lifetime?” . . . and I’m going to learn from them, also. So, incorporating their backgrounds, and everything that they are into it just makes it better for all of us.

To summarize the pre-intervention implementation period, data gathered via participant interviews showed that creating a student-centered learning environment and recognizing a student’s culture were beneficial academically, behaviorally, and in terms of teacher practice.

**Post-Intervention Findings**

This section outlines and presents a discussion of the post-intervention findings of the study. First, the perceived influences of interventions on five domains are discussed. Then, findings concerning the benefits of participation to teachers and students are reviewed. Last, the data related to the participants’ expressed limitations or inhibitors to formation of relationships between themselves and their students is discussed.
Influence of Interventions of Cultural Care and Inviting Practices

This section reports the findings on teachers’ perceptions of influences of interventions based on cultural care and inviting practices on five domains: (a) teacher-educator practices; (b) teacher-student relationships; (c) school climate, including an unexpected finding regarding student-initiated conversations on race; (d) student academic and social behaviors and the distinctions between students’ races and cultures; and (e) the influences on classroom management strategies.

Teacher-educator practices. Data analysis revealed that all educators reported a heightened awareness of their initial interactions between themselves and students, a level of intentionality in seeking positive student behaviors and character traits, and a reflection on practice and student engagement. For example, Mrs. Washington shared,

I try to find ways to reward the students more, I find, such as with the tweets and with the Post-its. I think I really try to take some time to actually identify students that’ve done something positive that I noticed. So, I think it has definitely impacted how I interact with the students.

All participants reported greater self-awareness about greetings and a positive mindset in their approaches to interacting with students. Their positive mindsets and approaches transferred to the learning environment and to relationships among students. Mr. Wolfe noted a deep shift in priority and focus:

The priority is with the students’ well-being and home life. Knowing what’s going on helps with prioritizing. I realize there is more to it. There is a shift in focus. I’m not as quick to correct. I think about what and how I engage. These students are bringing some things to me far beyond the work in front of us.

Mrs. Anderson expressed self-awareness about how she starts the day: “I’m changing my whole tone when I speak to them when they walk in the classroom, as opposed to, ‘Come on, come on, come on. Let’s go.’” Another participant described an overall change in mindset, focus, and interactions with students across grade levels. According to Ms. Paul,
I definitely have seen a change in myself, just in my overall positivity is one. Being more positive in my teaching definitely is changing the way that I interact with all of my students. I’ve even reflected on every grade level. Just because we’re implementing these things to make our school more positive and we’re seeing the kids in there smiling and they’ve changed their demeanor a little bit.

It helps bring more positivity into my day, so then I’m not focused on all of the negative things, or the heavy workload that we have, or “Hey, I have this paperwork that needs turned in today.” Maybe I’m focusing on, “Oh my gosh, she just held the door for that kid after this,” or “She smiled so big when I gave her that compliment.”

Like I said before, I mean cultural care, if you’re doing these reflections and you’re really, really getting into what you believe and what, maybe you subconsciously didn’t even know was down in there, you can get to a point where “maybe I’m not approaching this kid in the best way that I could and now I’m thinking about it differently, talking to them, and getting to know them.”

Ms. Paul’s dialogue indicated a level of awareness of unconscious bias that teacher reflection offered.

**Teacher-student relationships.** Participants were asked to reflect on any perceived influence of cultural care on teacher-student relationships. They were also asked whether they noticed any variation between students of color and White peers. All participants reported a noticeable change in their teacher-student relationships. Three reported a difference in influence between students of color and White peers. Of those three, Mrs. Washington, the only school counselor in the study and whose professional responsibility often addresses student discipline, reflected from the point of view of student behaviors. Mr. Wolfe was unable to offer a direct comparison in this instance because the students who were referenced were all African American. Although Mr. Wolfe often interacts with the entire student body on various duties and during his presence in the mainstream classroom, only one student currently receiving learning support services was identified as White and he is not in Mr. Wolfe’s caseload.

Mr. Wolfe discussed an evolving relationship with his fifth-grade students who receive learning support services. “I think their attitude is better, more positive when it comes to
specific tasks or subjects that would often invoke avoidance behaviors.” He reported a change in the dynamic of relationships where teacher-student conflicts have been reduced. Students are more easily motivated and avoidance behaviors diminished. “I think it’s much easier to get them motivated to put forth their best effort compared to before when it was more of a fight with some students.” When asked to reflect on his perception of differences in students based on race or culture, Mr. Wolfe indicated that all of the students in this particular group of fifth graders were African American.

Mrs. Washington, the school counselor, noticed a changed in her relationships with students because of her participation in the PLC. She said that it not only influenced the students intended; it also influenced students whom she had observed.

I think that it not only affects the individual, I’m just thinking about giving Post-its and things like that, I don’t think it just impacts just the individual student, it has impacted other students because then they notice, “Hey, the staff are really watching us, they’re trying to reward us, they’re trying to encourage us in the right direction.” I think it does impact classrooms. That sometimes they may have some behavior issues and some concerns, so I definitely think that it’s a trickling effect with everything.

In addition to promoting a positive school climate through interactions between students and staff, the PLC extended inviting practices to incorporate staff members. Ms. Washington reflected on the influence on students of color as a result of recognizing teachers and staff.

The staff, I think they look forward to Mondays, too, with getting appreciated, getting little candies, things like that. I think that they look forward to that, too, and not knowing who’s doing it. I think just improving their mood, just having them be more excited about coming in on Mondays because Mondays are really tough for a lot of people, too. In addition to that, I know it has to have an impact on the students directly. Because if the staff are happy and excited to be here, then the students will be excited to be here. That’ll trickle down to them as well. I think that the more we do with staff, too, that’ll definitely help our students, absolutely.

When asked whether she noticed a difference in influence on students of color correlated with behaviors, Mrs. Washington responded affirmatively.
I think it has, just from my perspective of what I’ve seen. . . I think some of the students that are predominantly White, they come in already having some skills, already fitting the mold that a teacher would expect of a “good” student. I think those students that teeter back and forth with having some issues, I think that they have been more positively impacted.

Ms. Paul attributed the change in relationships with her students in part to the activities conducted in the PLC and reflections on cultural care on a day-to-day basis. “I think it has, only because I am reflecting more on a day-to-day basis.” Ms. Paul echoed other participants’ sentiments, reflecting on an intentional approach to interacting with and responding to students when building relationships:

Just trying to intentionally be more cognizant of how I am reacting with them so I can have a better relationship because I’m not just focused on when school’s over. Who cares? Let’s not even think about it...just getting back to that, like I had to be in college. You have to reflect and write it all up. Maybe because I wasn’t writing down reflections, I kind of got away from thinking about what am I really doing . . . because I could be ruining someone’s life, pretty much, by the way I interact with them. Anything that I say to a student can either hurt my relationship with them or help them. I’m just trying to be more aware of what I’m saying to kids or even how I’m looking at them.

Ms. Paul reported a difference in the formation of teacher-student relationships between students of color and herself. She attributed this to her participation and involvement in the informational and reflective activities in the PLC.

I think definitely with the PLC because some of the videos or an article . . . I even went back to the one just because we all know we have the biases and then going back and hearing someone else’s story kind of helps me relate.

Testimony on the influence of using cultural care to form cross-cultural relationships emerged when Ms. Paul stated,

I feel like they’re more open to telling me things that they wouldn’t have before. Just building those relationships. Kids can’t learn from someone that they don’t like. I don’t know that they didn’t like me before. But it’s definitely on a deeper level now because we have a connection. Maybe they didn’t before. I’m just a White woman in front of them. Maybe some of them couldn’t connect. How I approach them. How I’m thinking about different situations and handling them, definitely differently than I would have in the past. Then, focusing on the things that we are doing that are good.
I’m focusing on the kids’ work more than behavior because we have less behaviors, because now they have those relationships in there and they feel safe.

Ms. Paul’s response highlights a direct correlation among the seminal theories: theory of motivation (Maslow, 1943), IE (Purkey & Novak, 2016), and CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2009), which shaped the defining principles of cultural care.

Like Ms. Paul, Mrs. Anderson reported a change in teacher-student relationships in which students were more comfortable in interactions and open to dialogue with teachers as a result of implementing inviting practices through cultural care, participation in the PLC, and more reflective practices. Mrs. Anderson said,

I feel that they really have changed, just some of the quieter ones that just sit back and don’t really say a lot in class, more are coming out. Just [Student], for one, she was really quiet with me. Now she’s like, “Hello, Mrs. Anderson!” She gives me a hug every morning now, which I never would have thought that would have happened, because she was kind of real quiet and didn’t really talk to me that much. But now I feel like a lot more kids are opening up to me.

Initially, Mrs. Anderson had specified that she did not notice any differences in the formation of teacher-student relationships between herself and students of color in contrast to White students: “See, I don’t know. I don’t know. I really can’t say that.” Yet further into the interview, she stated that she noticed a difference in student responses in relation to race. For Mrs. Anderson, White students appeared to respond more in a more conversational style.

Sometimes the White students are more . . . They’ll say, “Good morning, how are you?” Whereas some of the Black students would say just, “Good morning.” They don’t ask the, “How are you?” back, maybe. Not all, of course.

Mrs. Anderson posited that this was different for students of color, who appeared to respond with affection: “In terms of affection, I would say the Black students are more affectionate to me than the White students.”

School climate. Teachers were asked whether the climate of the learning environment was influenced by implementation of inviting practices based on cultural care. All participants
indicated that they had noticed positive changes in the learning environment. Two common themes emerged: (a) a shift in teacher mindset, and (b) an increase in teacher-initiated, proactive approach to initial student interactions. One unexpected finding emerged from the data: student-initiated conversations related to race. Each is described and discussed next.

**Shift in mindset and teacher-initiated, proactive approach to initial student interactions.** Two participants described a “calm” tone in the buildings and linked the change to the interactions prior to the start of the day. Mr. Wolfe said, “I think that beginning of the day is a lot easier and lot calmer. Transitioning from morning duty to homeroom for them is a lot easier because of the inviting practices.” Mrs. Anderson discussed self-awareness of her tone and verbal engagement with students at the beginning of the school day, its effect on students’ dispositions, and how this carried over into learning environment:

I feel like they’re a lot calmer when they walk in the room. I feel like I’m not being so . . . You know when I said, “Hurry up, hurry up, let’s go, let’s start,” I feel like I’m being more caring when they walk in the room. I’m more notice-able of myself . . . and I’m saying different things. I’ve been having a lot more conversations about that, too, in my classroom. I’ve had a lot of conversations with just caring and saying how much I care about you, and how the other teachers care about you. I even said, “We’re not here because we’re racist. We’re not here because we just come here for a paycheck. We come here because we love our jobs and we love our kids.” I said, “We come in sick, we do whatever we can because we love you guys.” I probably never would have said the word, “love,” but I think now I’m saying it more often. “I love you guys.” I don’t want it to be uncomfortable for them, but I want them to know, “You’re like my kids, and I love you. You are very important to me, and I want you to do your best,” so I’ve been using the word “love” more.

Ms. Paul reported a noticeable change in the tone of her classroom during lessons where she conducted small group instruction. She attributed the shift to a more positive learning environment to the shift to a more intentional and positive mindset. “It’s changing the climate because it’s changing how I approach my day.”

In my classroom, I’ve noticed the change. Just, like I said, I keep going back to my own self, my own positivity. Maybe if I approach the day or this lesson or even a certain group of kids . . . . Because I had this one part of my day and I kept thinking in my mind every day, “This is the worst part of my day. This is the worst class.”
CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES

By specifically altering mindset and verbal engagement, Ms. Paul and Mrs. Anderson saw improvement in school climate.

School climate data were shared during a PSCC meeting held at Freedom during the time of the study. During that meeting, last year’s school climate data from the TLC Survey was highlighted on the agenda with the A+ Schools representative. The data revealed that only 49% of the teachers and staff agreed that Freedom was a good place to work. The following notes were taken at the PSCC meeting.

PSCC Meeting (8:05 AM) The discussion surrounding A+ schools and equity. Shared with the care team is doing. Parents were receptive, including them in the compliment box. Also, Miss Paul shared with the group that she thought it was working, creating a positive feeling. Mr. Wolfe shared when he was selected as one of the star staff that he was really touched and it changed his mood and disposition reading what the students had to say about him. He said that he was trying to put himself in the shoes of a student, especially one who struggles maybe behaviorally, earlier academically, and how hearing something kind could really change their mood and disposition.

Following that, the principal at Freedom announced his resignation, and the absence of any response from the teachers was illustrious to the tone of the building. The notes also record the expansion of inviting practices with the inclusion of parental involvement. The significance of leadership in relationship to school climate is found in my researcher’s notes.

PLC: Inviting practices and parent involvement. Principal at Freedom announces resignation to each of the PLCs. Which was something that the staff had already heard and suspected without confirmation. No one seemed surprised or disappointed in the announcement. Many teachers had suspected it was due to the incredible dissatisfaction from teachers and parents as seen in the data from the parent survey and the Teaching Learning Conditions survey, in addition to the falling test scores. After he left, the PLC carried on the conversation surrounding the parent involvement piece as if it had little relevance.

Input was requested from the PLC regarding parent participation. Update regarding information was provided to the PTO for Freedom Elementary News Letter. (Email sent and all members cc’d). Care committee agreed that parents with information now will be included in the inviting practices established. This includes sharing positive compliments and words of kindness to the staff. Parents will have the opportunity to participate through email or through a comment card that will be found in the office.
This displays the collaborative approach to school improvement and inclusive practices, involving multiple stakeholders.

**Student-initiated conversations on race.** Ms. Paul described a change in the level of comfort and openness in the learning environment that had not existed previously. She recalled with some uncertainty a conversation between herself and a student, who is African American, that pertained to an incident involving several students. The conversation dealt with matters of race and complexion, on which she based her response.

I’m basing that off of one specific thing that she shared with me because she never would share anything with me before. It’s one student that I really didn’t have a relationship with and, through giving her, showing her, “Hey, I notice when you do this. Let’s go post that on the board,” or just even complimenting her. . . We were explicitly talking about race. I had never really done that with this group before and . . . I didn’t know, they’re fifth grade, should I even be doing this? I had a student share with me that it makes her sad because other students call her light-skinned, but she’s Black. Then, it became a teachable moment. It was nice because before, we didn’t have the climate where she would feel safe enough to express that. The other kids, they’re teaching me things. It was really nice because before, we never had these . . . I didn’t with this group of kids, have discussions about race.

Conversations initiated by students with their teachers on topics of race, racism, or prejudice was an emerging theme with three other participants throughout the course of the study. The pre-intervention interview conducted with Mrs. Washington revealed that students had expressed that they felt that some teachers were racist toward some students but they were unable to determine whether it was to avoid disciplinary action. A similar scenario was discussed by Mrs. Anderson.

With the Trump issue. That’s been huge, because we’ve had a couple kids . . . I actually had one kid say that I was a racist. I was with [Teacher] and she was trying to get [Student] calmed down. . . . I walked over into the room just to see, and he’s like, “All you teachers are racist.” I took him to the side after he calmed down, like the next day, he came in and talked to me. We had a conversation afterwards, because I was hurt. I told him, I said I was hurt. Then I had a conversation about it in class about racism, and I said, “There are people you have encountered that are racist. I’ve encountered people that are racist. I’m not a racist, and neither are these teachers at school.” I said, “That’s what you have to understand. We’re hard on you because we love you.” That’s what I told them. “We’re hard on you because we love you. Not
because we’re racist, not because we want to pick on you, because we want you to succeed in everything you do.”

Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Washington discussed separate incidents of tension among students and between teachers and students involving students’ perceived and expressed feelings of racism. Three participants, including myself as a researcher-participant, reported multiple instances of students expressing fear, anger, or concern regarding election results. In one instance reported by a participant (Mrs. Anderson), what she viewed to be a student’s frustration and anger was projected toward a teacher by the student. Mrs. Anderson indicated that the student, who felt unjustly reprimanded, made an accusation of racism and yelled, “You voted for Trump! You’re a racist.” In another occurrence, a second-grade African American male student said on the day after the election, “We are all screwed and getting sent back to Africa.” Another student of color pounded his fist and shouted, “It’s not fair,” then put his head down and cried. However, I must point out that not only students of color expressed contempt for the election results; all but one student (22 of 23) expressed disappointment in the outcome.

My experience with student-initiated conversations occurred frequently throughout the study. I recalled three distinct conversations, one of which is described briefly and two of which are described in detail.

A common theme between myself and Mrs. Anderson was the 2016 Presidential election. Mrs. Anderson cited “the Trump issue” when discussing a racially charged exchange with a student that led to a class discussion on racism. Notes in my research journal (RN) described the tension and tone of the school the day after the election and two conversations that took place.

RN: November 9th: Getting through yesterday (the first day of school after the election) was very difficult. Many students were tense and irritable. Several children
were visibly tired and extremely sleepy, and what could be described as confused. We had some tension between students regarding the color of their skin and how we treat and judge one another. A student who identifies as African American was called “White” during recess. It was meant to be hurtful and insulting toward her. After returning from lunch, the student expressed how two students, who also sit at the same group/table as she, had called her White during recess. She was very hurt and had cried while explaining what was said about her. No student denied what they had said and it was a teachable moment. We discuss the color of skin. I shared my personal family dynamics. Having three biracial boys, all varying in complexion, hair texture, eye color and appearance. I used my experience as an example to demonstrate that appearance doesn’t always equate to race or culture. We discussed the variety of beautiful complexions that we could see in our classroom and the seriousness of using someone’s race or culture or race to hurt someone’s feelings. This was an incredibly powerful moment to create a safe space in my classroom. It allowed students to openly discuss race culture and racism. To address issues like this we must be able to establish an open dialogue with students and staff from the earliest point of entry.

RN: A few weeks later students were having our usual morning snack where they have quiet conversations with their table mates and friends. Usually, it’s friendly chit-chat about the snack, recess, or the events of the day. However, one particular table briefly discussed what racism was. At the table was one White female, one biracial male, and two African American females. The White female commented that it is “when you don’t treat people the same just because of the color of their skin.” One of the African American female students followed up with the comment and said, “It is not fair, it’s just very wrong and everyone should be treated the same.” As quickly as the conversation started, it ended and we transitioned into our next activity. It confirmed the significance of allowing students to talk, discuss, and ask questions about race and culture in a safe space. That can only be established by the teachers who lead by example.

I attributed this to establishing a safe learning space built on mutual trust and respect that allowed for open dialogue and honest discourse on difficult subject matters. In part, this interaction validated the importance of trust and a sense of psychological safety in school settings and confirmed that students are willing and comfortable discussing race.

The second conversation was with a former student who was currently in the fourth grade. He is an African American who often needed behavioral support and had received many disciplinary referrals and actions during the prior year and into the current school year. However, he excelled during the time in my class. He and I had a strong bond and a positive teacher-student relationship. Long after he was in my classroom, he often stopped by my
classroom to say hello and give a hug. On this day, he was able to come and spend a free period with me as a behavior reward. He asked to spend his free period helping me in my classroom rather than in the computer lab. At that time, my second-grade class was being instructed by the student teacher and they had a presentation, which allowed me to have one-on-one conversation with the student. I reflected on this situation in my researcher’s notes dated January 5.

RN: Interaction between former student and myself. [Student] came to my room to spend some time together. He asked to spend time with me during his computer lab time in science. He often stops by to say hello, get a hug, and quite frequently is looking for a snack! While sharing a snack, [Student] brought up what had been shared on social media regarding the upcoming Presidential inauguration and turning the TV off in protest and to lower the ratings. The conversation continued with MLK Jr. Day and our BHM performance from when he was in 1st Grade. He then asked about racism. I’d like to think that, but it spoke volumes to me that a 9-year-old child is willing to say to someone of the opposite race and opposite sex that, that I feel safe enough to ask you difficult questions. One of the questions he asked was, “Why were there only Black slaves? Why didn’t they make White people slaves too?” I spoke honestly in “kid-friendly” terms and language. I explained there were many things I did not know or understand, but we can always learn more. I was not sure why anyone would want to make anyone a slave. But I was trying to learn and understand better so that nothing so horrible ever happened again and that everyone could have a chance to do good things. I asked if he remembered our class motto . . . [Student] quickly responded, “When you do good things, you get good things.” I explained we changed it a little bit— “When you do good things, good things happen.”

The level of trust that this child must have for me, as a White female, and him as an African American male, must be very strong, because for him to be comfortable enough to ask me questions about racism spoke greatly of the importance of talking, listening, and acknowledging open discussions with students early on. . . . I felt good about how he must have trusted and perceived me to have such a sensitive conversation. In the culture of my generation, race was not something that was discussed. Highlighting and drawing attention to differences was very taboo. The “elephant in the room” isn’t something that we can afford not to address. In the words of Fredrick Douglas, “Without a struggle, there is no progress.”

In contrast, Mr. Wolfe was the only African American male participant in this study and the only participant who did not report a student-initiated conversation on racial matters or matters of equity during the time of the study. Mr. Wolfe confirmed this during a follow-up
discussion. He stated that he was “unsure why it never came up” and said, “I just think it was known but not spoken. It was understood without us saying it.”

In summation, the data reflect that the implementation of inviting practices through the lens of cultural care during a 7-week period had a positive impact on the school climate for all participants, specifically influencing teacher-initiated interaction and mindset and student-initiated conversations about race (apart from Mr. Wolfe’s class).

Student Academic and Social Behaviors

Participant teachers perceived a positive change in students’ academic and social dispositions, behaviors, and engagement after the intervention. The perceived influence on students’ academic behaviors is discussed based on the findings involving any noticed distinction between students of color and White students. Then, the findings about the believed influence of cultural care on students’ academic behaviors, and any notable differences between the two student demographics are presented.

Influence on students’ academic behaviors. All participants in this study were asked for their perceptions on the influence of cultural care on student learning and academic behaviors (effort, motivation, confidence, participation, or engagement during class). The participants indicated that student learning was positively influenced through the intervention of inviting practices through cultural care. Common themes among participant respondents were associated with an increase in student participation, confidence, efficacy, and effort, as well as a reduction in avoidance behaviors and disciplinary referrals.

One common theme among participants was a priority for building relationships with students, which they agreed was essential and beneficial to student learning, motivation, and self-efficacy. Following are excerpts from participant interviews.
I’ve noticed that I’m getting responses. Before, I wasn’t getting anything. [Student] is another one. He’s a big hugger. He’s always like, “I’m so glad to see you,” and I always say, “I’m so glad to see you, too.” Kids that I really didn’t . . . that were very quiet, I feel like they’re opening up to me more. (Mrs. Anderson)

I just know the students that I did identify to give shout-outs, and things like that, that they were extremely appreciative of it. (Mrs. Washington).

Specifically with the fifth-grade students. I think their attitude is better, more positive, when it comes especially to specific activities like writing. Even for the students who do well with writing, I think their attitude and their perspective on writing has increased. Also in terms of taking assessments, the amount of test anxiety or the lack of willingness to put forth their best effort in testing, has definitely decreased. (Mr. Wolfe)

The increase in effort and decrease in avoidance behavior connect to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977); as defined by Pajares (1994), self-efficacy beliefs are “people’s judgments of their capabilities to accomplish specific tasks” (n.p).

Mr. Wolfe reported evidence of observable changes in student self-efficacy in larger mainstream classrooms and in small-group settings. He described an increase in effort, confidence, and motivation in his students. He commented on elements of student self-efficacy.

I think it has promoted giving students more confidence when coming into a classroom, especially if it’s a subject that they know they’re not strong in. If they know that they have an opportunity to be successful and if the environment’s going to be one where it’s going to cultivate them getting better . . . I think they’re going to be more willing to put forth a better effort in terms of engaging in the work, just following the rules that that teacher has for his or her classroom.

Connecting Ms. Paul’s earlier statement that she did not learn from teachers whom she did not like, which confirmed her belief that students do not learn from someone whom they do not like, Mrs. Washington discussed the priority of scaffolding a positive relationship and the influence on student learning.

I think that any time we’re trying to positively reward the students, or recognize them in a special way, it will inevitably impact their learning in a positive way so that they’re more attentive . . . more able to focus on what the teacher is saying.
Ms. Paul expressed a strong belief in the need to establish a relationship prior to student learning.

If we don’t have that initial connection and we’re not trying to build it and grow from where we started then I don’t think they’re learning anything from me. I think, maybe, I was doing something to send the wrong messages before. I could still be doing that, but as long as I’m cognizant of that and I’m constantly trying to change. I don’t know. I really think that caring for them first, before you can get into any learning. Because how are they going to learn without that initial care? . . . I feel like my students of color, maybe before . . . This specific group that I’m thinking of when I say this—I don’t feel like they could relate to me before. Maybe they’ve had less interactions with White women or maybe they haven’t all been so wonderful.

Mrs. Anderson reported a sense of community when promoting student learning and celebrating students’ successes, giving attention to students who are performing below grade level in mathematical skill sets. She shared that her students often supported and celebrated one another’s successes and attributed that to teacher modeling.

You know what I notice, we cheer each other on, like if we get first in math or something like that, or how many points if you’re a player of the day, or a kid that’s really struggling. The kids who cheer for the other kids in my classroom. I think that’s important. I love that they do . . . I feel it more this year than I ever have. I feel like my kids really support each other more, because I support them more.

For Mrs. Anderson, this was significant for promoting student learning with measurable outcomes. Mrs. Anderson shared a situation involving one of Freedom’s new students.

I had a couple of kids that were really struggling, and I’ll never forget this one day that one of the kids got an A. . . . I said, “[Student], you got like a 14 out of 15 on your quiz, [Student]!” His face got so big. The kids are like, “What, [Student]?” They were like, “Woo!” They all clapped. His face, I can’t even tell you. . . . He must have thought you gave him a million dollars, because his face to me was, “Oh my gosh, this is the best thing I ever saw.” It was just so cute. He was so proud of himself.

Just the other day, I think it was Friday, we were doing multiplying fractions and we’re simplifying, cross-simplifying, and that’s a hard thing, right? He said out loud, “Oh, yeah, that can be divided.” It was 8 and 16. . . . The kids turned around and they looked at him, they go, “All right, [Student], that’s what I’m talking about!” I said, “That’s right, [Student], you got it! That’s right, it’s divisible by 8!” His face lit up again.

In this instance, the influence is seen in measurable outcomes in the form of a student’s test score and letter grade in mathematics. Later in the interview, Mrs. Anderson shared the
student had recently become homeless. She posited that the classroom community and family-like atmosphere of the learning environment was extremely beneficial to his learning and to the other students, as well. This type of atmosphere was described by Ladson-Billings’ (2009) theory of CRP, outlining successful teachers’ practices of African American students.

**Distinction in students’ academic behaviors in relation to race.** At the time of the post-interview (7 weeks post-intervention), three participants were clear in stating a difference for students of color in relationship to student learning and academic behaviors, while two participants stated they did not recognize that difference. These two participants posited that this could attributed to the fact that the majority (85%) of students at Freedom are students of color, as well as the length of the interventions (7 weeks) in relationship to the time at which the post-intervention interviews took place. However, in one of the two participants’ responses, notable changes in academic behaviors (effort, motivation, confidence, participation, performance, or engagement during class) were noted. All participants’ responses regarding differences between the two groups indicated that a change was noticed in student confidence and disposition with adults, as well as in student-student interactions.

Mrs. Washington, the school counselor, was unable to identify a direct influence or note a comparison in student learning. As discussed in the previous section, her response was more generalized to the student body and posited a potential influence, stating, “Knowing that we have their best intentions at heart for them, any time the kids realize that we’re here for them, they’ll give us the reward back in terms of learning.” When asked whether she had noticed an influence on student learning for students of color, Mrs. Anderson referred to the student who was being supported by his peers with encouragement and celebrating successes, she said,
He went from E to a C, so yeah, I feel like he’s moving in the right direction. Don’t get me wrong, sometimes he slips and goes back down, but I feel like just that little push of the other kids . . .

As a participant researcher in action research, I noted growth in student learning and interest and in academic performance and behaviors. When looking at measurable goals and student growth, 100% of the students showed an increase in oral reading fluency, which is expected. However, two students who were in danger of failing in Grade 1 excelled to proficiency for middle-of-the-year benchmark scores in fluency. Nevertheless, from my perspective based on prior experiences and intentional interventions based on cultural care as a part of this study, the greatest influence on learning can be attributed to the positive influence of cultural care on student behaviors revealed in the following section. Based on 17 years of teaching experience in an urban setting, it has been my experience that many avoidance behaviors that influence student learning are connected to low student self-efficacy. A positive learning environment based on inviting practices and cultural care simultaneously facilitated positive teacher-student relationships, student confidence, and efficacy and improved behaviors, ultimately influencing student learning.

**Influence on students’ social behaviors.** Participants’ perceptions of the influence of interventions on student behavior were often correlated and overlapped in the categories of teacher-student interactions, formation of relationships, school climate, and students’ academic behaviors and learning. Four educators reported a change in students’ social behaviors and noted slight and favorable differences for students of color. Four participants indicated that students exhibited more positive student-student interactions (compliments, gestures of kindness, encouragement, verbal engagement).

Mrs. Anderson’s perspective on student behavior did not specify a change in overall behaviors but she reported that her students “behave well” in her classroom. Mrs. Anderson
accredited students’ positive behaviors to her CRP style of high expectations and strong positive-teacher relationships that created a learning environment where students thrive.

I think they know what’s expected of them from me, and just that I try to make the learning fun for them. I don’t even know how to explain it, I just . . . I don’t even know what to say to that. Just that they do a great job and they listen, and I feel like I have a safe environment in my classroom. I feel like they’re safe and they like being there. I think they enjoy my class.

When asked whether this was different for students of color, Mrs. Anderson said, “I don’t know, I feel like . . . Sometimes I feel like the White students like my class, but I don’t think they enjoy it as much. I feel like the Black students enjoy my class more.”

As previously stated, a significant portion of professional responsibilities for the counselor is to address student discipline and behavior. Mrs. Washington had this to say about student behaviors:

I do see that change in the other students, and I’m talking permanently, like the older students from here and there. They might get a referral, but I have seen some less referrals. The more intense students, I haven’t seen too much change with them, but the ones that are in the middle, that can go back and forth, I have seen some positive changes with them.

Throughout the interview, Ms. Paul often included descriptions of the influence on student behaviors. When asked specifically whether there were any observable changes in student behavior, she stated, “I feel like I’m not dealing with the behavior as constant as before. I remember saying before, I’m like, ‘Did I really go to school and pay all this money and work so hard to just be a disciplinarian?’”

When asked whether there was a difference on the influence of cultural care for students of color, Ms. Paul supported Mrs. Anderson’s observations of student-to-student interactions. “I think that there’s an improvement now, but now the cultural care has had an influence to where they’re complimenting each other.”
Mr. Wolfe described the observable changes as a reduction in student avoidance behavior and validated the recurring theme of the increase in positive student-student interactions.

I think just being more responsible in terms of having their materials, how they engage with one another and how they engage with that teacher in terms of asking for help. Before, you had some students who were aggressive in terms of wanting help, or they would shut down and not ask for help. I believe that once the students get that compliment, get that vote of confidence, then I believe they’re going to be more willing to ask for help or at least try a bit harder before, I don’t want to say throwing the towel in, but before asking for help if they know that they’re going to get it. Again, I think it comes back to how they ask for help and their interaction with that teacher because they know that that teacher is recognizing them for something that they’ve done well.

In relation to the difference for students of color, Mr. Wolfe described the outcomes for one of his female African American students:

With fifth grade, there’s just one female in fifth grade, African American. Her confidence has gotten a lot better in terms of participating out loud and reading. In small group sessions, she didn’t have a problem working. It was more so in the big group.

Overall, positive changes in students’ social and academic behaviors were observed across the board during the study, including data that reflected positive behavioral change for participants’ African American students.

Influence on Classroom Management

Participants were asked whether inviting practices through the lens of cultural care had affected their classroom management. All but one participant responded that classroom management or management style had been affected by implementing cultural care as part of participation in the PLC. Emergent themes were (a) a proactive and reflective approach, and (b) prioritization of students’ well-being over task completion.

Proactive and reflective approach. Mr. Wolfe discussed a teacher-initiated, proactive, and positive approach and its influence on students’ responses.
I think I can . . . watch behaviors early enough to make sure they either stay away from certain behaviors with other students, or if correcting them, how I correct them is now different compared to maybe when I didn’t take the idea of being more inviting. I think engaging with them early, whether it’s when they come into the classroom, whether they come into their morning duty area, I think if I initiate that positive interaction, that when it is time to correct them in terms of managing their behavior, it’s a much easier job and I think that they understand where I’m coming from instead of taking offense to it.

Mrs. Washington echoed the same approach:

I think that for me, I think with bringing in these practices, I think I really think more so of how to reward the students as opposed to how to punish them. I think if we can come up with a positive system of how to reward the students that have minimal issues on their buses would be probably the best way to handle it. I’m not saying it’s a quick fix, but I think that gradually moving towards that direction, and definitely that cultural care practices and methods, probably made me think more so on my designs as opposed to being more punitive.

Ms. Paul’s positive approach indicated a level of reflection when interacting with students.

I think it affected how I approach my management instead of just trying to talk at them and . . . made me really think, especially with my students of color, why are they acting like this? Has anyone listened to them today? What can we do to change what we’re doing here to benefit them more in the outside world too?

Mrs. Washington offered a suggestion to expand sharing information and training on inviting practices based on cultural care with teachers and staff.

I think that definitely maybe more training for some of our staff so that we can remind them of the equity piece, because I think we forget that in the day-to-day practices of getting things done.

Her response can be connected to the three phases of invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016); it also includes the option for expansion but acknowledges choice and flexibility in extent.

For clarification, materials and information were shared with the entire staff at Freedom in multiple forms (hard paper copy, email links to videos, or verbally presented). All staff members were invited to participate in the interventions and activities of the PLC on equity and care without formal commitment. Some staff members chose to participate in the activities but
others did not. Expansion of inviting practices was reported by Mr. Wolfe in his reflections on some of the most beneficial aspects of his participation.

**Prioritization of students’ needs over task completion.** Ms. Paul stated that she had experienced a shift in prioritization: “Before, I was just so focused on content. I’m not saying that I’m not now, but I don’t think I’m going to get anywhere with the content if I’m not also seeing the whole child.” Mr. Wolfe also indicated a shift in mindset, looking beyond student behaviors and recognizing individual needs, along with listening intently to students.

I think just trying to be more cognizant of each of the students while they’re in a group or definitely individual and their needs and what it is that they need support or help in, and trying not to look at . . . not basing them strictly off their behavior but looking past their negative behavior and interactions to see what their real challenges are academically. Once I know that, then I know how to engage with them so that we limit the negative off-task behaviors that some of the students have demonstrated. I think just getting to know them a lot better and finding out what their interests are and how they actually feel about a topic will then change how I may present a topic or a concept based off their voice.

Mrs. Anderson was the only participant who did not report that her classroom management had been influenced. She indicated that classroom management had always been one of her strengths and that her classroom management style had not changed. “I don’t know about that, because, I’ve felt like I’ve always had good classroom management. That’s one of my strong points . . . I don’t know if it affected it as classroom management.” As a teacher-researcher and participant in this study, I noted that reflective practices on engagement and pedagogy were a part of my classroom management, regarding consideration of how teacher-student relationships form and how teacher-initiated approaches influence classroom management strategies.

**Benefits of Participation**

The teacher-educators in this study were asked whether participation in the PLC was beneficial to themselves and to their students of color. First, the benefits to teacher practice are
discussed. This is followed by findings on the perceived benefits of participation in the PLC to students of color.

**Teacher Benefits**

All participants stated that they benefitted from their involvement in the intervention. Mrs. Washington regarded recognition of staff as the most beneficial experience of her participation: “I think that for me, the most beneficial experience has been to help this school staff and just acknowledge a number of things that they do.”

Mr. Wolfe stated,

I think just changing my attitude towards how I engage kids initially, especially when first seeing them during the course of a day or during the course of a schedule. If I don’t see a kid until the afternoon, not necessarily making that first engagement all about the classroom, but indeed changing it up so that our initial engagement is going to be about how they’ve been up to that particular point. Once that happens, then it makes working with them later in the day, for instance, a lot easier.

Mr. Wolfe considered witnessing an expansion of inviting practices into the mainstream classes and the encouraging verbal feedback that indicated positive changes in students’ behavior to be one of the most valuable outcomes of his participation.

I’ve had intermediate grade-level teachers in Grades 4 and 5 compliment students to me, whether it was about an actual work sample, again I’ll go back to writing, whether it was about something that they did in a classroom either with another student or independently, whereas before most of the interactions or most of the reports that I got weren’t necessarily positive ones.

His statement indicates that, even though there was not always formal commitment to participate, the potential to cultivate inviting practices and influence the learning environment existed. Like Mr. Wolfe, Ms. Paul considered the positive exchange between her students and other teachers and the positive student-student engagement to be the most beneficial experience.

I would say the most beneficial would be when we were able to tape ourselves, actually tape the children’s reactions, just because it really stuck with me and I was able to tape other teachers’ student reactions. Listening to another teacher tell a kid that maybe I
barely knew or a kid that I’ve only had negative interactions with because I only deal with them say at recess or lunch and it’s an unstructured setting. Seeing that teacher compliment that kid and then I’m like, “Wow. I really need to change the way that I’m approaching this kid. There are positives to everybody.”

Asked whether implementing cultural care as part of the PLC had influenced her pedagogical style, Mrs. Anderson discussed being more reflective. She stated that she benefited from becoming more reflective on teaching practices as a result of her participation.

I’m open to more of what I say to the students, as what maybe I don’t say to them; trying to focus on more students that maybe do not get the attention that usual students do . . . Or if they’re having a bad day, maybe not being so tough on them, maybe that day. I’m just noticing more of how I speak to the kids in a different way, maybe. How I am with them.

When Mrs. Anderson was asked what was most beneficial, she reiterated a shift in mindset and awareness of verbal engagement.

**Benefits Specific to Students of Color**

Participants were asked whether their involvement and participation in the PLC benefitted their students of color. Mrs. Washington reported that students of color had benefited from teacher-educator participation but emphasized,

I just feel like it is probably going to continue to be a work in progress in how I practice and look at things at times so that students of color can benefit more. Whether it’s doing more activities with them to empower them, whether that means putting more positive practices.

Mrs. Anderson’s consideration of students’ perspectives paralleled my own reflective practices; she was the only other participant who specified giving attention to a student’s point of view. I reflected,

I think one of the things that I got out of it was that I am very aware of what it is that I say, how I say things, and how they may be perceived even though they may not be meant that way. I think I’m just more aware and more sensitive to how someone who is of color may take or perceive what it is that I’m saying. Because we’ve experience it as mothers of biracial children, but we’re not sitting in the students’ seat. I think that how they perceive it is really important on how we present it, because it makes a difference.
Overall, participants agreed that their participation in the PLC had benefitted them as educators in developing a greater sense of social interactions, increased self-awareness, and engaging in reflective practices that are typically associated with promoting student growth and achievement.

**Limitations or Inhibitors of Relationship Formation**

All participants reported limitations to the study related to time restrictions in planning within a schedule, multiple transitions, and a lack of available staff for teacher coverage. The lack of continuity was a limitation in the form of student and teacher schedules (multiple transitions), lack of human resources (substitutes) that resulted in coverage for regular staff, and student discipline. Mr. Wolfe explained,

> I think timing because we do switch classes. I think a lack of time may have limited the forming positive relationships. I may not get them for two periods back to back for a 90-minute block, even with a 45-minute block. We’ve had this schedule for a number of years. I wish that there was a way where I could have them for two or three periods at a time. I think that would be beneficial. I know that I only see them for a certain amount of time and we normally have a task that we need to get done, but we haven’t been able to finish.

The logistics of the schedule and transitioning to each period were inhibitors for Mrs. Washington. She commented on students in a larger group setting, stating, “In the larger settings like the cafeteria . . . it’s mainly during those transition periods.” Mrs. Anderson stated that the amount of time spent with children and the number of transitions in the intermediate schedule were inhibitors. When asked about limitations, she said,

Maybe the time that we have with the kids. The rushing of the periods. The limited amount of time we have with them. I think it’s different. You [referring to the researcher] can form a different relationship with your kids, it’s not the same with my fifth graders. I see them for 90 minutes, where you see them all day. Even though I see them in the hallway, it’s still not the same where you see them all day. I think that time limits you.

Ms. Paul named a limitation to forming more, or stronger, positive teacher-student relationships by being pulled in multiple directions with teacher coverage. She stated,
“Sometimes we are pulled in so many different directions and just for time is one.” Freedom has had difficulty in maintaining regular substitutes and has suffered from multiple staff members being absent for extended periods of time. Often in those instances, teachers are asked to take additional students from various classes and grade levels or to cover a class during their preparation period. However, Mr. Wolfe and Ms. Paul were regularly asked to cover due to the flexibility in their schedules with the push-in-pull-out learning support model.

Mr. Wolfe expressed strong concern about the level of frequency with which he is pulled from his regular responsibilities. He spoke with deep conviction.

I do not mind helping at all. I really don’t. . . . we gotta be team players. We are all in it together. If something happens it has an effect on all of us, whether it’s directly or indirectly. So I’ll lend support wherever I can. I’m invested. But when I get pulled for coverage it causes issues for the teachers who I am supporting. Just in terms of the teacher. They are understanding that’s its not my fault. But it disrupts what is going on with the learning support child. Whether, it’s you know, allowing an early start on a test . . . and in terms of the student, they are on a schedule, too. They are waiting for me to come and help them. They’re looking for me for help and I’m not there. Sometimes we are not treated like ‘real teacher’ and we’re treated like a building sub. The Special Ed teacher is always the first person to run to, as if we have nothing to do. Our kids are the ones who need modifications that their teacher can’t always do, and the student misses out, on an already really tight schedule. It’s like taking glasses off a kid and telling them to read.

Mr. Wolfe added, “And the kids look at me different. So, I work to establish myself with the kids and colleagues and have even been asked, ‘Are you a real teacher?’”

Ms. Paul stated that a lack of administrative support in addressing extreme behaviors that required disciplinary action created uncertainty in student-perceived adult ability to provide safety and led to a loss of credibility.

Another big one is when there are truly severe behaviors and we don’t have as much support as we could from an authority figure or someone above us. I’m not saying that the kids need to live in fear, but there has to be . . . When there is something truly severe, for example, fighting and things like that. If they’re fighting and they’re just brought back to me 15 minutes later or they just threw a computer, which I witnessed, and then they’re brought back. That’s definitely limiting what I can do. The other kids don’t feel safe because they feel like I’m not able to protect them. “She’s the adult in the room and she’s allowing this other student back.”
She added that limited human resources constituted a barrier: “Lack of resources also because the adult to student ratio in the building.” She proposed a solution: “Maybe if we had some extra adults in the building, you know, to problem solve with kids.”

During the action research, I witnessed the lack of administrative support described by Ms. Paul and experienced by many teachers. In my classroom, there were infrequent disciplinary incidents requiring administrative intervention or behavior referrals. However, during staff meetings, team meetings, and informal meetings, Ms. Paul’s sentiment was echoed repeatedly.

**Chapter Summary**

Through thoughtful conversations, careful reflection, and participation in a PLC that engaged in challenging conversations, teacher-educators in this study identified the influence of cultural care and inviting practices on the social-emotional aspects of the learning environment. Although it was not described as a limitation, four of the five participants stressed the importance of support and maintaining momentum for continuous school improvement.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

In this chapter I summarize six significant discoveries in this research study and discuss how they relate to elements of the theoretical frameworks (CRT, CRP, IE, self-efficacy) and how they relate to existing literature. The findings were derived from analyses of pre- and post-intervention interviews, my recorded observations and notes, and artifacts generated as a result of participation in the PLC focused on equity and care in an urban elementary.

First, six significant findings related to the context of the study are discussed: (a) the climate of the learning environment; (b) teacher-educator preparation and professional development on matters of diversity, race, and equity; and (c) approaches that highly qualified teachers use to form positive relationships with consideration of race and culture and the emergent themes related to the influence of cultural care interventions on (d) teacher practice, (e) teacher-student interactions and relationships, and (f) student social and academic behaviors. Then, an unexpected outcome—student-initiated conversations about race—is reviewed. The chapter ends with acknowledgment of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a concluding summary.

Major Findings

There were six significant findings in this qualitative participatory action research study. Each is summarized in the following sections, with implications of the outcomes.

Climate of the Learning Environment

Pre-intervention. Noguera (2003) argued, “There is no doubt if schools were to become more nurturing and supportive, students would more likely perceive schools as a source of help and opportunity rather than an inhospitable place that one should seek to escape and avoid” (p. 455). This finding supports quantitative data from the TLC Survey of previous
years, which indicated that fewer than half (43%) of the teachers and staff agreed that Freedom Elementary School was a good place to work. Participants indicated a level of distrust among staff members and between teachers and administration, a lack of administrative support, and a high level of stress, all of which eventually affect student behavior and performance.

The impact and consequences of a negative learning environment are evident in data showing a decline in student performance levels, an increase in absenteeism, and declines in teacher, parent, and staff satisfaction over a 3-year time span at Freedom (A+ Schools, 2014, 2015, 2016). Unique to the data in assessing the overall school climate, teachers in the study indicated pockets of positivity throughout the learning environment. These environments are easily disrupted and often require administrative support in terms of addressing student behavior. When behavioral issues are frequently left unaddressed, educators feel unsupported and undervalued and experience higher levels of stress and diminished levels of behavior management and instructional efficacy.

Post-intervention. IE offers a framework to begin the process of creating or enhancing a positive, inviting learning environment while fostering educational resilience and achievement (Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016). All participants reported an increase in mindfulness regarding how each set the tone for the day through interactions with students. They also noted that transitions, which can be disruptive, were smoother. They reported a shift toward a more positive learning environment after engaging in the PLC based on equity and care. Two participants specifically used the term *calmer* in their descriptions after participation in the intervention.

This finding is important for several reasons. First, the literature indicates that educational climates that are optimal for learning are inviting and generate an atmosphere of care and trust (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2012; Pajares, 1994; Purkey, 1992; Purkey &
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Novak, 2016). Second, it is essential that teachers invite students into learning through actions that convey intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2012; Lee, 2012; Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Aspy, 2003; Purkey & Novak, 2015, 2016; Schmidt, 2007) to promote realization of personal potential (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Also, similar findings can be connected to a substantial body of educational research associated with CRP. The literature shows that, when supported in a family-like atmosphere, students thrived on positive attention and thus experienced academic success (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a, 2010b).

Interventions based on cultural care were driven by the elements of IE (intentionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust [I-CORT]) as an intervention for school improvement, while utilizing a PDSA cycle outlined in improvement inquiry (Bryk et al., 2015). This research supports the ideals of invitational theory, along with key characteristics of CRP, that result in a positive school climate and student learning (Appendix F).

**Implications for policy.** Significant findings of this study can be aligned with state policies for school improvement and the outlined activities set forth by the state of Pennsylvania, as part of the requirements of the federal policy, to support the significance of this strategic project. The state suggestions to improve education include building cultural sensitivities, ongoing professional learning, research-based teaching practices, celebrating success, and investing in innovation (PDE, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Correspondingly, the findings from this study support the above mandated policies, addressing school climate as a matter of social justice and a strategic priority for school improvement at district, state, and national levels. It is necessary for administration and leadership to have a transparent, shared vision alongside teachers and staff. Without the presence of invested and effective leadership that promotes a positive school climate, models professional respect, and
acknowledges, values, and respects all stakeholders, any school improvement efforts will fall short of success.

Educator Preparation and PD on Diversity, Race, and Equity

Teacher-educator preparation. Analysis of pre-intervention interview data revealed that only two participants in this study indicated having had coursework at the collegiate level that involved culturally relevant teaching or preparation for teaching in a diverse setting. Both participants indicated that this had been a personal choice rather than a requirement of the education program. This finding indicates a scarcity of teachers with experience and knowledge of working in highly diverse settings prior to employment; thus, many are at a disadvantage for promoting student learning and achievement in settings with students who are typically underserved.

It has been reported that 82% of public school educators are of European descent, while more than half of public school students differ in race and culture (Boser, 2014; Milner, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2009; CUE, 2016). In order to benefit student growth and learning and to provide relatability in student-centered learning environments, it is critical to examine how to fill the void in teacher experience, knowledge, and application regarding culturally relevant practices. Echoing a recent article by Anderson (2015), a call for teachers of color in schools is not only significant for students of color; it is vital for White students to dismantle negative misconceptions or narrowed perspectives to which they are often exposed and to form authentic relationships that allow for development of student cultural competence.

Implications for educator and administrative preparatory programs. CRT acknowledges that racism is ordinary and difficult to address due to society’s denial of its existence and adoption of a colorblind mentality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This study’s findings support recommendations that are regularly found in culturally relevant and
responsive literature regarding the need for teacher preparation programs to expand to diverse settings (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014; Milner, 2010b, 2015; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). The findings also support recommendation to provide opportunities to build cultural competence and increase racial awareness (Milner, 2010b, 2015), during both pre-service coursework and in-service PD experiences.

It is also recommended to lengthen experiences in pre-service preparation and placements of highly qualified and competent culturally responsive mentors. Building one’s own cultural competence, along with a natural comfort in addressing issues associated with race and equity, should be included in preparatory programs to prepare educators for working with parents, families, students, and staff who possess multiple, and most likely, differing perspectives.

Professional development in LWPSD. The findings indicated that all members of the PLC had attended one PD session that was specific to diversity, equity, or race at the district level, referred to as Beyond Diversity Training but did not include culturally relevant teaching. During the pre-intervention interviews, participants described that session as tense, defensive, and extremely uncomfortable. Mr. Wolfe and Mrs. Washington, two African American educators, reported having felt “put on the spot.” All participants expressed a level of discomfort in the tone and size of the setting (large group). They agreed that, although PD was necessary, giving thought and consideration to the environment where sensitive topics are discussed would have been beneficial. Sessions were conducted in a large group setting, outside of the schools in which they worked, and with other educators, many who had never met prior to that day.
In contrast, participants agreed that the small group of the PLC offered a nonthreatening space for authentic reflection and rich dialogue, free from judgment. The opportunity to build reflective practices that enhance and improve educational practices was viewed as a benefit of participation. Participants’ perceptions of the atmosphere of the professional learning space can be connected to literature that suggests that, when engaging in matters of race, consideration of the perceptions and experiences of the audience is necessary (Milner, 2015; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). One participant indicated that she felt more comfortable and prepared to address race and equity issues with her students. She and another participant stated that they had become more outspoken with family members whom they described as “biased” and “racist.”

Milner (2015) and other critical race and educational scholars (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Noguera, 2003; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016) have suggested that teacher-educators engage in reflective practices to build cultural competence and develop critical self-awareness regarding relationships with students. The personal dynamics of familiarity in the small-group setting of the PLC facilitated reflection and encouraged in-depth conversations about race. As evident in the significant findings, a large, unfamiliar, and unwelcoming setting as reported in previous PD regarding equity was not perceived by participants as beneficial.

Regarding the context of PD, findings reflecting the essential characteristics of shared vision, collaboration, and inquiry-based learning in PLCs are supported by other research involving PLCs (Hynds et al., 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015). Participants in this study reported that they had become more aware of their unintentional biases and had developed a greater
self-awareness of their race, as well as a deeper consideration of their students’ race, when forming relationships as part of their regular practice.

**Implications for practice and professional development.** The PLC focused on shared and collaborative decision making, engaging teachers in reflective practices and promoting positive relationships through cultural care and inviting practices while promoting intentionally positive mindsets framed by I-CORT elements. The small-group collaborative and shared decision-making aspects of PD are supported by mounting evidence in educational research on PLCs (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hynds et al., 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015; Rivkin et al., 2005). That research offers insight on the benefits of teacher growth and student learning. This improvement research study used quick cycles of change to guide and “accelerate learning by doing,” as described by improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015). This technique is offered for use in IE through the gradual phases outlined in the helix (Purkey & Novak, 2016; Figure 2) and described in detail in Appendix G.
Figure 2. Invitational education helix, illustrating the phases and stages of invitational education. Source: Fundamentals of Invitational Education (2nd ed.), by W. W. Purkey & J. M. Novak, 2016, Greensboro, NC: International Alliance for Invitational Education.
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It is recommended to continue to implement and support small PLCs for race- and equity-related PD at the earliest point of entry. The findings present an opportunity to conduct PD via PLCs, allowing teachers to develop a greater self-awareness to their own race and the race of their students in an inviting safe space from a strengths-based perspective. This advocates an opportunity to (a) enhance or improve practice; (b) provide educators with skills, knowledge, and a foundation to engage in productive dialogue with students and other educators on difficult topics; (c) develop awareness of biases, stereotyping, and systematic and existential racism to address disproportionate data and racial disparities; (d) promote student awareness and cultural competence, and (e) provide a platform to promote positive educator-student relationships.

It is recommended to establish site-based equity teams supported by skilled experts for comprehensive, whole-staff PD and individual support as needed. The specialist, who must possess strong leadership skills and a broad knowledge base on race- and equity-related topics, can assist in facilitation of staff development and schoolwide improvement and provide resources for building cultural competence. This recommendation is supported by strong evidence in research on the positive impact of building teacher capacity in urban settings (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b) and leadership capacity via school partnerships (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012) on student growth and achievement.

Methods of Forming Positive Relationships and the Influence of Interventions

In culturally relevant teaching, social interactions in the learning environment foster positive social relationships through “honoring the students’ sense of belonging” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 82). These relationships promote self-worth through a sense of psychological safety in which students feel comfortable and supported (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 79) while being held to high standards of excellence (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Gay,
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2010; Milner, 2010a, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2010). An aspect of CRP is that both pedagogical theories and practices have an underlying characteristic that is authenticated through genuine caring relationships.

**Forming positive relationships.** The teachers in this study were identified via the district’s teacher evaluation system as highly effective in teacher performance. These participants described how they had established positive teacher-student relationships through intentional initiation of positive social interactions. Emergent themes from participants’ responses included intentional and inviting greetings, conversations about nonacademic concepts, sharing personal stories, giving additional responsibilities to students, and listening to student concerns with intentionality. Findings showed that the teachers expressed genuine interest by acknowledging students’ presence and behavior and respecting students’ perspectives, all of which was reciprocated by students. This finding is consistent with conclusions reported by Hynds et al. (2016) regarding the impact of PD on indigenous students’ achievement and teacher practice. Although this study did not evaluate student achievement quantitatively, the teachers in this study reported seeing an improvement in academic behaviors (e.g., effort, motivation, time on task) by their students of color.

Consistent with the literature on culturally responsive learning environments (Noguera, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999), teachers in this study shared that demonstrating simple acts of human kindness had resulted in student academic growth and success (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Hyland, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010b; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012; Ware, 2006). They reported having a more mindful and intentional approach when engaging with students. Each participant strongly agreed that demonstrating care for students had contributed to positive teacher-relationships. Demonstrating care involved prioritization of student needs, providing
basic needs (snacks, clothing), attending to first aid needs (e.g., Band-Aids, clean clothes), and positive acknowledgment of student behaviors and efforts toward academic growth.

Post-intervention interviews indicated that all participants had initiated a shift in mindset that was intentional and positive. This included attention to deliberate verbal interactions (greetings, compliments, encouragement, exchanges of nonacademic information, social conversations) between themselves and students to facilitate positive relationships.

Positive verbal messages, also referred to as inviting messages (Edwards, 2010), that acknowledged, recognized, and valued a student’s presence, feelings, and behaviors created an environment based on mutual respect and ultimately influenced behavior management and academics.

Considering Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, teachers must meet a child’s physiological safety, love, and esteem needs as a prerequisite to addressing academic achievement. Attention to student needs is evident in the teacher-educators’ approach to developing positive teacher-student relationships and demonstrating genuine care, leading to students’ successes, as seen in this study.

Four of the five participants reported that they had met some basic student needs, such as snacks, clothing, or materials to lessen the students’ burden or stress. They emphasized the importance of showing care and concern for students’ well-being as a priority over task completion. An example of this is reflected in a conversation with one participant who described a time when one of her students was not feeling well. Rather than pressuring the student to engage in the lesson and complete the assignment, the teacher allowed the student to lie down in a designated area of the classroom. The student’s well-being took priority over task completion. Participants expressed a strong conviction about the importance of meeting
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student social-emotional needs as a means to form relationships that facilitated opportunities for meeting academic needs.

CRP as part of practice incorporates a sense of community; teachers often use techniques of “other mothering” (Ware, 2006, p. 423). In this situation, teachers are viewed and act as extended family (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006), caring for students in both academic and nonacademic capacities. Three of the four participants, as well as the researcher as participant observer, indicated that, by communicating with parents in a positive and proactive manner, they demonstrated care and reinforced positive relationships with their children’s parents and families. They also solidified their bonds with their students. Communication took various forms (phone calls, text messages, notes sent home, emails) before, during, and after school hours. The participants were confident that these gestures created a genuine sense of community among students, families, and themselves. Two participants indicated that, when they paused to acknowledge students and show genuine interest in the children to the parents and families, they influenced the level of support that the parents provided to their children. The discoveries in this study are significant to school improvement and educational reform. The outcomes of CRP on student performance and the presence of influential teacher-student relationships demonstrated the positive results that can be achieved if these relationships are given priority.

The significant findings in this study confirmed a 3-year longitudinal study examining highly effective practices in urban schools (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). The outcomes also illustrated the relationship between highly effective culturally relevant practices and increased achievement (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). The outcomes are also evident in educational research involving care (Noddings, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999) that are discussed in culturally relevant and responsive literature (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Gay, 2010; Hattie, 2012; Kane & Cantrell,
Educators in this study reported that they modeled intentional and thoughtful gestures of care toward students and that students replicated these actions. The teachers who demonstrated care and concern for their students provided a sense of psychological safety and acknowledged a genuine interest in the students’ physical and emotional well-being. These social exchanges reinforced development of an atmosphere grounded in trust and respect, which is optimal for student learning.

**Significance of recognizing race and culture in relationships.** CRP practices utilize social interactions in learning environments to foster positive relationships (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a). The formation of relationships based on social awareness and social interactions is correlated with many research studies and the literature on cultural relevance. These relationships facilitated student growth and achievement for students of color in this study.

Similar results have been reported in research studies on IE and self-efficacy (Arslan, 2012; Pajares, 1994, 2001; Usher & Pajares, 2006). The predictive nature of self-efficacy on academic outcomes and performance emphasizes that educators should consider its sources to promote student growth and achievement. Cornelius-West (2007) reported a strong association between self-efficacy and academic performance in relation to the role of the teacher who created a positive teacher-student relationship through positive verbal persuasion via facilitated relationship.

Support for this significant finding in relation to elements of CRP and self-efficacy is found in Usher and Pajares’s (2006) study that examined sources of self-efficacy (verbal
persuasion, performance mastery, psychological states, and vicarious experiences). Although race was not central to that study (race as a variable when examining sources of self-efficacy), it draws attention to the relationship between self-efficacy and culturally relevant pedagogy, concluding that invitations that others send to students played an important role in student motivation, confidence, and beliefs.

Three participants reported seeing a difference in social and academic behaviors in students of color in comparison to their White peers, while two participants did not report notable differences between the two peer groups. However, there was a slight inconsistency in one of the educators’ responses. When asked whether there were any notable dissimilarities, Mrs. Anderson replied “No.” However, she commented that it appeared that students of color enjoyed her class more, were more affectionate, and initiated social interactions more frequently after the intervention. The aversion to drawing attention to differences between races could be attributed to Mrs. Anderson’s societal perspectives and upbringing. During the interviews, she related her family’s discomfort in discussing race as offensive and socially inappropriate. Her viewpoint reflected the colorblind perspective argued by critical race theorists (Delale-O’Connor & Milner, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and explored in race-based research and literature (Milner, 2007; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016).

**Influence on students’ social and academic behaviors.** Usher and Pajares (2006) concluded that IE invitations that others send to students about their behavior played an important role in students’ motivation, confidence, and beliefs in their capabilities. Like Usher and Pajares, teachers in this study agreed that, by recognizing students’ race and culture from a strengths-based perspective, they positively influenced subsequent interactions with students that involved redirection, their approach to behavior management, or their management of
avoidance behaviors. The educators’ perspectives reflected in this study support existing literature that correlates perceived self-efficacy with student behavior and academics.

Teachers reported that students demonstrated an increase in effort, motivation, and positive disposition in subjects or tasks that are often difficult. One participant recounted an increase in the letter grade of one student. Another reported an increase in proficiency levels in oral reading fluency. Mr. Wolfe reported a decrease in avoidance behaviors (playing with objects, asking to leave the room, head down, intentional delay in task completion), which is evidence of observable changes in student self-efficacy in larger mainstream classrooms and, even more so, during small group lessons. He stated that he students were being recognized more often for their notable change in effort and quality of work by teachers who were not part of the PLC or study. These findings are consistent with extensive scholarly literature concerning student self-efficacy and academic achievement due to the existence of strong relationships with their teachers (Arslan, 2012; Bandura, 1994, 2001; Downey, 2008; Hattie, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012; Pajares, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2001a, 2001b; Schunk, 1991; Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Usher & Pajares, 2006, 2008; B. J. Zimmerman et al., 1992).

All participants stated that they had noticed favorable changes in students’ behaviors. Three teachers noticed constructive changes in student behavior (being more motivated and confident, willingness to participate) and less conflict and resistance in addressing inappropriate student behaviors or dispositions or when redirecting students. They reported using a more proactive approach to interactions with students that allowed for ease in redirection. Mrs. Washington, who is often involved in addressing discipline in the school, reported a decrease in office referrals, except for extreme behavior cases requiring multitiered student supports. One participant indicated no changes in behavior management approach
based on her strength-in-practice but reported observable changes in student-to-student behaviors and noted that students of color seemed to enjoy her class more than White students.

The significant findings show the impact of IE (Purkey & Novak, 2016) and interventions under the umbrella of social-emotional learning programs as described by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011). These findings are associated with increased student academic performance, reduced aggression and emotional distress, increased helping behaviors in school, and improved attitudes toward self and others (Durlak et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007; Usher & Pajares, 2006). The findings are especially notable when considering equity, disproportionality in discipline, and reported gaps in achievement.

**Self-awareness of educators’ own race.** Teachers in this study indicated that they had become more aware of their own race. They had developed a deeper understanding of how to interact with students, especially prior to an established relationship. Milner (2010b) discussed other case studies in similar contexts that illustrated the importance of teachers building relationships with students. Milner suggested that teachers could have lasting results by reflecting on their internal and external dialogue.

In this study, educators advocated a strengths-based perspective regarding differences in culture. They agreed that recognizing students’ race and culture encouraged relationships, influenced teacher practice, provided opportunities to develop connections, and influenced future interactions with students. Two participants said that acknowledging similarities and differences in race and culture as part of regular practice improved student-centered learning, resulting in an increase in student effort and interest and greater time on task. Three participants reported that they put themselves in the student’s place to respect perspectives in multiple contexts.
Implications for practice. These findings indicate the importance of educators participating in reflective practices to enhance formation of positive relationships and to allow for a mindful approach when engaging with students, families, and each other. It is recommended that opportunities be provided to (a) engage in reflective activities as part of a collaborative growth model of PD, (2) engage stakeholders in social- and team-building school community events to promote formation of relationships, (c) share best practices among staff, and (d) explore intersectionality as a part of self-reflection.

The data in this study strongly support the argument for researchers and educators in highly diverse settings to build cultural competence for formation of strong positive teacher-student bonds. Based on the data in this study, this can be accomplished by incorporating reflective practices as part of regular practice. This practice is reinforced in small-group PD (e.g., PLCs and NICs [Bryk et al., 2015]) that offers materials and resources to engage in discussions on race and equity as an embedded component of staff development.

Implications for PD. Pennsylvania’s new Educator Effectiveness System requires use of the student learning objective (SLO) process (PDE, 2015). The PDE (2015) defined the SLO as a process to document a measure of educator effectiveness based on student achievement of content standards. It is recommended to enhance practice through action research on SLOs that simultaneously utilize the PDSA cycle of inquiry. This could be accomplished through small-group, team-level, or grade-level learning communities.

Influence of Interventions and Participation in the PLC

Several significant findings related to the influence of interventions were reported by participants as a result of their participation in the PLC. Participants gave multiple examples of ways in which they considered the PLC to be beneficial to themselves and their students. These findings illustrate an interrelated element of the theoretical frameworks used in this
study and among relationships, interactions, tone of the learning environment, and student social and academic behaviors. This can be attributed to the complex social nature of educational settings and environments, which are humanistic organizations by nature.

**Influence on teacher practice.** All participants reported a shift to a more positive mindset and a more cognizant perspective of students’ perceptions, lessons, curriculum, and behavior management approaches. All participants indicated a greater awareness across multiple settings and contexts. Data analysis revealed that all educators revealed a heightened consciousness of their initial interactions between themselves and students and a greater level of intentionality in seeking positive student behaviors and character traits, as well as recognizing and acknowledging students (socially and academically).

In addition to experiencing a shift to a more positive mindset, the member of the PLC reported an intentional and increased focus on students’ needs and an increase in overall self-awareness and social awareness of race, equity, and relationships outside the work environment. Significant findings specified an increase in self-awareness about word choice, intentional approach, and engagement. These were also viewed as benefits of member involvement in the PLC. These findings reflect those presented in research on the impact of social-emotional learning programs in relation to improvement in social-emotional skills, attitudes, and outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

**Specificity to students of color.** One goal of the PLC was to develop cultural competence and cultivate reflective practices of educational practitioners involving race and equity. Milner (2007, 2015) suggested that researchers engage in self-reflection to gain deeper awareness of critical consciousness and extended a call to action for teachers to explore and learn together in cohorts to transform practice. Development of social-emotional awareness and skills in association with equity and social justice was also a reported outcome and
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perceived benefit. All participants indicated that they were more aware of their race and how it could be perceived by students of other races or cultures. They were also more aware of potential biases that they or other teachers in the building exhibit, both consciously and unconsciously. This can be attributed to group discussions and self-reflection, aiding in development of greater understanding of racial bias, stereotyping, racism, culture, perceptions, beliefs, and equity, with a secondary but equally crucial objective of building teacher-student relationships with the intent of school improvement.

This study applied recommendations for action researchers’ reflection on race, culture, and positionality while conducting race-related studies (Milner, 2007, 2015) and responded to the call to explore difficult topics that are often considered taboo or controversial in small learning communities or cohorts (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Milner, 2015; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). It also answered the call to action for qualitative studies that encompass teacher perspectives (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, 2009), while filling a gap that connects IE research and CRP with specificity.

**Influence on interactions and relationships.** Previous discussions regarding the social and organic nature of education and educational settings have pointed out that characteristics related to teacher-student relationships are reflected in responses involving the influence of interactions between students and teacher-educators. The participants reported an increase in positive teacher-student interactions that led to positive teacher-student relationships. Students were observed to compliment, collaborate, and encourage each other.

**Unexpected Outcome**

An unexpected and significant finding was the emergence of student-initiated raced-based conversations. All but one participant (the only male) reported students having
conversations based on race or culture. Student-initiated conversations took two forms: between student and teacher and between student and student. Some students initiated intellectual sharing- and inquiry-based conversations, while others expressed anger, frustration, fear, or disdain.

Two participants attributed the student-initiated conversations about race to the positive learning environment based on trust, care, and respect. These participants said that students felt comfortable in speaking and inquiring about understanding race with teachers because of their relationship cultivated through interventions associated with cultural care. Three participants stated that students’ outbursts of anger or fear were related to the 2016 Presidential election, which exposed a deeply divided nation and bolstered hidden racism and biases, unleashing a surge of acrimony in schools across the nation and in various forms of media (social, print, and news) Costello, 2016a, 2016b). On two specific occasions, students mentioned the election or the current President’s name. This is evident in the data from this study and is supported by existing research.

Significant findings of this study support data reported by the SPLC. The SPLC’s report indicated that 67% of students, mainly immigrants and students of color (American-born citizens) had expressed uncertainty or fear for their families and showed signs of anxiety involving the results of the election and what might happen to them or their families (Costello, 2016a, 2016b). More than half of surveyed teachers reported seeing an increase in hostility and “uncivil political discourse” (Costello, 2016a, p. 4) among students, with an impact on teacher practice. According to the SPLC study, the election has had a “profoundly negative effect on children and classrooms; it has produced an alarming level of fear and anxiety among children and enflamed racial and ethnic tensions in the classroom (Costello, 2016a, p. 4). The findings of this study concur with the SPLC report that “a disturbing nationwide problem, one
that is particularly acute in schools with high student concentrations of minority children” (Costello, 2016, p. 4) has escalated, elevated, and emboldened open harassment.

To reiterate, not all instances of student-initiated racial conversations were deemed adverse or negative by the participants who reported the events. Several conversations had been proactively seeking understanding and inquiry-based, both between students and between students and teachers. Yet the data showed that the election results had indirect impacts on the tone of the school environment and altered moods of both students and staff. The comfort in student-initiated conversations was a result of a safe learning environment, an established teacher-student relationship, and the educators’ self-awareness of matters of race and equity. Two participants reported student-to-student conversations related to race and culture on more than one occasion.

One finding in this study revealed the presence of student-initiated conversations that differed slightly from results reported in the University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative (2016) Positive Racial Identify Development in Early Education (PRIDE) scan. Conducted in nine pre-kindergarten classrooms that reported over a 2-month observation period, the study reported findings indicating that children did not talk about race with each other or with teachers, even though 55% of the teachers reported that children talked to them about race and 36% said that children were talking to other children about race.

The PRIDE report indicated that teachers did not talk about race with each other or with other children (University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016, p. 9). I must emphasize that, in the scan, no reported instances of discrimination were observed and the teachers appeared to have “equitable relationships with children regardless of race” (University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early
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Childhood Collaborative, 2016, p. #). These findings indicate a subtle, possibly unintentional, colorblind approach (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) in teaching in early childhood settings. This has the potential to be detrimental to development of positive racial identities and reinforces marginalization of those who are typically underserved (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and who have expressed concern regarding development of racial identity in children from a young age (University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). Further exploration is needed to determine this impact, as addressed in the section on future research.

The slightly contrasting results underscore the need for teacher-educators to engage in growth and learning opportunities to develop critical consciousness and cultural competence at the earliest point of entry for students, and congruently, in teacher education programs. In the current study, children were (with emphasis) comfortable, willing, and able to have race- and culture-based conversations with trusting adults and peers in a psychologically safe environment.

Implications for practice. The significant findings from this study support existing research about the importance of the role of the teacher in establishing a positive learning environment and implementing inviting practices (Purkey & Novak, 2016) where open dialogue and discussions occur while simultaneously recognizing, acknowledging, and valuing race and culture. A recommendation for moving forward is for educators to engage students in lessons or materials with rich, highly diverse resources that promote positive perceptions of multiculturalism and race. This can result in an inviting student-centered classroom that offers positive images and messages to develop positive racial identities. Educators should consider text, curriculum, aesthetics of the environment, and programs that promote social-emotional learning.
Implications for PD. A recommendation for tenured and nontenured educators is to engage in learning opportunities similar to the PD conducted in this study. This would invite child-friendly dialogue on race and equity as opportunities are presented. The recommendation for a collaborative approach in PD to assist in building teacher capacity can be found in existing research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hattie, 2012; Owen, 2014, 2015; Rivkin et al., 2005; Stosich, 2016). A related recommendation is that educators in need of support or coaching be provided opportunities to engage in modeled lessons and to observe best practices. Co-teaching with a mentor or master teacher serving in the capacity of a coach would help educators to develop culturally responsive practices, skills, and a knowledge base. As cautioned by Rivkin et al. (2005), it is crucial that the coaching model in PD outline a clear plan of action, be inclusive, and be supported by administration. This work must be supported by and include all stakeholders, including higher-level education programs and community partnerships, for legitimate and transparent progress in addressing inequities.

Implications for higher education. Results from this study revealed the limited or absent opportunities in diverse settings for preservice teachers, required coursework on CRP, and extended experiences in highly diverse settings to develop the concept of cultural care. A recommendation for remediation is that education programs (administrative and teacher) establish a partnership with schools or districts to serve as a network. The distributed leadership model promotes a collaborative partnership that promotes teacher leadership, improves professional development, and increases collective efficacy (Cohen & Geier, 2010; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). These educational hubs would act as long-term learning centers for universities, colleges, or educational training programs committed to social justice and have a shared benefit for all who are involved.
**Implications for policy.** Pennsylvania has begun the process of enacting federal mandates delineated by the ESSA. The theory of action, outlined in the Equitable Access to Excellent Educator’s plan, ensures that students have access to excellent and highly qualified teachers in an effort to narrow equity gaps between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers (PDE, 2015). Reflected in the report are positive outcomes with intent to build on these successes. An example of this is evident in the federal program, Investing in Innovation Fund (i3). This program provides funding to support local educational agencies, nonprofit organizations in partnership with one or more local education agencies, or a consortium of schools with a record of improving student achievement and attainment to expand implementation of and investment in innovative practices that have been shown to be successful (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The central goal of this program is to provide funding that allows qualifying entities to (a) expand and develop innovative practices that serve as models of best practices, (b) work in partnerships with the private sector and the philanthropic community, and (c) identify and document best practices that can be shared and applied in multiple contexts relatable to individual needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). It is recommended that higher education institutions consider establishing educational partnerships (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012) or educational centers focused on providing collaborative support to build teacher capacity (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b) that is embedded in social justice. Collaboration in PD should support teacher empowerment and collective efficacy and require an investment in building relationships between the academy and institutions (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2008, 2012). With dedicated and authentic investment in successful interventions that incorporate a multifaceted partnership approach, the outcomes in collective growth yield rewards that are far greater than the costs.
Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in a public school district where I have been employed for more than 18 years. Furthermore, I was the only person to conduct the voice-recorded interviews. One limitation of the study could be related to interpretation of the outcomes due to my active participation as the lead facilitator in the PLC. Third-party peer review of emergent themes from coded interviews, with a minimum of 85% code agreement, was conducted for interrelated reliability. To support reliability, an audit trail (Appendix A) was created to record discussion on topics related to race and equity, resources, and steps in implementing a PDSA cycle (Bryk et al., 2015).

As in all qualitative action research, the risk of bias exists. According to the University of Southern California (2017) Research Guide, potential sources of bias in self-reported data are as follows:

1. selective memory—remembering or not remembering experiences or events that occurred at some point in the past; 2. telescoping—recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time; 3. attribution—the act of attributing positive events and outcomes to one’s own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces; and, 4. exaggeration—the act of representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data.

To adjust for limitations and to ensure transferability, reliability, credibility, and validity, I conducted member checks for clarification, elaboration, and respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of researcher’s notes on participants’ responses and the reported findings. Participants were provided a charted copy of their individual responses and researcher’s notes in electronic form and offered the opportunity to review significant findings for any potential misinterpretation.
Sample Size

The study was intentionally limited in size. The small-scale study was conducted with four participants and the action researcher, all as willing participants in a PLC focused on equity and care. The number of participants in the PLC was purposefully delimited by school administration as part of weekly, site-based PD opportunities. The small group allowed teacher-educators to reflect and have open discussions and discourse in a safe space, which was considered an advantage for gaining rich data. This was critical, given the sensitive subject matter and topics (race, racism, equity, biases, etc.) that have the potential to cause personal or emotional discomfort. A further limitation was that the administration’s role was not included as part of the study. Future studies should consider the role of the administration.

Ethical Considerations Regarding Researcher Positionality

Milner (2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2015) argued against researchers detaching themselves from the research process. Milner suggested that researchers engage in self-reflection to gain a deeper awareness and critical consciousness to contribute to the dialogue, empower researchers, and provide researcher accountability to people and communities related to the research. Milner (2007) discussed researcher positionality and introduced a framework “to guide any research into racial and cultural awareness” (p. 388). This aligns with a tenet in critical race theoretical framework, using a narrative and counter narrative “captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants . . . centralizing race for the knower and for the known. In other words, race and racism are placed at the center of the narrative and counter-narrative” (Milner, 2007, p. 391). To limit potential bias, I presented a personal narrative aspect to the participants, sharing my purpose and intent and situating myself within the study.
Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should consider replication of the study based on cultural care and including measures of the impact on multiple variables (race, gender, graduation rates, attendance, disciplinary data, the role of the administration, and student voice). The research should include longitudinal studies, quantitative levels of efficacy (students and staff), and school climate surveys. Replication of this study could contribute to the limited literature on connections between IE (Purkey & Novak, 2016) and culturally relevant practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014; Milner 2010a, 2010b, 2015). The principles of inviting practices, diversity and inclusion, and equity could be applied across multiple educational contexts. Human capital and staff could benefit from considering inviting practices as a regular part of staff and skill development across various disciplines, including public, private, and voluntary sectors. Application of cultural care in highly diverse professional settings that rely on social interactions as part of regular function should consider examining the influence or potential impact of its implementation on professional learning.

Summary

Teacher-educators have always articulated the significance of positive teacher-student relationships through care as a regular part of pedagogy. Conversations, particularly those on educational policy and school improvement, with emphasis on practical strategies and tools to implement CRP, equity, and effective interventions, have been shown to be useful. While I agree that policies to address such matters are necessary, I caution that, if there is no solid understanding, authentic commitment, and complete inclusion of stakeholder voices, implementation of policies will not be applied with fidelity. This outcome would perpetuate a lack of faith in flawed educational programs, policies, or procedures at the expense of students.
and, more broadly speaking, societal contributions. This should be of great concern and profound consideration.

The participants in this study engaged in robust conversations concerning equity and incorporated reflective strategies to build cultural competence for improving practice. Through thoughtful conversations, the teacher-educators in this study illustrated the influences of interventions based on cultural care and inviting practices on multiple areas of the learning environment. This study offers insights regarding the influence of a grassroots effort to build formative relationships, encompassing various aspects of educational reform and suggesting a context in which it can be achieved. In the words of James Comer (2001), “No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship” (p. 30).

**Critical Scholar for Social Justice**

The study conducted was a deeply personal and professional endeavor. Yet, the purpose of the research (improving and enhancing practice in unification with encouraging a positive school climate based on care, trust, and respect) never wavered. The theory of cultural care, provides educators a practical framework that promotes a self-awareness of the significance of our actions that embody authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) for educational success. It is nearly impossible to teach someone *how* to care, but as a transformative leader, I have the responsibility to disseminate the research that demonstrates *why* we must care.

Moving forward, I intend to share the research-based initiatives with educational leaders, administrators, and teachers in multiple contexts and forms. As a teacher-leader and a PLC facilitator, I intend to continue provide professional development opportunities and present the information through new teacher induction programs. Engaging in dialogue and publicizing the findings will give educators a practical approach that aligns with school improvement reforms. This action research offers teachers, teacher-leaders, and school
districts a thought provoking intervention design that can positively transform learning
environments tailored to their needs. It is crucial to illustrate the benefits of PD conducted in
collaborative learning communities that build teacher capacity and leadership, and promote
student achievement (Cooter, 2003a, 2003b; Hynds et al., 2016; Owen, 2014, 2015; Vernon-

As Milner (2015) notes, despite the efforts to deliver instruction in a safe space during
professional development and in educational preparation, discussions about race and culture
can often result in silenced dialogue. It is my opinion, based on the collective experiences of
this strategic problem of practice, that many individuals do not always lack the willingness to
engage in these difficult conversations, but lack a familiar discourse to participate without fear
of judgment and negative social repercussions. The formation of sustainable relationships
based on cultural care assists in providing a research-based initiative that facilitates an
environment optimal for learning, success, and improvement.

The findings also offer higher education institutions a set of evidence based
recommendations for improving teacher and administrator preparation programs. The next
steps in my strategic plan for applying my research findings include embracing opportunities
for involvement in teacher and administrator preparation programs and collaborating with other
scholars to push the research agenda forward.

The process of change takes relentless dedication and investment. If adequately
supported and adopted by leadership, a culturally caring mindset is one that is transferable, can
be modeled, and applied for the collective benefit of education. As an educational scholar and
invitational leader for social justice, I hope to serve as a bridge that supports and facilitates the
necessary transformation to enable and promote an equitable education.
REFERENCES


CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES


Milner, H. R. (2010b). *Start where you are, but don’t stay there*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.


CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES


CULTURAL CARE AND INVITING PRACTICES


## APPENDIX A

### PLC OUTLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic: Equity and Care PLC</th>
<th>Activity or Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1:</strong> September 29th</td>
<td>Disproportionate Data</td>
<td>Directed by MM to distribute data surrounding disproportionate test scores within the district and our school. Discussion surrounding noticing’s of disproportionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2:</strong> October 13th October 6th was a RTI planning meeting (No PLC)</td>
<td>PLC Tim Wise Video <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V13nqzefyoE&amp;feature=em-share_video_user">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V13nqzefyoE&amp;feature=em-share_video_user</a></td>
<td>Take notes, reflect, bring thoughts and perspectives to the next meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3:</strong> October 20</td>
<td>Continuation of the topic of discourse and beginning the conversation. Discussion of the foundations of IE and how practice should consider racial identity of students.</td>
<td>NY Times Article Challenging White Privileged and Invitational Education book distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4:</strong> November 3 (October 27th* Staff meeting) (Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle) IRB-October 31st</td>
<td>NY Times Article: New York Private Schools, Challenging White Privilege from the Inside (Kyle Spencer, February 15, 2015)</td>
<td>PLC Discussed labels and discourse of race. Article conversation started on the idea of Whiteness and labels. Activity 1: Care Team Make and Take (See Appendix X, Artifact 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5:</strong> November 10th (Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle)</td>
<td>PLC Social Breakfast: Breaking Bread, Building Bonds</td>
<td>Staff members were invited to socialize during a very stressful and tumultuous time with the results of the election. This was a time to build camaraderie and focus on what matters most. People. We also shared the activity we are doing in the PLC that asks staff members to reflect on what they do to build relationships with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6:</strong> November 18th (Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle)</td>
<td>Best Practices: Activity 1: Share-out and Next Steps</td>
<td>PLC participants shared personal practices surrounding building caring relationships. PLC generated ideas to implement (“interventions”) in classrooms (or school wide) during our interactions with students based upon definition of cultural care with consideration to I-CORT elements. (See Figure 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 7:</strong> December 1st (November 24th Thanksgiving Break) (Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle)</td>
<td>Follow up: Collaboration, Modifications and Continuation (Do-Study of improvement science and design development Bryk et al. and Mintrop) In conjunction to the practices based on cultural care, dialogue surrounding equity (race, culture, marginalization etc. is conducted and resources shared.)</td>
<td>Discussion of what was working, what to continue and/or modify. Next steps: Tier Time once a month Motivational Monday’s – teacher recognition. Promoting and maintain momentum. Positive announcements – connect with [teacher’s name] for student government participation. Use PLC time to develop materials. Interim- Bias video TED talk to keep focus on matters of Equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 8:</strong> December 8th</td>
<td>Dialogue on TED Talk/Unconscious Bias: Material Preparation for Starr Staff and Housekeeping: Next Steps</td>
<td>Updates from agenda – Video discussion was not able to take place due to time limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9:</strong> December 15th</td>
<td>Unconscious Bias Video Discussion</td>
<td>Recorded information and voice memo in Dropbox. 2 hr. delay - 45 minute PLC meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 10:</strong> January 5th – (Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle)</td>
<td>Moving Forward: Keeping Momentum, -- Expansion to Parental Involvement</td>
<td>Information was provided to the PTO for Freedom Elementary News Letter. Parents are being informed and now will be included in the inviting practices sharing positive compliments and words of kindness to the staff. Parents will have the opportunity to participate through email or through a comment card that will be found in the office. Principal announces resignation effective January 24th.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Personal demographic questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Why did you decide to go into education?
3. Tell me about the position that you are teaching this year. From what you can remember, did any of your experience in college prepare you for teaching in a diverse setting?
4. Did you have any coursework in college that covered culturally relevant pedagogy?
5. What did you think about it?
6. What professional development surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy have you had during your career in education?

### Interview Questions (Pre-IQ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-intervention implementation:</th>
<th>Interview Questions (Post-IQ):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the tone of the building this year. What about the tone of your classroom? What’s your class like? Describe the atmosphere and tone of the environment (office or main office) you are working most with students?</td>
<td>Did implementing cultural care have any influence on your teaching or interactions with students? Was this any different for Students of Color in comparison to your White students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any students (or those that you interact with regularly) that stand out to you in terms of needing additional help in terms of behavior? What about in terms of academics?</td>
<td>Has your relationship(s) changed in any way with the students (in your class or who you interact with) as a result of reflecting and implementing inviting practices via cultural care? Was this any different for Students of Color in comparison to your White students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What made you decide to join and be a part of the Care Team?</td>
<td>Has the classroom tone or atmosphere of the classroom climate changed in any way since intentional implementation of inviting practices through cultural care? How has it changed (positively or negatively)? If there aren’t any changes, why do you think there has been no impact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the way in which you build relationships with students vary in terms of their race or culture? What about in terms of your race or culture?</td>
<td>What impact do you believe cultural care has on student learning? Do you feel this was different for Students of Color versus their white peers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do think considering or acknowledging a students’ race or cultural background influences their behavior?</td>
<td>What, if any, observable changes in behavior have you noticed with students? Do you feel this was different for Students of Color versus their white peers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you show your students you care about them? Do you reflect or consider race and culture in the way you show students you care?</td>
<td>Do you feel that inviting practices through the lens of culture care affected your classroom management? Do you feel the Students of Color benefited from your participating in the PLC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel considering or acknowledging a students’ cultural and racial background influences your teaching style or interactions?</td>
<td>How do you feel your practice has changed as a result of being a part of the PLC that focused on equity and care?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you define cultural care?</td>
<td>What were some, if any, factors you felt inhibited or limited, forming positive relationships with your students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject/Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher – Self-Contained</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher – Math/ Spanish</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher – ELA/SS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher – ELA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher – Math/ Science</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher – ELA/SS</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Teacher – Spanish</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher – Math</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher – ELA/SS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher – ELA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Teacher – Primary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Teacher – Intermediate</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Primary (K-2)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>Related Arts</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Related Arts</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Related Arts</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councilor</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para 1</td>
<td>Primary (K-2)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para 2</td>
<td>Primary (K-2)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para 3</td>
<td>Primary and intermediate</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para 4</td>
<td>Autistic Support</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para 5</td>
<td>Autistic Support</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Staff</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Staff</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodian</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Service</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Service</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER FULL-TIME STAFF</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHERS ONLY</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: W = White, AA = African American, H/L = Hispanic-Latino, M = male, F = female.
### TLC SURVEY RESULTS—CONSTRUCT: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Elementary Schools in District</th>
<th>Freedom K-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>The faculty and leadership have a shared vision.</td>
<td>70.80%</td>
<td>71.00%</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.</td>
<td>63.00%</td>
<td>62.90%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.</td>
<td>63.30%</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>The school leadership consistently supports teachers.</td>
<td>68.50%</td>
<td>72.10%</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.</td>
<td>93.90%</td>
<td>96.20%</td>
<td>83.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.</td>
<td>90.30%</td>
<td>92.30%</td>
<td>54.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Teacher performance is assessed objectively.</td>
<td>74.80%</td>
<td>80.20%</td>
<td>36.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.</td>
<td>80.70%</td>
<td>83.40%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.</td>
<td>69.90%</td>
<td>75.30%</td>
<td>59.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.</td>
<td>72.60%</td>
<td>73.70%</td>
<td>45.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.</td>
<td>79.20%</td>
<td>79.30%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Elementary School (N = 23) Mean Percentages (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for ISS-R Subscales and Total Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>69.46</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>57.02</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>57.61</td>
<td>11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>73.54</td>
<td>8.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>58.26</td>
<td>9.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63.70</td>
<td>7.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Elementary School (N = 23) Mean Percentages for ISS-R Subscales and Total Score.
Cultural care is defined as a gesture that displays genuine interest in another person’s social, emotional, mental, and physical well-being, while simultaneously recognizing and acknowledging race and culture as a significant part of a person’s identity. Cultural care must include respecting, valuing, and embracing culture from a value- and strength-based perspective.
APPENDIX G

THE THREE PHASES OF IE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Step 1 Initial Exposure</th>
<th>Step 2 Structured Dialogue</th>
<th>Step 3 General Agreement</th>
<th>Step 4 Uncoordinated Use and Sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasional Interest</td>
<td>Open dialogue, discussion, reading, hearing speaker or watching a video takes place in step one.</td>
<td>Organized discussions following a program, speech, meeting, or reading is common during this step. There is an emphasis on appreciation and recognition of inviting practices already taking place. (Finding the bright spots). A valuable activity is identifying what makes practice inviting.</td>
<td>The purpose is to seek agreement on what invitational practices to try to see what works, should continue, or be discontinued. These small adjustments can be minor or a preliminary test.</td>
<td>Changes that have been tried are shared with stakeholders and those changes are reported. A key is to celebrate successful new practices that set the stage for upward movement in structure of the helix.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II Systematic Application</th>
<th>Step 5 Intensive Study</th>
<th>Step 6 Applied Comprehension</th>
<th>Step 7 Strand Organization</th>
<th>Step 8 Systematic Incorporation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once small successes have been begun, the process of forming more structured groups to incorporate positive changes together and on a broader scale.</td>
<td>A school wide process begins. Overview of IE is shared by an experienced leader surrounding: The Foundations Assumptions Elements Domains Levels of Functioning, Dimensions Inviting Stages, and The Helix</td>
<td>Participants share their understanding of key ideas surrounding Invitational Education and evaluate the process of systematic change.</td>
<td>Participation now is whole staff, including custodial staff, food service, administrators, support staff, psychologist, nurses, volunteers, and students. Each individual joins one of the 5 working groups that represents one of the 5 Domains). Each Strand focuses on their Domain selects individual to disseminate progress to whole school Goals are set in established intervals. Each Strand shares goal, obstacles, ways to overcome obstacles, and methods of evaluation with the entire school.</td>
<td>Strand teams have established its own identity. There is a possibility the Strand has developed a name and formed a network with other inviting schools to promote growth collaboratively. Strand chairs meet on a regular basis and share progress with the school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase III Pervasive Adoption</th>
<th>Step 9 Leadership Development</th>
<th>Step 10 Depth Analysis and Extension</th>
<th>Step 11 Confrontation of Major Concerns</th>
<th>Step 12 Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invitational Education has become a part of the school culture and is embedded in everything that is done. School personnel serve as invitational leaders and provide support to other schools who want to learn about invitational culture. The school also serves as a host for other schools who may be in Phase I, considering using IE</td>
<td>Other school goals are explored as an appreciation of Invitational Education develops. Members of the Strand teams can expand projects and explore larger projects to learn, lead, and live.</td>
<td>Critical analysis of Invitational Education through deep understanding is used to compare and contrast with other schools for continued improvement approaches.</td>
<td>Members of the school community take a practice stand and address key issues that affect the school and community. Key issues such as racism, sexism, elitism, favoritism, and privilege are addressed. Leaders speak up and act against injustices. All stakeholders have a voice in this step.</td>
<td>Invitational practices are permeated throughout the school with care, optimism, respect, and trust. The school serves as an international model. Leaders are asked to speak at other schools and conferences. The school is an example of pride for all stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>