Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Model to Level the Playing Field for Black Students in a High Poverty Middle School

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: A MODEL TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD
FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN A HIGH POVERTY MIDDLE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Academic failure and achievement gaps plague high-poverty school districts with majority-minority student populations. Culturally responsive pedagogy provides an opportunity for educators to bridge the gap caused by poverty and educational disparities. This applied research aimed to create a culture of teaching and learning that impacted student behavior and growth and proficiency in English Language Arts and math at a high poverty middle school. The eighth-grade teachers and students were exposed to this pilot program to increase teacher capacity in cultural responsiveness and increase student achievement. This applied research study utilized two action plan elements, which included professional development and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Four research questions guided this study. The first question inquired about teachers’ perceptions after receiving the professional development. The second question explored teachers’ usage of culturally responsive teaching strategies and program integration in their lesson plans. The third question examined student behaviors and discipline as a result of program implementation. The fourth question evaluated enCase benchmark growth and proficiency in English language arts and math. In a collaborative effort with stakeholders, the findings of this research study support the need for culturally responsive pedagogy to be utilized as a strategy to improve the success of students in high-poverty schools.

Keywords: poverty, achievement gap, culturally responsive pedagogy
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Gary McKinney, who has supported me throughout my academic and professional careers. Thank you for being my Superman for 34 years of my life. I hope I have made you proud thus far.

To the people who believe in me, my family, loved ones, and friends: Thank you for the consistent prayers and encouragement.

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To former, current, and future students: my purpose has positioned me to have the opportunity to encounter each of you. I hope an encounter with me challenges you to be all God has purposed you to be. I hope I have or will inspire each of you to dream and work hard to make your dreams come true. Remember this, you miss 100% of the shots you don’t take. Take the shot.
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*It always seems impossible until it’s done.*
- Nelson Mandela

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

High poverty schools contend with various obstacles that impact student achievement for Black students. Those varying obstacles create a far-reaching goal of student achievement as inequities and barriers heighten. Welner & Carter, 2013; Mooney, 2018 expressed a vast difference in achievement and opportunity gaps. An opportunity gap refers to unforeseeable circumstances in which people are born, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES) that cause certain determinants of life (Mooney, 2018). Simultaneously, an achievement gap can persist between race, class, gender, and SES. Therefore, an opportunity gap that surges across race and socioeconomic status expands as income and wealth inequality incline (Welner & Carter, 2013).

This suggests, that high poverty schools perpetuate a cycle of opportunity gaps as they experience significant barriers to academic achievement and student success. Extant research reveals that when minority student groups are the majority in high-poverty schools, barricades and obstacles to student achievement are exacerbated. Those barriers include a substantial achievement gap between Black and White students and low SES and higher SES, high drop-out rates, and consistent below-average performances on benchmark and state-wide assessments. Moreover, opportunity gaps grow and manifest when poor and minority students have 1) inexperienced teachers, 2) insufficient resources, and 3) low expectations, as evidenced by
unchallenging school curriculums and a lack of rigorous instruction (Basch, 2011; Berliner, 2010; Florence, Asbridge, & Veugelers, 2008).

A critical question that emerges in a high poverty school district encompasses how to effectively improve the educational experiences for all stakeholders to decrease the achievement and opportunity gaps among low and high socioeconomic student groups? Specifically, regarding race, the educational battle in question includes how to reduce the student achievement gap between White and minority student groups. The inability to confront racism causes the persistence of inequitable opportunities for minority students, resulting in strong achievement gaps (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). In education, racism presents a domino effect and impacts all stakeholders in the school community. It trickles down through, 1) hiring and selecting administrators, 2) recruiting and hiring teachers, 3) formulating student policies, and 4) making decisions about facilities and resources.

Barriers caused by poverty, social injustice in the educational system, and a lack of cultural responsiveness in the school setting have been listed in extant research as reasons why students living in poverty struggle with academic achievement.

Many educators fail to realize that minorities’ and Whites' educational inequities are no accident. Hundreds of years of oppressive and dehumanizing policies and legislation were deliberately contrived. They manipulated to maintain power and privilege within the hands of a few. At the same time, Jim Crow laws and other subversive forms of oppression decimated economic and educational opportunities for Blacks and other minorities (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, p. 2, 2015).

It is projected that the United States will become a majority-minority nation in 2043; the society is not prepared as educational institutions are filled with predominantly White teachers with a
Eurocentric curriculum (Sarraj et al., 2015). Therefore, teachers and school leaders must understand the significance of poverty, cultural awareness, opportunity gaps, and equity to successfully teach and reach students from impoverished areas. As the minority population increases, it is with a great sense of urgency that educators learn to facilitate the success of diverse students (Au, 2007; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

According to Hawley and Nieto (2010), race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning in two important ways: 1) how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and 2) they influence teachers’ assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning (p.66). As a result, it is imperative for teachers and school leaders to become culturally aware and responsive as well as develop strategies to implement culturally relevant practices in the classroom and schoolwide to combat the barriers to academic achievement caused by systemic racism and poverty. In culturally responsive school cultures, school leaders and teachers value and affirm their students’ identities and experiences (Hawley & Nieto, 2010).

Bryant-Shelby Middle School (BSMS) is a Title I school with 100 percent free and reduced lunch. BSMS is situated in an impoverished area in Clayton, Mississippi and faces various obstacles to student achievement. The demographics of the school consists of 98 percent Black and two percent White, Arabic, and Hispanic students in grades fourth through eighth. The next section will provide the background to the problem.

**Background to the Problem**

Clayton School District (pseudonym) is located in Northeast Mississippi and consisted of four schools within the district during my initial hire in 2015. The four schools were Avery High School, Shelby Middle School, Bryant Elementary, and Avery Elementary. I was assigned to Shelby Middle School. However, before I arrived in the school district, the Mississippi
Department of Education took over Clayton School District in 2012 due to misappropriation of funds, faulty hiring, and below-average test scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT2) and Subject Area Testing Program (SAPT2). When I began working in the district, Clayton School District and Shelby Middle School had an accountability rating of a “D,” and Bryant Elementary had a C rating. At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, the conservator combined Bryant Elementary and Shelby Middle School for unclear reasons. Five years after the Conservatorship, Clayton School District has an accountability rating of an “F,” and Bryant-Shelby Middle School has an accountability rating of a “D.” For this study, I will focus on assessment data for Bryant-Shelby Middle School.

In 1966, an interviewee for the Clayton Examiner stated, “At the time the schools began to integrate, there was a push from the White Citizens’ Council to start a private school in Clayton for their White children to not to have to be in school with Black children (Snow, 1966). White residents have historically bused their children to private schools outside of the Clayton school district and continue to do so today, directly impacting the school district's funding based on average daily attendance. This perpetuates a lack of resources for the school district by creating a majority-minority school district culminating in lower SES families. In 1997, the Mississippi Legislature created the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), a law that provides a formula designed to ensure an adequate education for every child in Mississippi. The MAEP formula produces a base student cost, the required amount to give each student an adequate education in a Mississippi school. “The state funds the difference between what a local community can provide (up to 27%) and the total base student cost. That amount is multiplied by the school district’s average daily attendance to get the district’s MAEP allocation” (Parents'
Campaign, 2020). Thus, daily school attendance is vitally important yet challenging for impoverished family cultures where survival is more valuable than education.

For the past seven years, Bryant-Shelby Middle School has experienced challenges with hiring qualified teachers with high teacher turnover and periods of fluctuating success and failure based on state assessments and accountability ratings established by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). According to Robinson (2007), most teachers who teach in poor districts are likely to hold less educational credentials, teach a subject without specializing in it, and graduate from less prestigious universities than teachers who teach in more advantaged areas. Thereby, intensifying the opportunity gaps and barriers to student achievement for students in high poverty schools.

In the Spring of 2017, BSMS earned a “D” accountability rating, with the previous school year being rated as an “F” in 2016. Currently, BSMS stands at a “D” rating from the 2019 MAAP state assessment, with the 2017-2018 school year’s rating calculated as a “C.” However, as a Title I eligible school with 100 percent free and reduced lunch, barriers of poverty and a lack of cultural responsiveness are presented as obstacles to attaining consistent academic success at BSMS.

In addition, for the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented barriers to student success, especially for students in poverty. At BSMS, due to COVID-19, virtual instruction and hybrid learning were the options given to ensure the safety of all stakeholders to reduce the spread of the virus. However, virtual instruction and hybrid learning have become a barrier and caused an increase in student apathy, stress, and failing grades. Many of the students have experienced a lack of internet access, attendance declined during virtual instruction, and exposure to quality grade-level content and instruction has been challenging.
Significance of the Problem

According to Miller et al., (2014) “living in poverty has adverse consequences on students’ opportunities to learn and succeed. The strength of the relationship between poverty and school success is even stronger than the reported link between disease and cigarettes” (p. 132). Students who live in high poverty are at high risk for academic, behavioral, and social failure (Belfiore et al., 2005). This suggests, the cultural responsiveness or lack thereof provided by teachers and school leaders heavily influences the academic success of low SES students. More emphatically, having high-quality teachers becomes imperative in the context of educating students in high-poverty schools.

The aforementioned statement leads to the fact, that BSMS has experienced challenges each year with hiring credentialed, highly qualified, and experienced teachers. Furthermore, Clayton school district has a negative reputation after being taken over by MDE and being a small town with a community culture of violence, crime, drugs, and poverty. In 2015, as I was seeking a counselor position in the district, I only heard negative comments about the community and school district. Consequently, Clayton school district suffers from history and culture of racism and poverty. Highly qualified teachers are not attracted to the town or schools causing the students to experience significant barriers to academic success.

Significance for the Audience

This research study brings attention to the barriers impacting student achievement at BSMS. The students, teachers, parents, and administration are negatively impacted by the cycles of poverty where the opportunity gaps are stealthily present while the achievement gaps are apparent. The focus of this research study was to innovatively improve the teaching and learning process through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the ELA and math for eighth-
grade students. This research consisted of efforts that involved observation, implementation, and documentation to continuously improve the teaching and learning experience of the participants and student population. The applied research study focused on identifying actionable elements that could be duplicated in other high-poverty schools to tackle the barriers to student achievement.

Bryant-Shelby Middle School benefited from implementing culturally responsive practices and pedagogy to ensure students in poverty learn and achieve academically. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a construct that demonstrates the degree to which teachers are aware of students’ cultures and committed to diversifying instructional methods (Gay, 2002; Siwatu, 2007). The students, teachers, and administration were positively impacted by the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices at BSMS. The teachers and students had the opportunity to be introduced to culturally responsive pedagogy that allowed for engaging instruction to reach the eighth-grade student population to impact student outcomes in a significantly positive way.

Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy created the possibility of teachers developing stronger relationships with their students, positively impacting student learning. As a result, the students became more engaged in the learning process and ultimately acquired student growth and proficiency in ELA and math as measured by the enCase benchmark assessment. The ultimate potential benefit of this research study was projected higher performance on the state-wide assessment by mastering grade-level standards through engaged classroom teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy potentially impacts the trajectory of students’ lives to become productive citizens.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied research was to create a culture of teaching and learning that supports the student population through culturally responsive pedagogy for eighth-grade students at BSMS. This applied research consisted of implementing culturally relevant practices and culturally responsive pedagogy to positively impact student outcomes. The research study began with a description of the problem at Bryant-Shelby Middle School and a justification for conducting the research in practice. An action plan was developed with a collaborative approach with BSMS administrators and faculty to be implemented and evaluated. Through a collaborative process with stakeholders, the central phenomenon was examined through a review of research on culturally responsive pedagogy combined with qualitative and quantitative data to develop an action plan to address the problem. In addition, qualitative and quantitative research questions were designed to support the program evaluation of the action plan.

The central phenomenon of this applied research study was the need for teachers to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy that positively impacts teaching, learning, and student outcomes (i.e., behavior, growth, and proficiency). Quantitative data, including pre- and post-surveys, the enCase benchmark assessment, and discipline data were used to evaluate the action plan results. In addition, qualitative data such as interviews, focus groups, and observations were used to gather feedback from participants to monitor progress and improve program implementation.

As a convenient sample, two eighth-grade teachers were selected by the administration at BSMS as the focus of this research study as participants. The eighth grade English Language Arts and math content areas were targeted considering they are two priority tested subjects in Mississippi. Therefore, these two participants were selected and agreed to participate in this
research study. The participants were involved in professional development to be trained and informed of the impact of poverty and education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and to develop the capacity to teach with cultural responsiveness. The goal of this applied research aimed to create a positive culture of teaching and learning through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that improve student outcomes and achievement as measured by the school-wide benchmark assessment (enCase) with a focus on reading and math proficiency and growth.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study into increasing teacher capacity, as well as student growth and proficiency, were designed to collect information about the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation at BSMS. The first research question addressed the efficacy of the entire program implementation. The purpose of the second research question examined the usage of the program by the participants. The third research question explored behavior and discipline data after culturally responsive pedagogy program implementation. The final research question provided information regarding English/Language Arts and math growth and proficiency as a result of program implementation. The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. What are teacher perceptions after receiving culturally responsive pedagogy professional development?

2. After receiving culturally responsive pedagogy training, was there a difference in the usage of culturally responsive strategies by teachers and inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy in the lesson plan design?

3. To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy improve student behavior and discipline in the classroom?
4. To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy improve ELA and Math benchmark growth and proficiency?

Summary

At Bryant-Shelby Middle School, student achievement and success are essential in preparing students for the next-level and beyond to become productive citizens. This applied research study aimed to minimize the achievement gap and barriers of poverty by providing the student population with a culturally responsive education. Throughout this chapter, I have presented reasons for the consistent low performance of high poverty schools, specifically among Black and Brown students. Chapter II provides a review of the literature associated with the research topic concerning culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Another intention of this research study was to contribute to the existing literature regarding the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in high-poverty schools and developing a model for teachers to utilize in their daily lesson plans. Chapter III provides an overview of the action plan's methodology, which includes the development, description, implementation, and evaluation of the program. Chapter IV presents a review of the findings from the study. Chapter V concludes the research and provides a discussion, limitations, and recommendations for future research regarding the improvement of culturally responsive education in high-poverty schools among Black students.
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In various school districts across the nation, poverty and academic failure are intertwined, causing challenges and discrepancies in school reform for marginalized student populations. Numerous policies have been executed to cultivate student opportunities in the face of challenging environments (Miller et. al, 2014). These school reform policies in our nation for the past 57 years include the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, and Title I funding. These policies are among the nation’s responses to ensuring equity in education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, federal legislation created in part to address inequities inherent in public education systems related to socio-demographic factors (Singh, 2013, p.4). According to Singh (2013), In 2001, the ESEA was reauthorized under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which provided unprecedented federal authority to hold states accountable for overseeing educational outcomes in their schools (p.4). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), provided educational opportunities for students who faced barriers to their educational achievement. NCLB focused on four key groups: students of color, students in poverty, students receiving special education services, and English Language Learners (Lee, 2014). Accountability was accomplished through annual testing, reporting, school improvement plans, and penalties for school districts (Lee, 2014). NCLB contended to be
controversial causing stress for teachers and school leaders. However, NCLB forced schools to focus on disadvantaged student populations through accountability (Lee, 2014).

Secondly, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA. It replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and was passed by Congress and signed into law in December 2015 (Chu, 2019, p 3). According to Chu (2019), ESSA boasts its greater attention to equity and excellence by focusing on the achievement and opportunity gaps among students within and between schools and districts, especially students who have been historically underserved in terms of educational achievement (p. 3) In addition, ESSA carries the core of NCLB through accountability measures, assessments, and alternative routes for teacher certification (Thomas, 2005). Chu (2019) asserted that such policy initiatives are built on the widely embraced yet unchecked belief that public education in the United States fails massively regarding adequately educating students, and insufficiently prepares them to compete in the world (p. 3).

Lastly, Title I funds are a response to high-poverty schools and inequities for this student population. According to Padilla et al., (2020), by federal definition, Title I schools have at least one demographic in common: greater than 40% of their students living in poverty (p.105). This suggests that Title I schools are faced with an immense number of academic challenges and obstacles. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides federal funds to state and local education agencies to increase funding for high-poverty students to help break the cycle of poverty (Rodas, 2019, p. 3). In addition, students who are eligible for Title I funds are supposed to get more funding which should translate into better teachers, smaller classes, more instructional time, or extra programs that would help to close the achievement gap (Rodas, 2019, p. 3).
This literature review focused on research-based information to identify barriers to poverty and strategies to improve the academic success of Black students. The literature referenced in this review provides context concerning poverty and education, the history of the achievement gap, educating students through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy, professional development, and the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on education.

**Barriers of Poverty in Education**

Poverty plays a monumental role in the educational achievement of all student populations. Perhaps, poverty plays a more significant role than most educators recognize or would like to acknowledge. The following literature will help establish the perspective and context of this research by providing insight into the connection between poverty and the barriers to educational achievement. The barriers caused by poverty directly impact students' academic success who come from low socioeconomic statuses. There are various types of poverty. According to Jensen (2009), there are six types of poverty, but this research will focus on two-situational and generational (Jensen, 2009, 2013), which will be the focus of the literature provided in the section. Each facet of poverty has different characteristics that require different educational strategies and interventions to assist students in becoming academically successful:

Situational poverty is often temporary and usually caused by a crisis of some kind. It creates stress, unhappiness, disadvantage, and it has a serious and deleterious impact on the ability of children to concentrate and perform in school as well as on the possibility of parents providing support and assistance for their child’s education. Shields, 2014, p.132

Generational poverty is considered to be permanent where parents of students are dependent upon government assistance. Students from generational poverty may suffer from
malnutrition, low vocabulary skills, less knowledge, and lack of exposure to the world (Shields, 2014). Generational poverty is exhibited in families where at least two generations have been born into poverty and unequipped with the means to shift their situations (Jensen, 2009).

According to Baker (2012), education is the expected hope to break the cycle of generational poverty. Children born to poor, undereducated parents are unlikely to succeed at school without equitable interventions that target their situations (Baker, 2012).

Poverty is geographically aggregated in neighborhoods, thereby, creating high-poverty schools (Padilla et al., p. 105). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) indicated that most schools in high-poverty areas in the United States suffer from underqualified teachers in schools with poor working conditions, high teacher turnover rates, and low pay. It is evident when children are poor or homeless, they attend school less frequently, experience fluctuating school success, change schools often, and experience higher dropout rates (Love, 2009). As a result of the barriers and circumstances caused by poverty, impoverished students are far more likely to enter school with language and reading barriers, due to a lack of exposure to things that promote heightened levels of comprehension in literacy, vocabulary, and reading (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010).

The statement above alludes to the beginning of the achievement gap between students of lower and higher socioeconomic status (SES). On average, low SES students attend lower-quality schools than higher SES students (Lee & Burkam, 2002). In comparison to their peers from high SES backgrounds, children from low-SES families are two to four times more likely to have classmates throughout grade school and beyond with weak academic skills and increased behavioral problems (Duncan & Murane, 2011). This leads to a continual increase of the achievement gap as children from poverty progress through school.
Michelmore & Dynarski (2017) examined gaps in student achievement and income differences. The findings in this study revealed that children who spend the majority or all of their school years eligible for free or reduced lunch have the lowest test scores, whereas those who are never eligible have the highest test scores. Michelmore & Dynarski (2017) sampled students in the eighth grade, and the outcome of interest was standardized test scores in math. Within the sample, 76% of the eighth-graders were enrolled in a Michigan public school for nine years since kindergarten. The study revealed that persistently disadvantaged students are an unambiguous minority group within the population of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Michelmore & Dynarski (2017) found that when comparing persistently disadvantaged to never disadvantaged students, the achievement gap widened considerably. Persistently disadvantaged students scored significantly below students who had never been disadvantaged.

Wade (2017) explored the poverty in Los Angeles, California, and its impact on people of color and education. Wade (2017) mentioned, that when a certain category of people with capital departed from the area, their higher incomes and resources which supported the school districts, local businesses, and infrastructure went along with them. Furthermore, a school district’s ability to educate children is directly related to economics and the local tax base as mentioned in Chapter I with MAEP. Consequently, it is essential to understand that high poverty school districts situated in impoverished areas will continue to face economic hardship, which subjects educational institutions and the people they serve to a subpar education. Wade (2017) stated, Education was once thought as the escape route from poverty, yet with the perpetual cycle of poverty unbroken, and education reaching unreasonable costs, that escape route is closed; equal opportunity and access are a fleeting dream if these obstacles are not removed (p. 143)
The Achievement Gap

An achievement gap prevails when one categorical group of students significantly surpasses another identifiable student group in their educational achievement (Hung, et al. 2019). Achievement among groups differs across various identifiers such as socio-economic status, race, and gender (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Student achievement gaps are also found along parental education achievement lines and socioeconomic status (Goldsmith, 2004; J. Lee, 2008; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003). The progress toward reducing the achievement gap has been slow-paced and the gorge between Black and White students continues to widen (Lee, 2002). There is strong evidence regarding income status playing a role in student achievement, specifically with evidence that the achievement gap is widening between low- and high-income socioeconomic statuses as well as across races (Reardon, 2013). There is robust evidence that exclaims racial differences in socioeconomic status are a primary contributor to achievement gaps (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Rothstein & Wozny, 2013). This suggests, that the disparities in educational achievement and the achievement gap between Black and White students have been an issue in education for a long time (Jones, 1984).

Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that the focus on the student achievement gap can be compared to the national budget deficit in the United States. Ladson-Billings (2006) explained the urgency to examine educational debt in the same manner that national debt was examined. In essence, Ladson-Billings was referring to the opportunity gap as mentioned in Chapter I. “The historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components that led to gaps among groups is educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Simply put, what has happened in our nation’s history (i.e., slavery, segregation, Jim Crow Laws, etc.) has expanded the educational debt in our
nation. This suggests, that to reduce the educational debt, disparities regarding the achievement gap between Black and White students must be eliminated (Jencks and Phillips, 1998).

Moreover, prior research has found a correlation between parental educational attainment and the achievement of their children (Reardon, 2013). According to Carnevale, et. al., (2013), higher educational attainment of the parent leads to 1) greater levels of education for the child and 2) the chance for the child to reach a higher SES. Existent research demonstrates that as early as kindergarten, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate lower literacy, vocabulary, and math skills that lead to academic failure (Dahl & Lochner, 2005; V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2002). In addition, research reveals that parents transfer a wealth of knowledge to their children, informal and formal (Cantwell & Milem, 2010; Johnson, McGue, & Iacono, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Moreover, this conveys the impact parental education attainment has on children and their academic achievement. According to Ornstein (2010), a large portion of the disparities in student achievement can be accredited to home environmental factors, such as the student’s home, peers, and community interactions. Thus, exarcerbating the effects of the opportunity gaps as children from impoverished areas are impacted negatively by significant out-of-school variables.

Mississippi has a history of being the last in education in the nation. The following literature references will give the historical context of the persistence of the achievement gap in Mississippi.

**Historical Context of the Achievement Gap in Mississippi**

Mississippi has been regarded in educational research as severely underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of the country as it pertains to educational achievement for all students (Boggan, Jayroe, & Alexander, 2016). Mississippi is considered one of the most impoverished
states in the country with more than 24 percent of the population living below the poverty line, as reported by the United States Census Bureau (2013). The following research will give context and documented history regarding the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites in the state of Mississippi. The educational opportunities given to Black students, and students who come from poverty are vastly different from those opportunities given to White students from a higher socioeconomic class.

The history of the achievement gap in Mississippi began with laws that sustained racial inequality such as the Black Codes. Black Codes were restrictive laws designed to limit the freedom of African Americans and ensure their availability as cheap labor after slavery was abolished during the Civil War. The Black codes were enacted in Mississippi in 1865 and led to the Jim Crow laws of 1888. The Jim Crow laws mandated segregated schools be maintained for the children of the White and Black people in Mississippi, and after 1890, integrated education was unconstitutional (Ferris State University, 2022; Jackson, 2018).

Indeed, great disparities existed in the segregated education provided for black and white children. In 1900, although African American children accounted for 60 percent of the state’s school-age population, they received only 19 percent of the state’s school funds. Adams County spent $22.23 to educate each white child, but only $2.00 for each black Child (Jackson, 2018)

Delta founded the first White Citizens' Council chapter in Indianola, Mississippi, to prevent school desegregation (Fuquay, 2002, p.159). The White Citizens’ Council was resistant to the segregation movement. Beginning in 1964, segregationists, led by the White Citizens' Councils, shifted their energies from blocking public school integration to creating an alternative, all-white private school system (Fuquay, 2000, p. 161).

Crosby (2012) examined the history of school desegregation in Claiborne County, Mississippi through verbal interviews recorded in the 1990s. Crosby (2012) explored the documented history of the persistence of White privilege to limit educational opportunities and perpetuate opportunity gaps for African Americans. Crosby (2012) noted, “most Black students had to walk long distances to overcrowded “shacks” that served as schools. Black children’s attendance was limited by transportation and the demand for their labor, which was reflected in a shortened school term- typically five months” (p. 263). Thus, White students were able to graduate from high school at a faster rate than Blacks, which exacerbated the poverty gap between Whites and Blacks in Claiborne County. The educational debt in our nation as mentioned earlier by Ladson-Billings (2006) is the educational debt that was sustained in southern states and counties such as Claiborne County in Mississippi. Educational debt has been sustained through segregation and opportunity gaps in education presented to poor Black students and families. Crosby (2012) mentioned,

The facilities, resources, transportation, and school terms for Blacks and Whites in Claiborne County were vastly unequal until September 1959, when White school officials opened Addison Junior and Senior High School for African Americans. In 1914, for example, the state of Mississippi spent $8.20 per White student and $1.33 per African American (per year); in 1940 the spending ratio was $51.71 to $7.24. (p. 262)
These circumstances sustained the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks attending school during this time by giving Black students an unequal opportunity to receive the same education as the White students. The Black students were not valued as much as White students, and it was reflected in state funding for education.

Moreover, Crosby (2012) alluded to “White Flight” in this study and discussed how Whites merely created a new form of segregation by sending their children to private schools instead of allowing them to participate in school integration.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 required school districts to have a desegregation plan or face the loss of federal funds. Most districts in the deep South used “freedom of choice” plans which, theoretically, gave all children, White and Black, the choice to attend any public school in their district. By the spring of 1966, more than half of Mississippi’s school districts implemented freedom of choice on paper, but Whites did not concede easily. Across the state, fewer than three percent of Blacks attended formerly all-White schools, and no White students went to Black schools. In fact, freedom of choice plans were probably more effective in spurring the private school movement than in desegregating public schools, as Whites sought to establish a state-wide system of segregationist academies and the Mississippi legislature initiated a tuition-grant program to subsidize private school attendance. Crosby, 2012, p. 264

White flight in school districts has contributed to the educational debt in Mississippi. In essence, a plan to provide “freedom of choice”, supported segregation and disparities in educating Black and White students. This suggests, private schools sprung up as a strategy to veraciously exacerbate the racial and socioeconomic gaps between Blacks and Whites.
Dixon (2020) investigated the extent to which Mississippi engaged in racial disparities in public education between Black and White students. Dixon (2020) posited that White Mississippians continued to resist school desegregation in many ways. First, many White students and White teachers exited public schools for private schools, and many Black students attended schools with an overconcentration of poverty (p. 3). As evidence, 43% of Black children in Mississippi live in poverty compared to 14% of White children in Mississippi living in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019a, 2019b; Mississippi Lifetracks, n.d.) This conveys, the history of the achievement gap in Mississippi is cemented in segregation of race and class, which produces inequities in education.

As a response to the educational opportunity gaps among Blacks and Whites in Mississippi, Freedom Schools were established in the summer of 1964. Jackson & Howard (2014) researched how Freedom Schools in Mississippi were designed to interrupt the social framework of education where Black children are positioned as inferior and incapable (p. 155). Efforts to devise an alternative to Mississippi’s poor education for Black students began in 1963 with Charlie Cobb, an aspiring writer, Howard University student, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) member (p. 157). “Cobb realized that for Black folks, schools in Mississippi served as institutions of oppression, inadequate, and black students in them received an education in every way inferior to that available elsewhere” (Jackson & Howard, 2014, p.157).

A report given by the U.S. Department of Civil Rights provided evidence that Black students are most likely to be in classrooms with teachers who are new to the profession, underqualified, or teaching out of subject courses, frequently resulting in high teacher turnover (Jackson & Howard, 2014, p.156). Hale (2014) asserted, “quality education did not necessarily
mean seating a Black student next to a White student. It meant making sure every school adopted a rigorous curriculum, hired excellent teachers, and provided an opportunity for economic mobility.”

As a result of the educational disparities, 41 Freedom Schools were established in Mississippi in the Summer of 1964. “They were intended to counter the “sharecropper education” received by so many African Americans poor Whites. Through reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and civics, participants received a progressive curriculum during a six-week summer program” (Menkart & View, 2021).

The six Freedom Schools in Hattiesburg alone had over 600 students. Meridian was the largest, single Freedom School with more than 200 regular students. Freedom Schools were organized in municipalities throughout the state, including Batesville, Canton, Columbus, Gulfport, and Jackson. Students ranged in age from five to eighty, but most were between ten and eighteen years old (Sturkey, 2016).

Furthermore, Jackson & Howard (2014) focused on teacher development and the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy as critical in obtaining equity and justice for Black students in public schools. Modern-day Freedom Schools are provided by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF). According to Jackson & Howard (2014),

CDF Freedom Schools are partnerships between the Children’s Defense Fund and community organizations, churches, and public and private schools to provide literacy-rich summer programs in communities where opportunities are limited or nonexistent. CDF Freedom Schools serve children in grades K-12 for six to eight weeks and integrate reading, conflict resolution, and social action in an activity-based curriculum that promotes social, cultural, and historical awareness. (p. 158)
Freedom Schools recognize the necessity of bringing culturally responsive pedagogy to the center of teacher preparation programs. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers are the most influential factor in successful schooling outcomes (Jackson & Howard, 2014, p. 159). The Freedom Schools’ national training institute is designed to provide student teachers with opportunities to cultivate culturally responsive teaching practices (Jackson, 2009a, 2009b).

This study leads the literature review into defining culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and providing evidence for why implementation is necessary and beneficial to predominantly minority and high-poverty schools.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive practices evolved from multicultural education, which emerged in the 1970s as an approach to affirm diversity in educational spaces (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). To construct a culturally responsible way of teaching, extant research utilized the terms as stated by Aronson & Laughter (2016), as culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt and Erickson, 1981), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive (Cazden & Leggett, 1981), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) p. 163. The topic of culturally responsive practices and pedagogy is growing and expanding, which means teaching practices should correspond with student cultures and backgrounds to inform the process of teaching and learning (Gay, 2002).

The essence of culturally responsive pedagogy resides in the work of scholars of color who reject oppressive systems that perceive students in urban communities as deficient and inherently underachieving (Evans et al., 2020, p. 52). One of the key researchers, Ladson-Billings (2009) defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart
knowledge, skills, and attitudes (p. 18). Different children have different needs and addressing those different needs is the best way to deal with them equitably (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 136). Culturally responsive pedagogy can only truly exist when all aspects of educational systems, policies and planning, lesson design, and instruction are rooted in students’ cultures (Gay, 2014).

Gay (2002), a key researcher in culturally responsive pedagogy, asserted culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (p. 106). This conveys, that culturally responsive pedagogy contends to understand the context of societal oppression and its impact to be translated into engaging students through culturally relevant teaching strategies (Gay, 2014). Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy should impact the process of teaching and learning in a positive way.

Gay (2002) endeavored to improve the success of diverse student populations through culturally responsive teaching and preparing teachers in education programs with the necessary knowledge and skills. Five elements of culturally responsive teaching were examined in this study: 1) building a culturally diverse knowledge base, 2) designing a culturally relevant curriculum, 3) demonstrating cultural sensitivity and awareness, 4) building a professional learning community with effective communication, and 5) responding with cultural responsiveness through daily instruction (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) asserted that culturally responsive teaching contends with the following concept, when academic knowledge and skills collide with experiences and frames of reference for students, learning and engagement will occur in the classroom. In essence, the academic achievement of diverse student populations will improve when they are taught through their own cultural lenses (Gay 2000).
Gloria Ladson-Billings, a key researcher of culturally responsive pedagogy, introduced the term culturally relevant pedagogy to convey a form of teaching that engages the learners from the experiences and cultures that differ from the mainstream culture (Muniz, 2019).

Ladson-Billings proposed three goals on which these teachers’ practices were grounded. First, teaching must yield academic success. Second, teaching must help students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities while simultaneously helping them achieve academically. Third, teaching must support students’ ability to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities. Muniz, 2019, p. 9

Therefore, culturally relevant practices are essential for teachers and leaders to implement when educating students in high-poverty schools. When teachers are culturally competent and responsive, instruction can be conveyed from the student’s lens and frame of reference. Teachers are often unaware of their own beliefs and assumptions about their students’ backgrounds. This leads to teachers lacking sensitivity and awareness of their biases regarding their interactions with students who are different from them (Ayres, 2001).

**Race, Equity, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Frameworks of equity are a response to the gorge between educators and students and between a predominantly White and privileged society and marginalized learners (Evans et. al, 2020). Equity versus equality is a phrase often used in school districts to challenge teachers to provide every student with what they need to be successful. Instead of providing the same learning opportunities to all students, it is argued that schools should provide increased learning opportunities to students who do not come from privileged backgrounds (Charalambous, Kyriakides, and Creemers, 2018) Schools comprised of students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds should treat issues of equity as a priority and aim to be involved in specific
interventions to address both issues of equality and equity (Charalambous, Kyriakides, and Creemers, 2018)

The theory of culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that the mismatch between school and home experienced by many Black and brown and low-SES students is a factor in their academic achievement (Jackson & Howard, 2012). Moreover, minority and low-SES students disengage in the classroom at a higher rate and report negative perceptions of middle school, their teachers, and the entire educational process (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mitchell, 1992; Rudduck, 2007; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Although low student engagement is an issue for adolescents across various demographics, it is particularly concerning for students in high-poverty schools (Landau, Barrera, & Keefer, 2017). According to Gay (2002), “culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning” (p 107). Furthermore, teachers should know detailed information about the cultural particulars of their students, to ensure the environment is meaningful and representative of the students they teach (Gay, 2002).

Schmeichel (2012) examined culturally relevant pedagogy as an equitable practice for good teaching. The dissemination of good teaching practices is seen as key to efforts to close the achievement gap and to improve the educational experiences of children of color (p. 211). In this study, “the emergence of culturally relevant teaching and the discourse of difference between mainstream culture and the culture of children of color regarding academic achievement was traced. The culture was described as the key to understanding what was inhibiting the academic success of children of color” (p. 14). According to Schmeichel (2012),

The belief that children of different racial groups were inherently different from each other rested on the assumption that white, middle-class behavior and attitudes were
typical or normal. The interactions between teachers who expected “the norm” and students who were not “the norm” were described as problematic, and contributing to the academic failure of the students of color (p. 214)

Culturally responsive teaching suggests that minority students possess a wealth of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992) when effectively activated can add depth to the content and curricula being presented in the classroom (Farinde-Wu, et al., 2017, p. 282). Moreover, Schmeichel (2012) asserted that students who come from cultural backgrounds that differ from the predominant culture need a tailor-made curriculum to fit their needs. “Teachers who demonstrate care and a consistent demand for excellence have a significant positive impact on African American student achievement” (Acosta, 2015, p. 3). These teachers are committed to developing nurturing relationships and classroom environments where learning is cooperative and engaging (Schafer & Barker, 2018, p. 28). Furthermore, culturally relevant and responsive teachers must choose to understand the social, political, and historical contexts which frame the experiences of minority children (Jackson & Howard, 2014).

**Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Culturally responsive practices are addressed in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015). These standards were developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) to outline the foundational principles of educational leadership that are necessary to effectively influence student achievement. Standard three within this document specifically addresses equity and cultural responsiveness stating, “Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). Standard three of the NPBEA standards (2015) specifically addresses the role of
educational leaders to strive for equitable educational opportunities and culturally responsive practices for all students (Minkos et al., 2017). In addition, there are eight elements under Standard three that describe the actions or practices educational leaders should engage in to promote student equity.

“Effective leaders recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). Therefore, an effective leader acknowledges the need to be a culturally responsive leader and provides opportunities for equitable education for all students. Once a school leader has acknowledged the necessity to be culturally responsive, it is important to follow up with tearing down frameworks that perpetuate inequities and establish frameworks that promote inclusion and equity (Shields, 2014). According to Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016), culturally responsive school leaders are responsible for promoting an inclusive school culture. Khalifa et al, (2016) argued that culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) addresses the issues affiliated with promoting the achievement of marginalized student groups.

Educational reform conveys effective school leadership as a critical component of school improvement and reform processes (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Brown (2005) observed, “schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community” (p. 585). Klar & Brewer (2014) endeavored to identify leadership practices and beliefs that were adapted to increase student achievement in a rural, high-poverty middle school. In this study, four core leadership practices were identified and used for understanding successful leadership. The four core leadership practices were establishing guidance and direction, building the capacity of people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program.
Moreover, culturally responsive schools begin with leaders who are conscious about reaching and teaching the students they encounter. When school leaders develop culturally responsive practices grounded in equity, they are prepared to build the capacity of the students and teachers they lead. For teachers to be culturally responsive, supportive school leaders must emerge with a framework of equity in mind.

**Literature on The Culturally Responsive Teacher**

Teachers who believe in the principles of culturally relevant teaching create equitable and inclusive learning opportunities that support the learning process of all students (Milner, 2011; Karatas, 2020b). As mentioned by Karatas (2020b), when a teacher implements culturally responsive or relevant teaching practices and attempts to create a corresponding classroom culture, the academic success of all students increases (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Karatas, 2020c; Vavrus, 2008). Therefore, a culturally responsive curriculum has the potential to address school and classroom climate to be consistent in setting high expectations of academic success, developing cultural competence with a greater understanding of students’ and teachers’ identities, and developing teacher-student relationships.

One of the challenges teachers struggle with is developing relationships with students through gaining knowledge of their backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (2009) explained that teachers should study their students when deciding what and how to teach. What teachers learn about students should be combined both in the curriculum and through daily instructional practices (Ladson- Billings, 2009). Therefore, teachers should prepare lessons and instruction with culturally responsive strategies and practices that improve student outcomes and produce a culturally responsive learning environment. Culturally responsive teachers determine the
strengths and weaknesses of curriculums and instructional materials and make the necessary adjustments to improve the quality of instruction (Gay, 2002).

Adkins (2012) presented a case study of two English teachers of successful Black students who demonstrated characteristics of culturally responsive English instruction. According to Adkins (2012),

Culturally responsive English instruction can be defined as pedagogy that seeks to facilitate literacy development and empower students by (a) integrating curriculum and instruction that is meaningful to students and explores societal inequalities, biases, and assumptions in texts, (b) recognizing the integral role of student voice and experiences in constructing meaning, developing literacy skills, and working for social change, (c) developing a classroom community with high expectations, support, and collaboration among members inside and outside of the classroom, and (d) utilizing a variety of tools to provide feedback through formative and summative assessment to guide appropriate instructional decisions. (p. 75)

Thus, culturally responsive English instruction creates an environment where students are empowered to succeed through literacy skill development and the use of background knowledge (Adkins, 2012). Adkins (2012) asserted effective Black teachers of Black students build strong caring relationships that not only motivate students to engage in behaviors that support the learning environment, but also lead students to develop academically (p. 75).

Rychly & Graves (2012) examined teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy and the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy integration in the classroom. Rychly & Graves (2012) asserted the theory behind culturally responsive pedagogy is as follows:

Students learn best when they are engaged in their environments and with the information
to be learned. This engagement happens when students feel validated as members of the
learning community and when the information presented is accessible to them. Students
feel validated and capable of learning presented information when their learning
environments and the methods used to present information are culturally responsive to
them (Gay, 2002; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Nieto, 2004). p. 45
In this study, Rychly & Graves (2012) view four teacher practices as essential to effectively
implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. Those four teaching characteristics include
teachers who are: empathetic and caring, reflective about their beliefs about people from other
cultures, reflective about their own cultural frames of reference, and knowledgeable about other
cultures (p. 45).
Milner (2014) examined ways in which an African American teacher in a Title I school
implemented culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom that experienced success. The
research study was situated at a Title I middle school with 354 students. Milner (2014) described
Ms. Shaw as utilizing purposeful teaching that was consistent with instructional practices
described as culturally relevant teaching and sociopolitical consciousness in literature. Educators
who create learning environments that can be classified as culturally relevant are those who see
students’ culture as an asset, and not a detriment to their success (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus,
according to Milner (2014), Ms. Shaw implemented practices related to (1) building
relationships, (2) viewing teaching and learning as a mission, (3) including and remembering
race, (4) moving beyond materialism, (5) serving in multiple roles as a teacher, and (6)
promoting self and school pride.
In the same manner, it is considered important that teachers, who play a vital role in the
teaching and learning process, have culturally responsive teaching competencies (Karatas,
Karaş (2020b) explored teacher competencies that are necessary in providing culturally responsive pedagogy. Karaş (2020b) found themes in the research such as the teachers emphasized that personal characteristics of culturally responsive teachers should be developed, and they should also have strong professional capabilities as well as having pedagogical skills to design the teaching process by knowing the cultural needs of their students (p. 11). The personal characteristics consisted of the following: avoiding discrimination, showing respect, being a role model, being empathetic, and having good communication skills. The professional characteristics included having pedagogical background knowledge, the capacity to associate the content with the students, and the ability to be diverse in instructional techniques (Karaş, 2020b, p. 11).

Karaş (2020) asserted that being responsive to students’ cultural values, respecting them, and being aware of the impact of culture on learning are priorities for a safe educational environment (p.14). Indeed, in the extant literature, it is exclaimed in correspondence with culturally relevant teaching, teachers should ascertain both personal and professional competencies from a cultural perspective (Gay, 2002; Karaş, 2020b; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020; Slapac et al., 2020; Vavrus, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to Karaş (2020), culturally responsive teachers have effective communication skills, express empathy and understanding, exhibit respect for cultural differences, diversify instructional techniques, avoid biased thoughts and assumptions, and model cultural responsiveness (p. 10).

Simultaneously, culturally responsive teachers should also have classroom management that is adequate and reflective of the diverse cultures represented in the classroom. Schafer & Barker (2018) studied a multi-case study of effective teachers working in urban high-poverty schools who used culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) as a tool. Hickey and
Schafer (2006) argued the primary focus of classroom management should be the overall success of students and teachers should manage the classroom environment with a proactive approach. Weinstein et al., (2004) stated that teachers who implement culturally responsive classroom management must (a) recognize their own ethnocentrism, (b) have knowledge of their students’ cultures, (c) understand the broader systems influencing education, (d) use appropriate management strategies, and (e) develop a caring classroom (p. 25). This perspective is the foundation for considering the work of effective teachers working in diverse school settings.

In this study, Schafer & Barker (2018) identified classroom management methods that were most salient and across all four of the cases, which included: (a) classroom meetings, (b) choice words, (c) ground rules and routines, and (d) logical consequences (p. 31). Gaias et al. (2019) stated in their study that when teachers do not manage their classrooms in a culturally relevant way, students are more likely to exhibit high levels of negative behavior (Karatas, 2020b, p. 4). This thought leads to the next section of the literature review.

**Misappropriations of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

According to Ladson-Billings (2014), “What state departments, school districts, and individual teachers are now calling ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ is a distortion and corruption of the original ideas” (p. 82). Culturally responsive pedagogy is often minimized to celebrations and symbolism of student cultural practices (Hollie, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). This purports, that the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy has been diminished to suffice for inadequate educational policies without authentically transforming the process of teaching and learning (Evans et al., 2020). If culturally responsive pedagogy is not corroborated, then culture cannot be valued, racism is ignored, and inequities will continue in educational institutions (Freire, 2000; Kozol, 1992; Love, 2019). A culturally responsive education is a pedagogy, and it is harmful
when it functions as “a paradigm that is rooted in a desire for acceptance for those outside of the culture” (Emdin & Adjapong, 2018, p. 3). This conveys, that the disingenuous intent of utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy causes more harm than good for students and teachers.

For various reasons, many teachers struggle with implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom (Averill et al. 2015; Coffey and Farinde-Wu 2016; Gay 2013). Lack of knowledge of students’ backgrounds contends as a barrier to culturally responsive pedagogy for teachers (Banks and Banks 2009). Knowledge of students’ backgrounds is resolved in teachers’ efforts to develop rapport and strengthen relationships with students. Therefore, implementing culturally responsive practices requires effort, innovation, and consistency on behalf of the teacher.

Moreover, there is an assumption that because there is a Black or minority teacher in the classroom that he/she can implement culturally responsive pedagogy appropriately and adequately. Cochran-Smith (1991) argued that minority teachers were not automatically prepared to teach Black students. Geneva Gay (2000) argued that similar ethnicity between students and teachers may be beneficial as representation matters, but it does not guarantee effective teaching. Moreover, Cherry-McDaniel (2019) mentioned in her research, “I have become increasingly concerned with the lack of attention paid to ensuring that all teachers of color are properly prepared and adequately trained to meet the needs of students of color, specifically as it relates to being culturally responsive and culturally sustaining” (p. 242).

Preparing all teachers to teach in a culturally responsive way will decrease misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy.

This suggests teacher capacity needs to be developed in culturally responsive pedagogy to prepare not only Black teachers, but all teachers who enter the classroom seeking to make a
difference. Cherry-McDaniel (2019) stated, we need to take a more critical and conscientious approach to prepare teachers of color, and indeed all teachers, to become culturally responsive and sustaining, and willing to make long-term commitments to influencing change in classrooms (p. 241). According to one of the original theorists, Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three propositions: academic achievement/student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness. Therefore, any emphasis placed on culturally responsive pedagogy that does not reflect all three of the above-mentioned components cannot be corroborated (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Culturally responsive pedagogy that does not address student learning with rigorous instruction, cultural meaning, and socio-political and historical awareness leads to misappropriations.

**Research on Professional Development**

Adequate and well-delivered professional development (PD) and training are tools utilized to reduce the misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. According to Darling-Hammond, et al., (2009), when professional development aligns with school improvement efforts, there is potential for a greater impact on classroom instruction, as evidenced by well-connected professional development training. The goal of professional development in this research study is to increase and develop teacher capacity as it relates to culturally responsive pedagogy and poverty among minority student populations. Professional development informs, prepares, and builds the foundation for strengthening teacher capacity regarding culturally responsive pedagogy. As Timmons-Brown & Warner (2016) described in their research, culturally relevant pedagogy has the potential to influence and empower students’ learning to generate high levels of academic success among diverse student populations.
Timmons-Brown & Warner (2016) explored the impact of using a conference workshop to engage math teachers in culturally relevant pedagogy. The goal of the research study was to exhibit how the two-day workshop yielded improvement in teachers’ perceptions of their effectiveness, classroom practices, and teacher-student relationships. The results of the evaluations demonstrated that the participants increased their knowledge of key terms and concepts pertaining to culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition, the participants mentioned a significant increase in their intentions of using the following practices: reflecting on their own cultural biases, planning lessons toward a variety of abilities, allowing students to share work from their own cultures, making sure students understood content before moving on, and implementing strategies to ensure teachers’ attention is distributed equitably (Timmons-Brown & Warner, 2016, p.30).

As professional development occurs, teacher capacity and adequate learning can be established in the subject matter of culturally responsive pedagogy. Professional development of culturally responsive pedagogy provides teachers with insight into relevant and meaningful strategies that can impact student learning and achievement. In addition, professional development challenges teachers to recognize their level of cultural competence and responsiveness to minority students who come from poverty. According to Mezirow (1997), when adults can explore their own beliefs and assumptions, growth and development can occur. The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy in education should be at the heart of all teacher education programs and professional development (Karatas, 2020). Therefore, the misappropriations will decrease as educators grow in culturally responsive pedagogy and view it as necessary to the curriculum being taught to minority student populations in high-poverty schools.
COVID-19 Impact on Education

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated many people, caused many deaths, and transformed the world of education. According to Troutt (2021), “the Covid-19 pandemic hit every facet of life to varying degrees. This caused a paradigm shift for some within the learning community, changing from traditional face-to-face classes to classes delivered purely online to limit the spread of the virus among students and school employees” (p. 285). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted cultural and societal norms causing devastation around the world. For students, parents, teachers, and school leaders, adjustments and modifications were made for teaching and learning to continue. Bishop (2021) stated, “As of March 31, 2020, the closure of schools in 192 countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in over 1.6 billion learners being temporarily forced out of school buildings. New educational inequities arose, and existing ones were exacerbated” (p.1). As a result of the lockdowns, disruption of daily routines, social distancing, lack of social interactions, and non-traditional learning methods, there is increased stress, anxiety, and mental health concerns among students (UNESCO, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in the United States approached virtual learning with strong regard to state and school district restrictions, exacerbating inequitable educational opportunities (Garet et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2020; Bishop, 2021). Students in high-poverty school districts were adversely affected in comparison to more affluent school districts. High poverty schools faced challenges with the distribution of instructional materials, the availability of face-to-face instruction, and exposure to grade-level academic content, which has potentially expanded the achievement gap (Garet et al., 2020; Bishop, 2021). Students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds often live in conditions that make distance learning at home very challenging (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). For most students in poverty, school is an
escape and a safe place. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic caused many stressors to arise among adolescents during this time, and the effects are lingering through displays of negative student behaviors, absenteeism, and low academic performance.

Furthermore, teachers faced various challenges, including delivering online instruction, navigating new learning management systems, and attempting to troubleshoot students’ internet access (Gross & Opalka, 2020; Bishop, 2021). Bishop (2021) studied middle school teachers whose teaching practices improved during the COVID-19 pandemic through distance or online learning. The findings of this study included teacher practices such as deepened knowledge of individual learners, increased individualized instruction, greater opportunities for student choice and self-pace, more timely assessment feedback, enhanced family engagement, and increased technology skills (Bishop, 2021, p.1).

In addition, Bishop (2021) also recognized the science of teaching in disasters and found two important pedagogies during the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based service learning and reflection. According to Bishop (2021), community-based service learning, involved teachers and students responding to community needs after a disaster occurs. Reflection involved educators constructing narrative opportunities for students who personally experienced disaster-related trauma (Bishop, 2021). In essence, much of the findings are closely related to culturally responsive teaching strategies, which reveals a potential response to teaching students as the nation continues to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Summary**

School leaders and teachers who have implemented culturally responsive pedagogy and practices have the potential to transform their schools to include an equitable experience for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCELD) students (Griner & Stewart,
Many schools fail to acknowledge the diverse cultural and societal experiences of their students (Au, 2008; Cairney, 2002; Schulz and Kantor, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2006). Consequently, teachers form inaccurate perceptions of their students’ abilities and forfeit the opportunity to accelerate their academic success by invalidating their students’ racial identities and cultural experiences (Compton-Lilly, 2015). Many teachers exclaim, “I don’t see color and I treat all students the same”, but seeing differences is what will cause disparities and inequities to be reduced. In addition, creating a bridge between home and school experiences is vital for the academic success of minority students from low SES backgrounds. This suggests teachers must give way to learning about the cultural backgrounds of their students to close gaps and build bridges between home and school (Hilaski, 2020).

In Chapter III, a detailed description will be provided to discuss the action plan development, elements of research, and research methods. The elements of the action plan will be used to increase student outcomes such as learning, engagement, behavior, growth, and proficiency. The action plan will utilize an applied research method to gather data concerning each of the elements' impact on student outcomes, teacher perceptions, and student growth and proficiency as a result of program implementation.
CHAPTER III:

METHODS

Chapter III presents an applied research design and methods to address the problem to improve student outcomes of the eighth-grade student population at Bryant-Shelby Middle School. The applied research is designed to address both a problem of practice and to improve the effectiveness of program implementation and evaluation. At the time of this research, the eighth-grade enrollment included 95 students. The student breakdown by ethnicity was Black (98%), (2%) Hispanic, and Arabic. The conceptual framework comprised culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to increase the academic success of Black students in poverty. The benefits of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices at BSMS have the potential to increase student outcomes such as student learning and engagement, behavior, and student growth and proficiency as measured by school-wide benchmark assessments.

The research study led to the development of an action plan to identify elements with the potential to increase student growth and proficiency of the eighth-grade students in English Language Arts and math through the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, teacher competencies and characteristics extracted from Muniz (2019) and Karatas (2020) have been combined and identified to increase student growth and proficiency by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. The combined teacher competencies and characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher were utilized in the action plan element of professional development:

1. Reflect on one’s cultural lens and avoiding discriminating against student differences.
2. Collaborate with families, draw on students’ culture to shape curriculum and instruction, bring real-world issues into the classroom, and associate content with student cultural backgrounds.

3. Show respect for student differences, be empathetic, be a role model, and model high expectations for all students.


This chapter presents the action plan development, elements of research, and research methods. The elements of this applied research design are professional development, implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and development of culturally responsive pedagogy model. The action plan was implemented to create a culture of teaching and learning that builds relationships, engages students in the learning process, and improves student outcomes at Bryant-Shelby Middle School. Thereby, impacting the way in which students process teaching and engage in learning to increase academic achievement.

The first section of Chapter III provides the context of the events, which led to the collaborative efforts with stakeholders to development of the action plan. Implementation of the program encompasses the collaborative effort of between myself, the participants, and the administration at BSMS to address the lack of growth and proficiency of eighth-grade students. This section provides a chronological account of the events which led to the development of the action plan, an overview of the stakeholders involved in the process, school data, and existing research related to the action plan.

The second section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the action plan. This section identified and outlined the program elements, which included culturally responsive
pedagogy professional development: poverty and education, culturally responsive teaching strategies, an overview of the culturally responsive walkthrough tool, modeling through YouTube teacher videos, and the implementation of culturally responsive strategies in daily instruction. Each of the elements contained specific and measurable goals to evaluate the element's effectiveness as an independent component and as a part of the program. Each elements’ goals functioned as benchmarks to gauge the effectiveness of the action plan throughout each phase, from program development to program evaluation. Additionally, implementation timelines were presented for each element in this section.

The third section of Chapter III illustrates the program evaluation methods that measured the effectiveness of the action elements of the culturally responsive pedagogy program. Quantitative and qualitative processes and goals were aligned to each action plan element to evaluate them in relation to the research questions. The program evaluation involved a continuous cycle of progress monitoring to measure the program's effectiveness in reference to the established goals. This process was intended to improve the action plan's elements by identifying the necessary adjustments to produce a more significant impact on student outcomes, engagement, and achievement.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are teacher perceptions after receiving culturally responsive pedagogy professional development?

2. After receiving culturally responsive pedagogy training, was there a difference in the usage of culturally responsive strategies by teachers and inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy in the lesson plan design?

3. To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy improve student
behavior and discipline in the classroom?

4. To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy improve ELA and Math benchmark growth and proficiency?

Demographics of the Research Site and Participants

Bryant-Shelby Middle School (BSMS) is comprised of grades fourth through eighth with a total of 407 students. BSMS is a Title I school, which means the school receives additional federal funding to assist students with adequate educational resources. In addition, the free and reduced lunch rate is 100 percent for Clayton School District. The student population at BSMS is comprised of 98 percent African American students with the remaining two percent identifying as Caucasian, Hispanic, and Arabic students. The eighth graders consist of 95 students, with racial breakdown of 99 percent African American and one percent Arabic. The faculty and staff are comprised of 56 people certified and classified with the current demographics identifying as 80% African American and 20% White.

Bryant-Shelby Middle School is located in Clayton, MS in an impoverished community surrounded by subsidized housing. The median income for a household in the city was $23,530, and the median income for a family was $27,611 (United States Census, 2010). According to the 2010 Census, there were 5,612 people living in the city of Clayton. 69.2% of the population identified as African American and 28.8% identified as Caucasian. However, only 2% percent of Caucasian students are accounted for at Bryant-Shelby Middle School. The city of Clayton is rich in cultural history and racial disparities. It is known for historical attractions such as antebellum plantation homes, the Pilgrimage event, and the Tombigbee River.

This applied research study included a convenient sample of participants for the purpose of program implementation, which included the eighth grade English/Language Arts (ELA) &
Math teachers at Bryant-Shelby Middle School (BSMS). The participants provided me and the administration with a verbal interest in cultural awareness and the impact it could have on student outcomes among the student population at BSMS. The ELA teacher, Ms. Stovall (pseudonym) is an African American female and a second-year teacher at BSMS. The math teacher, Mrs. Brandon (pseudonym) is a Caucasian female and third-year teacher at BSMS. At the time of this research study, both subject-area teachers were examined by the administration as the subject areas are integral to the success and accountability of BSMS.

**Description of Action Plan**

The first element in the action plan is professional development and utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the classroom. Professional development included teacher training for the ELA and math teachers, observations, focus group interview sessions, and data analysis. The goal of professional development included teachers becoming effective and consistent in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that impact student outcomes, student growth and proficiency, and teacher-student relationships in a positive way. The second element included the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the ELA and math classes. The implementation included both participants utilizing effective culturally responsive strategies during a five-week implementation period. The goal of implementing culturally responsive practices and teaching at BSMS contends to increase cultural awareness and responsiveness, student engagement, and student achievement as assessed by enCase benchmark assessments, and the Culturally Responsive Walkthrough Tool.

The participants were involved in the professional development and implementation of the culturally responsive pedagogy program. The professional development of culturally responsive pedagogy provided the participants with insight into strategies and competencies that
impacted student learning, growth, and behavior among the eighth-grade student populations. In addition, the professional development challenged the participants to recognize their level and lack of cultural competence and responsiveness.

The eighth-grade students at BSMS were involved in the implementation of the program as recipients of culturally responsive teaching, strategies, and practices in the classroom. The eighth-grade ELA and math teachers were responsible as participants of this research study for implementing the culturally responsive pedagogy model. I conducted the professional development and training, observations, focus group sessions, and evaluated the program. The participants and I developed a culturally responsive pedagogy model suitable for the student population at BSMS.

Summary of Overview of the Action Plan

a. Provide professional development and training to teachers to utilize culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

b. Implement effective culturally responsive teaching and practices that increase teachers’ cultural competence and student engagement toward student success

c. Focus on Math and English due to relevance with state-wide testing

Development of Action Plan

The development of the action plan ensued after several administrative meetings with the school Principal, Mrs. Hughes (pseudonym), the eighth-grade English Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Stovall, and the eighth-grade math teacher, Mrs. Brandon. During these meetings, Mrs. Hughes discussed school-wide goals and reviewed school assessment data from the previous school year. The BSMS administrative team reviewed discipline and benchmark assessment data (i.e., enCase), and the statewide assessment, MAAP. Thus, after the review of data and
classroom observations, it was established there may be a correlation between teacher cultural competence, student engagement, and student achievement at BSMS. In past administrative observations and walk-throughs, a lack of cultural competence and responsiveness was observed, which presented a problem of practice at BSMS. In a grade level meeting, Mrs. Hughes, Mrs. Brandon, Ms. Stovall, and I reviewed eighth-grade reading and math data from three years ago to the present as a focus and inquired about cultural relevance in the classroom to increase student engagement.

As a result, the action plan was developed and consisted of 1) providing professional development for Mrs. Brandon and Ms. Stovall on poverty and practice, culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the classroom, and the history of the achievement gap in Mississippi, 2) implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and 3) program evaluation. In September 2021, the entire BSMS faculty were provided a survey to assess cultural competence and responsiveness. Teacher feedback was gathered to develop insight into the overall perception of cultural responsiveness and the relevance it has in the classroom setting. The culturally responsive pedagogy training began in January 2022 with the participants involved in this research study. The culturally responsive pedagogy program implementation was conducted by the participants from February 2022 to March 2022.

The process of data collection and communication with the various stakeholders was an ongoing process throughout the research study. The program was evaluated from February 2022 through March 2022. During the time of program evaluation, adjustments were made in the daily implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy according to observations, teacher interviews, and teacher feedback. I provided “glows and grows” for each focus group session after each
observation. The glow and grow method involved providing the participants with feedback after each observation based on the culturally responsive walkthrough tool.

**The Action Plan**

Table 1 provides the elements and details of the action plan. These elements were implemented to increase student achievement at BSMS.

**Table 1**

*Action Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>To develop and increase teacher capacity in CRP and teaching students in poverty.</td>
<td>January 2022</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and practices</td>
<td>To increase student learning, engagement and academic achievement.</td>
<td>February 2022 - March 2022</td>
<td>8th Grade ELA/Math Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Development**

The professional development components encompassed culturally responsive pedagogy, competencies, characteristics, and practices in the form of literature and multimedia presentations. Professional development occurred in two sessions and twice a week in the month of January. The objective of the professional development element was to introduce culturally responsive pedagogy to the participants in this study and the potential impact it could have on student outcomes at BSMS. The goal of professional development was to develop and increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and equip the participants with the tools for implementation in the classroom. Professional development training was provided to the participants, Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon.
The first session of the professional development provided the background knowledge of the purpose of the research, an overview of culturally responsive pedagogy and the importance of implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the English language arts and math classes. In addition, the first session provided the participants with the four competencies, characteristics, and culturally responsive pedagogy practices in the form of readings, articles, and videos to expound upon the information with clarity. The final professional development session encompassed a lesson plan design that integrated culturally responsive pedagogy into weekly lesson plans.

In the first session, the participants were given a cultural competence and poverty and education survey as a pre-test to assess their knowledge of cultural awareness/responsiveness and poverty. In addition, the participants were provided with research regarding poverty, the educational achievement gap between Black and White students, and the history of the achievement gap in Aberdeen and Mississippi. Next, I facilitated a group discussion by asking the participants their thoughts regarding culturally responsive pedagogy having an impact on students who come from poverty. I provided an overview of culturally responsive pedagogy through a PowerPoint presentation, and conveyed the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, along with the impact it could have on the eighth-graders at Bryant-Shelby Middle School (BSMS). In the PowerPoint presentation, I covered topics that reflected the culturally responsive walkthrough tool to be used in the evaluation. The topics covered included, a) How to create an inclusive environment, b) How to build trust and respect with students, and c) How to ensure being culturally responsive with my instruction strategies.
In addition, the first session included the following competencies, which have been combined and identified to increase student achievement by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy as mentioned in Chapter II:

1. Reflect on one’s cultural lens and avoid discriminating against student differences.
2. Collaborate with families, draw on students’ culture to shape curriculum and instruction, bring real-world issues into the classroom, and associate content with student cultural backgrounds.
3. Show respect for student differences, be empathetic, be a role model, and model high expectations for all students.

I introduced the competencies and characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher as described in Chapter II. Next, the following practices were explored within the professional development session, as mentioned in Chapter II: (1) building relationships, (2) viewing teaching and learning as a mission, (3) including and remembering race, (4) moving beyond materialism, (5) serving in multiple roles as a teacher, and (6) promoting self and school pride (Milner, 2014). I facilitated the discussion with Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon regarding suitable culturally responsive strategies and practices to be implemented in their classrooms. The following questions facilitated the discussion: 1) How can you implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the classroom in ELA or math instruction? 2) How will the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy impact student outcomes?

In addition, in the first professional development session, there was a focus on modeling culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices that were suitable for Ms. Stovall and Mrs.
Brandon. Instructional videos were displayed to model and engage the participants, and to give examples of what cultural responsiveness looks like in the classroom as guided by the Culturally Responsive Walkthrough Tool. The instructional videos are titled: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy by Jeffrey Dessources, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Mathematics by Shelly Jones, A Tale of Two Teachers by Melissa Crum, and Culturally teaching is good teaching by Great Schools.

Lastly, in the final professional development session, I explored lesson plan design with Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon to determine the appropriate integration of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. I facilitated a discussion with Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon to provide feedback regarding their content areas and pacing guides to ensure each lesson plan is aligned with ELA and math standards along with culturally responsive practices and strategies. During this session, I and the participants examined upcoming lesson plans and strategies to include culturally responsive practices. As the participants completed their lesson plans each week, I reviewed their lesson plans for inclusion and integration of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The next section of this chapter will discuss the details of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom at BSMS.

**Implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Implementation of the program occurred from February 2022 to March 2022 with culturally responsive pedagogy and practices being implemented in the eighth grade ELA and math courses as stated above in the professional development section. The goal of implementation was to increase student learning, engagement, and academic achievement. Implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy consisted of the participants integrating culturally responsive strategies and competencies into their daily lessons. Next, Ms. Stovall and
Mrs. Brandon modeled culturally responsive characteristics and competencies in the classroom by diversifying instructional techniques, building relationships, and infiltrating the instruction with relevant cultural references and practices that engaged the students.

**Stakeholder Responsibility**

The responsibility of this action plan was distributed between the Bryant-Shelby Middle School administration and the eighth-grade English language arts and math teachers. The BSMS principal and the Clayton School District superintendent provided support to me and the participants in implementing the culturally responsive model and practices. The administration assisted in selecting the personnel to be participants in the research. The eighth-grade English language arts and math teachers assisted in the development of the culturally responsive model which best fits the student population at BSMS. The eighth-grade students were the recipients of the culturally responsive program implementation. The administrative team at BSMS functioned in an advisory and supportive capacity throughout the process of implementation.

**Evaluation Plan**

The purpose of the program evaluation was to determine whether the described action plan accomplished the goal of improving student engagement, learning, and achievement by implementing culturally responsive and relevant practices. The two elements identified in the action plan are professional development and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, which were measured using qualitative and quantitative methods. The goal of implementation consisted of increasing teacher capacity cultural competence and developing and integrating a culturally responsive curriculum into eighth grade ELA and math instruction that better engages the students at BSMS and impacts student outcomes and achievement. The qualitative and quantitative sources will include observations, focus group interview sessions,
Cultural Competence Self-Assessment for teachers, The poverty and education survey, and the Culturally Responsive Walkthrough Tool. Classroom observations were conducted for progress monitoring, weekly focus groups sessions occurred for feedback and assessment of the program, and the culturally responsive walkthrough tool was utilized to determine how teachers were implementing culturally responsive pedagogy to identify themes and to determine what needed to be adjusted or adapted.

**Logic Model**

The following logic model listed the elements involved in the research action plan and the details of the evaluation plan. The table listed the elements, goals for each element, timeline for implementation of the elements, stakeholders involved in the process, and the data sources used for evaluation (Table 2). Additionally, this section summarized the action plan and provided insight into the program evaluation components.

**Table 2**

*Evaluation Plan/Logic Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Evaluation Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>To develop and increase teacher capacity in CRP and teaching students in poverty.</td>
<td>January 2022</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Cultural Competence Teacher Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Survey</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Poverty Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</td>
<td>Progress monitoring will allow teachers and observers to gain feedback concerning implementation of the program, and how implementation needs to be delivered to give the greatest impact.</td>
<td>February 2022-March 2022</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Walkthrough Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson Plan Review</td>
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<td>Review</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation/Focus Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Post survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Development

The first element of the action plan to be evaluated was professional development. The central goal of this element was to develop and increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching students in poverty. The evaluation sources for this element consisted of the poverty and education questionnaire and a post-training survey to facilitate discussion and receive feedback. The purpose of these two data sources was to assess the cultural competence of the participants and gauge where the teachers were regarding their thoughts surrounding the impact of poverty on education.

The cultural competence assessment was administered to the entire staff before the professional development sessions began. The poverty and education questionnaire was administered as a post-survey of the professional development sessions. The participants, Mrs. Brandon and Ms. Stovall completed the cultural competence assessment and poverty questionnaire developed by Ghent (2019), and I facilitated a discussion regarding the results. The discussion led to the introduction of culturally responsive pedagogy. The short-term goal of this element was the expectation of growth and proficiency on English language arts and math benchmark assessments due to increased teacher capacity of culturally responsive pedagogy training. The long-term goal of this element was the expectation of growth and proficiency on
the statewide assessments and district-wide training of culturally responsive pedagogy for teachers and leaders.

**Implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The second element to be evaluated was the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the eighth grade ELA and math classes. The goal of the evaluation for this element was to conduct progress monitoring that allowed me and the participants to gain feedback concerning the implementation of the program, and how implementation needed to be delivered to give the greatest impact. The evaluation sources for this element included a culturally responsive walkthrough tool and observations. The culturally responsive walkthrough tool developed by Virgil and Abedon (2015) was utilized to guide observations and focus group sessions with the participants each week. This allowed for progress monitoring to take place each week during implementation.

The final evaluation source of implementation in this action plan was the enCase benchmark assessment. The final evaluation goal of implementation was growth and proficiency in ELA and math as measured by the benchmark assessments. The third enCase benchmark assessment was administered at the end of February 2022. I utilized the data after the eighth-grade students were administered the enCase benchmark assessment to make a comparison with the second enCase benchmark data to determine the impact the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy had on student learning and achievement.

**Staff Cultural Competence Self-Assessment**

Prior to the professional development training, the participants completed the staff cultural competence self-assessment (Appendix B) to create feedback and identify ways to help them grow in cultural awareness. The assessment used a Likert scale of 3 to 1 to indicate: 3- I do
this frequently, 2- I do this occasionally, 1- I do this rarely or never. The assessment is comprised of three section headings including 1) Physical environment, materials, and resources, 2) Communication, and 3) Values and attitudes. Under each section heading there are statements related to the heading for the participants to rate regarding cultural competence and awareness.

The survey required the participants to rate statements such as:

1. I display pictures, posters, artwork, and other décor that reflect the cultures and ethnic backgrounds of students and families served by our school.
2. I attempt to understand any familial colloquialisms used by my students and families that may impact our communication.
3. I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with those of cultures or ethnic groups other than my own.
4. I understand and accept that family is defined differently by different cultures (e.g. extended family, fictive kin, godparents).
5. Before making a home visit, I seek information on acceptable behaviors, courtesies, customs, and expectations that are unique to the culturally and ethnically diverse groups served in our school.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of this applied research study was to create a culture of teaching and learning that supports the eighth-grade student population through culturally responsive pedagogy at BSMS. This applied research consisted of implementing culturally relevant practices and culturally responsive pedagogy to positively impact student outcomes and achievement. The action plan was developed to increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive
pedagogy for program implementation as well as to impact student behavior and enCase growth and proficiency in ELA and math.

Each piece of data was collected through the evaluation sources (see Table 2) to answer each of the research questions. Research question one was analyzed through the poverty and education survey and interview questions. The data was collected to determine teachers’ perceptions after receiving the professional development regarding poverty and culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers’ perceptions were indicated through their responses provided on the survey and focus group interview sessions. Based on participants’ responses, the goal of increasing teacher capacity was met.

Research question two was addressed utilizing the culturally responsive walkthrough tool, classroom observations, lesson plan review, and interviews. The data collected from the classroom observations and interviews were utilized for progress monitoring. The culturally responsive walkthrough tool and lesson plan review were utilized to determine teachers’ usage and integration of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Research question three was addressed utilizing classroom observations and discipline data. Research question three examined student behaviors and discipline as a result of program implementation. The classroom observations provided first-hand experience of student responses and behaviors as recipients of program implementation. The discipline data was retrieved after program implementation to compare discipline referrals submitted by the participants prior to and during the program.

Research question four was evaluated utilizing the enCase benchmark assessment administered to the eighth-grade students at the end of program implementation. The enCase benchmark assessment measured ELA and math growth and proficiency. For the purpose of this
study, I compared term two and three enCase administrations to determine program effectiveness to inform growth and proficiency.

Coding

I conducted the focus group interview sessions face to face with the participants. I utilized the Otter platform to record and transcribe participants’ responses. Several focus group interview sessions were also conducted through the Zoom platform. The Otter platform was integrated through my Zoom subscription to allow recordings and transcriptions. To analyze participant responses, I listened to each recording and reviewed each transcription from the Otter platform at least two times to become familiar with the data. After transcribing each session, the patterns of teachers’ behavior and strategies emerged to develop a culturally responsive model with the participants.

The coding and transcription process led to the development of the culturally responsive pedagogy model. As I listened to the transcriptions, I found several patterns in the participants implementing the program. The first pattern I found was creativity in instruction. Both participants reported having to be innovative while implementing the program due to the ELA and math curriculums lacking culturally responsive. Culturally responsive must be creative to transform the teaching and learning process. The next pattern included transforming the culture of the classroom. Both participants endeavored to change the classroom culture through inclusion and peer collaboration. In classroom observations, I observed a community and family-like environment in Ms. Stovall’s class. In addition, the classroom culture was transformed through the participants creating high expectations for all students and providing equitable learning opportunities. The final pattern that emerged was the teacher and student relationships. The participants were committed to developing relationships with all students, and they were
interested in the students’ likes and dislikes. This pattern conveyed the importance of teachers developing strong relationships with the students to impact student achievement.

**Development of the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Model**

The development of the culturally responsive pedagogy model was a collaborative effort between me and the participants. The goal of developing a model was to integrate a culturally responsive curriculum that is best suited for the student population and teachers at BSMS. Developing the culturally responsive model occurred throughout program implementation and was solidified in the last focus group session. Through observations, focus group interview sessions, and coding, the participants and I developed The C.A.R.E. Model to serve the population of students at BSMS. The C.A.R.E. Model is an acronym for:

1. Culturally Responsive & Creative
2. Cultural Awareness & Curriculum Alignment
3. Relevance
4. Empowerment and High Expectations

**Culturally Responsive and Creative**

To implement the C.A.R.E. Model, teachers must first be culturally responsive and knowledgeable of the backgrounds of their students. In essence, teachers must respond in a culturally competent way. Simultaneously, for some teachers being culturally responsive also means being creative. Cultural responsiveness requires creativity for implementation to engage students of diverse cultures.

**Cultural Awareness and Curriculum Alignment**

The second factors in the C.A.R.E. Model are cultural awareness and curriculum alignment. Cultural awareness requires the teacher to be aware of their own cultural biases and
lenses while simultaneously recognizing and understanding the cultural values and attitudes of the students. Secondly, having a curriculum that is aligned to fit the cultural backgrounds of the student population is essential. Students engage in a curriculum that reflects their identities, beliefs, and cultures.

Relevance

The third factor contends that students respond to what is relevant and real. Teachers must modify and use creativity to ensure instructional lessons are relevant to the student population. As mentioned, the participants and I found the students to be more engaged when the lesson was relevant to them and their cultures.

Empowerment and High Expectations

The fourth and final factor in the C.A.R.E Model contends that empowerment and high expectations are required in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must empower students and facilitate a culture in the classroom of high expectations. Black students in high poverty need high expectations to rise to that result from high-quality teaching.

Program Evaluation

To evaluate the implementation of the culturally responsive program, the Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011) were used to assess the quality of the program and inform decision-making for improvement. The five program evaluation standards include utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. According to Yarbrough et al. (2011), the five program evaluation standards provide a systematic way to examine the quality of a program for the purpose of decision making, capacity building, and organizational development in response to the needs of the stakeholders. The program evaluation standards provided guidelines to ensure there was quality in implementing the program at BSMS.
**Utility Standards**

The utility standards involve the extent to which program stakeholders find the evaluation processes and products valuable in meeting their needs. “Participants and staff who participate in surveys and interviews, or express their ideas in a focus group, may experience a greater understanding of their own motivations and those of their colleagues” (Yarbrough, et al., 2011, p. 5). Throughout the culturally responsive program implementation, focus group interviews, and surveys were utilized to answer the research questions. For example, research question one explored teacher perceptions after receiving professional development and training. Surveys and interviews were provided to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development. I served as the interviewer and researcher in this study. Analysis of the interview and survey responses was used to evaluate teacher capacity regarding culturally responsive pedagogy. The data collected is considered outcome data to inform the value of the professional development provided to the participants.

**Feasibility Standards**

The feasibility standards involve accountability, resources, context, project management, and practical procedures. Yarbrough et al., (2011), described feasibility as “the extent to which resources and other factors allow an evaluation to be conducted in a satisfactory manner” (p. 288). Within the culturally responsive program implementation, practical procedures and resources were sufficient. The evaluation procedures were practical and responsive, balanced the interests of the participants, and resources were used effectively. The resources utilized in this study was the culturally responsive walkthrough tool, and data retrieval was gathered from the student information system for discipline as well as the enCase platform for ELA and math growth and proficiency. In addition, after each classroom observation, I provided feedback to the
participants the same day or the next day. I conducted classroom observations one to two times a week. I checked lesson plans at the beginning of each week to determine if the participants were including culturally responsive strategies in their lesson plans. This ensured effective context, project management, and accountability.

**Propriety Standards**

The propriety standards include “what is proper, fair, legal, right, acceptable, and just in evaluations” (Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. 106). I received Collaborative Instructional Training Initiative (CITI) training before the development of the program to ensure implementation occurred utilizing the propriety standards. The CITI training included modules that focused on protecting the rights of the participants, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, federal regulations, and ethics. Laws and rules that regulate the conduct of people and organizations set the context for evaluations (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The informed consent statement was provided to the participants before the research study began. The informed consent ensured confidentiality. Prior to recording each session via Otter and Zoom, the participants were aware we were recording and were given the option to opt out or not agree to participate if necessary. In addition, the teachers were provided with pseudonyms to be consistent with anonymity.

In addition to the CITI training, the surveys, interview questions, and questionnaires that were given to the participants were submitted to the University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning the research study for approval. In addition to approval from the IRB, the consent of my dissertation chair was required. Therefore, all surveys were completed and submitted anonymously. Furthermore, the participants were informed of their rights regarding the research study as well as the right to withdraw from the research study at any time. Lastly, all qualitative data obtained from the participants were kept confidential.
**Accuracy Standards**

The accuracy standards contend to maximize the truthfulness of evaluation representations, propositions, and findings, especially those supporting interpretations and judgments about the quality of the program (Yarbrough et al., 2011, p.158). According to Yarbrough et al., (2011), accuracy makes up eight standards which include validity, conclusions and decisions, reliability, data collection, sound design and analyses, evaluation reasoning, and communication and reporting. The data collected during this research study included observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The data collected for this study can be validated through recordings obtained with the permission of the participants and district records. The findings can be corroborated through the recordings, transcriptions, discipline data, and the enCase benchmark platform.

**Accountability Standards**

According to Yarbrough et al. (2011), accountability is the fifth standard of program evaluation, and it investigates how programs are implemented and improved. “Evaluations should fully document their negotiated purposes and implemented designs, procedures, data, and outcomes” (Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. 231). The documentation for each action plan element presented in Chapter Three was obtained throughout the program evaluation process. Throughout this applied research study, designs, procedures, and data were fully documented. I conducted classroom observations and took notes regarding what was occurring in the classroom including teacher instructional methods and student engagement. The classroom observations were utilized to evaluate how the program was being implemented in the ELA and math classes. I analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data collected. The reported findings and results are affirmed through the data collected and documentation throughout the program evaluation process.
Summary

The action plan was implemented to create a culture of teaching and learning that engaged the students in the learning process, built relationships, and ultimately improved student outcomes and academic growth and proficiency at Bryant-Shelby Middle School. Thereby, impacting the way in which students process teaching and engage in the learning process to increase academic success. The goals of the evaluation plan were to improve student outcomes such as behavior, and the potential for growth and proficiency on the ELA and math enCase benchmark assessment because of increased teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

The benefits of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy at BSMS have the potential to impact all students and teachers, specifically Black students who come from poverty. Chapter I provided a description of the problem of practice and the purpose for conducting the study at BSMS. Chapter II provided the theoretical basis for the applied research study. Chapter III described the action plan, elements, and program evaluation for the study. Next, Chapter IV provides the details of the results, statistical analysis, and qualitative reasoning for each of the research questions and action plan elements.
CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Chapter IV provides the details of the results, qualitative reasoning, and statistical analysis for each of the research questions and action plan elements. The barriers caused by poverty and inequities significantly impact the Black student population at BSMS. This applied research study with a program evaluation sought to level the playing field for Black students in a high poverty middle school through the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy in eighth grade English language arts and math classes. The research site is Bryant-Shelby Middle School which serves approximately 95 students in the eighth grade. The eighth-grade racial breakdown is Black (99%), and (1%) Arabic.

As cited in Chapter II, educational disparities and economic inequality are highly correlated with race and socioeconomic status (Welner & Carter, 2013). Good teaching practices are seen as key to efforts in closing the achievement gap and improving the educational experiences of children of color (Schmeichel, 2012, p. 211). Moreover, students feel validated and capable of learning presented information when their learning environments and the methods used to present information are culturally responsive to them (Gay, 2002; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Nieto, 2004; Karatas, 2020b, p.45).

The action plan’s focus was to create a culture of teaching and learning that engages the minority student population thereby impacting the learning process, building relationships, and ultimately improving student outcomes such as behavior and student achievement at Bryant-Shelby Middle School. An applied research design was used to collect and analyze data to
establish the scope of the action plan. The evaluation sources were utilized to collect data. The data was analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the components of the action plan. The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy among the eighth-grade student population at BSMS was examined using an applied research design.

**Research Design**

The protocols used in this applied research were designed to collect data to determine the effectiveness of the action plan elements and compare the results of culturally responsive training and implementation to student outcomes prior to receiving culturally responsive pedagogy. The results were used to identify the significance of the action plan elements to adjust the program to be more suitable for the student population at BSMS. Through the survey protocol, various forms of data were collected from the participants (Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon).

**Findings from the Staff Cultural Competence Self-Assessment**

As previously stated, I surveyed the two participants regarding cultural competence. The first section of the survey was the physical environment, which included the materials and resources utilized in the classroom. The participants responded to four statements on the physical environment. The participants' response rate average was 2.5 and 2.75 out of 3. This finding revealed the participants occasionally and almost frequently reflect diverse cultures in the classroom environment and media resources such as displaying artwork and pictures and utilizing instructional videos.

The second section of the survey was communication, which was comprised of seven statement items involving the way in which the participants communicate in a culturally responsive way. In this section, the participants averaged a 2 and 2.4 out of 3 in the response
rates. This finding revealed the participants occasionally communicate in a culturally diverse way when interacting with students. The participants’ response rates were collectively a 3 on attempting to understand familial colloquialism that may impact interactions with students and parents.

The third section of the cultural competence self-assessment survey is values and attitudes. This section is comprised of 19 statements regarding the participants’ values and attitudes. The participants were asked to respond to statements addressing (1) socio-economic and environmental factors that impact diverse school populations; (2) teacher expectations of behavior or academic performance within diverse school populations (See Appendix B). In this section, the participants averaged 2.57 and 2.7 out of 3 in response ratings. This finding revealed the participants occasionally and almost frequently understand and value cultural perspectives that impact the educational journey of the students in which they serve.

The staff cultural competence self-assessment was utilized to identify the cultural capacity of the participants. The survey assessed three areas including physical environment including materials and resources, communication, and values and attitudes. The findings of the survey revealed the participants assessed themselves to be somewhat culturally competent. In each area, the participants averaged “occasionally” regarding the statements on the survey. When I facilitated a discussion regarding the survey, the participants were reflective and stated there were areas of improvement such as imposing their own values on the students and displaying diverse cultural pictures or artwork in the classroom. The participants transparently discussed their thoughts regarding their feelings about students’ behaviors, their home life, and lack of intrinsic motivation in school. Mrs. Brandon expressed the need to be conscious of the generational gap and realizing what worked for her may not necessarily work for this generation.
of students. Both participants expressed the need to display more student artwork and pictures that reflect the students’ backgrounds. The staff cultural competence self-assessment survey explored the knowledge and cultural capacity of the participants.

**Research Questions**

Above, I presented the findings of the surveys to establish the foundation for the four key research questions. I present the questions and responses here:

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Training**

Research question one asked, “what are teacher perceptions after receiving culturally responsive pedagogy professional development?” The goal of professional development was to develop and increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and equip the participants with the tools for implementation in the classroom. In addition, the participants were provided with research regarding poverty, the educational achievement gap between Black and White students, and the history of the achievement gap in Clayton and Mississippi.

The results of research question one was examined in observations and focus group interview sessions. In the focus group sessions, the participants were asked open-ended questions to examine their perceptions of the professional development sessions. The resultant data provides evidence that teachers perceived the professional development sessions to be intriguing and helpful. The following evidence provides a transcription of the participant responses to the focus group interview question:

*After receiving the training, what is your perception of culturally responsive pedagogy?*

Ms. Stovall reported, meeting students where they are and recognizing where they are academically. Recognizing where they are and then trying to implement the standards in a way that they can respond to and become successful academically.
Mrs. Brandon reported,

culturally responsive pedagogy makes me more aware of what I do in the classroom and notice the things that I do that are counterproductive. Like some of the references I use in the classroom and being mindful of the generational gap and utilizing the stuff that pertains to them.

The participants’ perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy were reflective and transparent. This conveyed their perceptions to be receptive to the professional development regarding culturally responsive pedagogy.

The first research question addressed the efficacy of culturally responsive pedagogy professional development and training. The goal of research question one was to develop and increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching students in poverty. In addition, the participants were given a post-survey questionnaire. The post-survey questionnaire included a Likert scale of one to five (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree). There were four questions in the post-survey questionnaire that answered research question one:

1. The delivery of the culturally responsive training was engaging and impactful.

2. Did knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy impact your lesson planning and instruction?

3. Did background knowledge of poverty and education impact your lesson planning and instruction?

4. After receiving the training, I am more culturally aware and competent.

Both participants marked five- Strongly agree for the first and third questions, while both marked 4-Agree for the second question. One participant marked four for the fourth question. The ratings
matched the observations I conducted. According to the participant responses during the focus interview sessions and the post-survey questionnaire, the participants’ perceptions reveal the professional development and training were effective and adequate leading to program implementation.

Moreover, the findings of research question one revealed the participants perceived the professional development to be engaging and impactful. When the participants integrated culturally responsive pedagogy into their lesson plans, it was meaningful and intentional. The findings also revealed that the professional development was effective as I observed the participants implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and reflecting on current and future practices in teaching the students at BSMS.

The poverty and education survey served as a post-survey after the participants received the professional development training which conveyed how poverty presented barriers to student achievement. This survey asked open-ended questions concerning demographics and poverty in relation to the student population at BSMS. In addition, it provided a Likert scale of one to five (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree).

One of the most relevant questions of the poverty and education survey stated, which of the following educational barriers or challenges impact the students you work with? Check all that apply. Both participants checked the following responses, low attendance, achievement gaps, language and cognitive development, lack of adult mentorship, emotional concerns, social knowledge and competence, and lack of parental involvement. On the Likert scale within the poverty and education survey, one participant marked 3 as in Neutral and the other participant marked 4 to indicate Agree to the following statement, “I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty,” The next statement, “I feel well
prepared to teach in a school where poverty-related issues are present on a regular basis” was rated a 2 and a 4 by the participants to indicate one participant disagreed and the other participant agreed to feeling prepared to teach in a school where poverty-related issues are prevalent.

The poverty and education survey was relevant to this research study as poverty exacerbates the barriers to education presented to minority students. This survey revealed the participants comprehended and related to the background information on poverty and education.

**Teacher Usage of Culturally Responsive Strategies**

Research question two asked, “After receiving culturally responsive training, was there a difference in the usage of culturally responsive strategies by teachers and inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy in the lesson plan design?” As mentioned in Chapter III, the participants were provided with training regarding culturally responsive strategies and characteristics. The culturally responsive strategies and characteristics introduced to the participants include (1) reflecting on cultural lenses and avoiding discrimination against students; (2) drawing on student culture to shape curriculum and instruction to integrate real-world issues into the classroom; (3) showing respect, empathy and modeling high expectations; and (4) utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy to diversify instructional techniques. (Muniz, 2019; Karatas, 2020).

As I conducted weekly observations and checked lesson plans, weekly usage of culturally responsive teaching strategies were utilized and implemented in the classroom. I observed the participants utilizing strategies such as inclusion, peer collaboration, high expectations, opportunities for student voice and choice, relevant assignments, affirmations, and opportunities for critical conversations and debate. In addition, the participants reported having to rearrange lessons to be more inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of the eighth-grade student population.
I utilized a “glow and grow” method throughout the focus group sessions to provide the participants with feedback based on the culturally responsive walkthrough tool. The glow and grow method provided the participants with areas of strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the program. “Glow” indicated strengths or clear implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. “Grow” indicated areas of improvement or the lack of implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. The focus group sessions allowed for progress monitoring to take place to improve program implementation. The glows consisted of the participants utilizing the culturally responsive walkthrough tool to guide teacher practice.

For Ms. Stovall, the glows included creating expectations and criteria for peer collaboration, providing opportunities for verbal and written reflections, utilizing student background knowledge to activate prior knowledge, creating learning groups, utilizing lessons that reflect diverse viewpoints, empowering students through affirmations, and providing equitable opportunities for support. The areas of improvement for Ms. Stovall included providing students with multiple access points to challenging assignments, providing rubrics that are engaging, clearly stating and posting high expectations, and creating evaluations that measure the multiple ways students learn.

The areas of strength (glows) Mrs. Brandon exhibited were emphasizing effort, creating learning groups and peer collaboration, making problem-solving visuals noticeable and accessible, encouraging all students to question and interpret concepts, and utilizing formative assessments for instructional purposes. The areas of growth for Mrs. Brandon included providing affirmations, providing an opportunity for verbal and written reflections concerning math, providing equitable opportunities for support, using students’ background knowledge to activate prior knowledge. Through observations and weekly lesson plan checks, I found that the
participants initially began to provide clear and concise culturally responsive practices. However, from week to week, the lesson plans were inconsistent and inconclusive of culturally responsive pedagogy integration even if the participants included the program in actual instructional practice.

I asked the following questions during focus group sessions each week regarding lesson planning and implementation: 1) How are you integrating culturally responsive pedagogy in your lesson plans? 2) Are you utilizing the culturally responsive walkthrough tool to assist with instruction, why or why not? Ms. Stovall reported, “I forgot to use the culturally responsive tool and to put it in my lesson plan, but I feel like this is something I try to do anyway, but I have tried to do more by ensuring the lessons are relevant to them. The curriculum the district has is not relevant to them at all.” Mrs. Brandon reported, “I looked at the culturally responsive tool when I developed the project and bellringers for this week, but I didn’t add it in my lesson plan. It’s hard to find culturally responsive things for math, like for geometry, it was hard.” In addition, the post-survey (Appendix E) asked the participants to rate the following statement, “I utilized culturally responsive pedagogy daily in the classroom after receiving the training”. Both participants responded with 4- Agree to indicate daily usage of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

The goal for research question two was for the participants to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices daily in the English Language Arts and math classes to improve student outcomes. In the final focus interview session, the participants revealed inconsistency with implementation was due to them already having to follow district pacing guides and curriculums, Ms. Stovall reported, “it takes creativity and hard work to modify lesson plans to reflect culturally responsiveness because the curriculum is not suitable for the student
population at our school.” Mrs. Brandon reported, “having too much to do already.” This suggested, that the district pacing guide and curriculums were not culturally responsive and impeded the progress of implementation for the participants.

The findings of research question two revealed the participants implemented culturally responsive pedagogy in various ways and attempted to utilize the culturally responsive walkthrough tool as a guide. For example, in weekly observations, Ms. Stovall exhibited culturally responsive characteristics by drawing on students’ culture to shape curriculum and instruction, utilizing student voice and choice, and diversifying instructional techniques. Ms. Stovall drew on the students’ culture of what is relevant to them in social media, music, and community. Ms. Stovall modified her lessons to include relevant topics for bellringers and English Language Arts and writing standards. For example, a bellringer included ELA standard R.I. 8.6, the author’s purpose, and acknowledging how an author may respond to conflicting viewpoints. The topic for this bellringer was Tik Tok, a social media site all middle schoolers utilize in their daily activities. Ms. Stovall played a Tik Tok video in the classroom and gave the students the following instructions:

Imagine it is against the law for anybody under the age of 18 to have access to TikTok without an adult's permission, and it has been decided that children are not capable of making sound decisions when it comes to making/posting TikTok videos. Suppose this idea became a possibility. How would you respond?

I observed the students engaged in responding to the bellringer and Ms. Stovall allowed the students’ voices to be heard by encouraging healthy debate and perspectives to be voiced in her classroom. Students’ voices were heard when Ms. Stovall gave an assignment regarding argumentative writing. One of the assignments included the students arguing for the use of social
media by teens being restricted by the law and enforced. The students were able to debate their arguments in the classroom. Furthermore, Ms. Stovall diversified instruction by using social media along with multimedia presentations. This observation revealed that Ms. Stovall implemented culturally responsive strategies in the ELA classroom. In addition, she reported an increase in student engagement when she implemented lessons that were relevant to the students. Ms. Stovall observed the students diligently working on their assignments, participating in their classwork with peers, and demonstrating increased effort in classwork and homework.

Ms. Stovall also exhibited modeling high expectations. Each day, at the beginning of class, Ms. Stovall presented affirmations to the class and engaged the students in participatory call and response. One of the affirmations stated, "It never matters what you start. You're awarded for what you finish." With this affirmation, Ms. Stovall utilized the moment to be transparent and share her story of starting school and moving from a teacher assistant to a certified English teacher. She shared how determination and faith take you wherever you can dream of in life. She ended by encouraging the students to work hard and follow their dreams.

In eighth-grade math, Mrs. Brandon implemented culturally responsive characteristics such as reflecting on her own bias and bringing real-world issues into the classroom to make associations with the students’ cultural backgrounds. For example, in a geometry lesson, Mrs. Brandon utilized bellringers and instructional problems that included real-world content and actual eighth-grade students who reflected the real-world connection. The geometry problem stated,

Alauna has a softball in her backpack. She tells Symorion the softball has more volume than the can of Pepsi he brought today. Symorion tells her since he bought the tall can today, his Pepsi definitely has more volume. They google the radius of a softball on Mrs.
Brandon's ipad to find it is 3.8 inches. Next, they measure the can and determine the radius is 1.8 inches with a height of 4.5 inches. Which student is correct?

Mrs. Brandon was aware that Alauna is a softball player for the school, and sports and food are important to our eighth-grade student population, which means there was a geometrical content connection to the real world. In addition, this was also a reflection of building relationships with students. Mrs. Brandon included what interested the students and became aware of their likes, dislikes, and extracurricular activities. In addition, Mrs. Brandon diversified her instructional techniques by instructing the students to utilize individual whiteboards to participate in the class and Skittles candy to solve equations. I observed the students engaging in the lesson by utilizing the whiteboards to complete math problems. In addition, the Skittles candy was found to be a relevant connection to teaching the content, because the students were able to eat the candy after solving the equations.

Mrs. Brandon also diversified her instruction by requiring the students to submit a project utilizing technology. The students were instructed to record a video of themselves teaching the class how to solve geometrical figures and problems. This finding revealed that Mrs. Brandon found a creative way for the students to utilize technology to learn and practice geometry standards. I viewed the students’ project submissions and observed as they taught various geometry standards. Throughout the project submissions, the students were engaged in the video and exhibited mastery of the geometry standards. I found this assignment to be reflective of high expectations and provided feedback to Mrs. Brandon in the focus group sessions.

I observed the participants struggling with daily implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy for varying reasons. Those varying reasons included time management and pressure to prepare students for priority standards in ELA and math. However, when the participants
exhibited culturally responsive characteristics and integrated those strategies into their instruction, the students were engaged, and their class participation increased. The findings of research question two revealed the process of teaching and learning was reciprocal, engaging, and impactful.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy on Classroom Behavior**

Research question three asked, “To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices improve student behavior and discipline in the classroom?” The findings of research question three were observed by myself and the participants and included in the focus group interview sessions. In addition, the data was collected through the student information system as discipline referrals submitted from the participants. In the focus group interviews, Mrs. Stovall reported, “students were more engaged and participated in class when I implemented relevant practices, so the behavior was much better.” Mrs. Brandon reported, “When I utilized analogies and stuff that was relevant to them, they were more engaged.” The post-survey questionnaire asked two questions regarding research question three: 1) Student engagement among the students improved in my classroom. 2) If student engagement improved, did classroom disruptions and negative behavior decrease? Both participants marked 5-Strongly Agree for student engagement improved in the classroom. In addition, both participants marked 4- Agree for classroom disruptions and negative behavior decreasing during the time of program implementation.

I gathered the discipline data for each teacher from the beginning to the end of program implementation to compare the behavior exhibited prior to implementation and during implementation. I found a slight decrease in negative behaviors that resulted in discipline
referrals during program implementation. I gathered data from the previous term and compared it to the current term as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*2021-2022 Term Two & Three Discipline Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Term 2 Discipline Referrals</th>
<th>Term 3 Discipline Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stovall</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 exhibits discipline data that occurred prior to program implementation displayed as term two and during the implementation displayed as term three. The discipline referrals from Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon each term included misconduct infractions. Table 3 shows a slight decrease in discipline infractions during program implementation. Moreover, the data collected from the student information system presents several findings. While discipline infractions dropped only slightly, there were instances of student engagement through activities that showed greater participation and attention in the classroom.

The first finding demonstrates that Ms. Stovall experiences more discipline issues in her classroom than Mrs. Brandon. Throughout weekly observations, I noticed Ms. Stovall experienced classroom management issues when there was downtime in the classroom and students were not being engaged or had assignments to complete. I presented feedback as to Ms. Stovall to build her capacity in classroom management. In addition, I encouraged the downtime to be planned and utilized to complete culturally responsive activities such as presenting ELA standards in a game such as Kahoot, creating project-based learning for the current unit, and playing culturally responsive Bingo to build relationships with students.
The first finding conveys the eighth-grade student population is less likely to engage in negative behaviors that result in discipline problems when class time is structured, requires high engagement, critical thinking, and kinesthetic learning. This leads to the next finding in that Mrs. Brandon experienced less classroom management issues as the math requires the students to engage in critical thinking skills and hands-on learning to solve math problems. In addition, these findings are relevant in the previous school year discipline data to provide evidence that engaging the students in structured, engaging, kinesthetic learning will yield less discipline referrals.

I gathered discipline data from the 2020-2021 school year as a comparison to the 2021-2022 school year. Table 4 displays discipline referrals submitted by Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon for both school years. The discipline data exhibited Ms. Stovall submitted 13 discipline referrals for misconduct and disrespect, and Mrs. Brandon submitted 10 discipline referrals for classroom misconduct and disrespect.

**Table 4**

2020-2021 & 2021-2022 Discipline Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>2020-2021</th>
<th>2021-2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stovall</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, in Table 4, the comparison of discipline data between Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon exhibits an increase of 17 discipline referrals submitted for this school year by Ms. Stovall and an increase of 6 discipline referrals submitted by Mrs. Brandon. However, it bears mentioning that in 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a major disruption in learning taking place in
the classroom as safety measures required our school district to operate in online learning and a hybrid model for the duration of the school year. Therefore, in 2020-2021, for half of the school year, BSMS was completely involved in virtual learning and no students were allowed on campus. For the second half of the 2020-2021 school year, BSMS ensued a hybrid model with students assigned an A or B schedule. The hybrid model meant half of the student body was on campus on any given day. For example, during the hybrid model, Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon had a maximum of 10 students in the classroom each day last school year due to COVID-19.

The discipline data for the previous school year are skewed as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the school year and student attendance. However, the findings were consistent with the 2021-2022 school year, in that discipline in the classroom has the potential to decrease when teachers are well prepared, utilizing culturally responsive teaching strategies, and engaging students in tactile learning activities. Research question three is connected to research four in that students who are engaged in the process of teaching and learning are more likely to demonstrate an increase in growth and proficiency in ELA and math.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Benchmark Growth**

Research question four asked, “To what extent did implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy improve ELA and Math enCase benchmark growth and proficiency?” I gathered data from the enCase platform to assess growth and proficiency. I gathered data from term two and term three enCase benchmark administration as shown in Table 5. Table 5 exhibits the data from the enCase benchmark assessment utilized at BSMS to determine where students currently are in mastering eighth grade ELA and math skills. The enCase benchmark assessment provides a detailed report of projected levels of growth and proficiency.
Clayton school district utilizes the enCase benchmark assessment as a projection for the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP), which is given to all students in Mississippi in the Spring semester. Moreover, for the enCase assessment, growth is measured by scaled scores and levels. Level 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4, and 5. Levels 1 and 2 are considered below passing, 3 is considered passing, 4 is considered proficient, and 5 is considered advanced. At BSMS, the enCase benchmark assessment was administered to the eighth-grade students at the end of October 2021 and the end of February 2022.

**Table 5**

*2021-2022 EnCase Benchmark Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Term Two EnCase Growth</th>
<th>Term Three EnCase Growth</th>
<th>Term Two EnCase Proficiency</th>
<th>Term Three EnCase Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stovall (8th grade ELA)</td>
<td>33.25%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon (8th grade Math)</td>
<td>30.75%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 exhibits a comparison between term two and term three of the enCase assessment being administered to the students. Term two is indicative of prior administration to the implementation of the program and term three is after the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices among Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data. 95 eighth-graders were given the assessment in ELA and math for term two and term three. In ELA for term two, 33.25% exhibited growth and 21% scored proficient or advanced. In math for term two, 30.75% demonstrated growth and 16.8% scored proficient and advanced. For term three of the enCase administration, in ELA, 52.6% demonstrated growth, and in Math, 52.1% demonstrated growth. Furthermore, for term three of enCase administration, in ELA, 23% scored proficiency and 22% scored proficiency in Math.
Moreover, in ELA, there was a 19.35% increase between term two and three growth in mastering English language arts skills, and a 2% increase in proficiency. In Math, there was 21.35% increase of student growth between term two and term three administrations along with a 5.2% increase of proficiency. The results of data revealed after the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, student growth and proficiency increased as measured by the enCase benchmark assessment. I asked the participants in the last focus group session to convey how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacted the term three administration of the enCase benchmark assessment.

Ms. Stovall reported, “on the days I implemented the culturally responsive pedagogy by including relevant content in association with the ELA priority standards, the students were more engaged, attention spans and verbal feedback and participation increased as instruction was given, and the students retained the information.” Mrs. Brandon reported, “when gave the students analogies about real-world things and connected it to math, the students paid attention and took notes. Also, using the whiteboards and Skittles candy right before the test really helped.” The statements from the participants revealed a shared belief and buy-in that culturally responsive pedagogy has an impact on the student population at BSMS. In addition, the enCase data provides evidence to the observations that I conducted and reports from the participants that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices yield an increase in growth and proficiency in the ELA and math. Therefore, the goal of research question four was achieved.

I made a comparison between enCase scores from the previous school year with the current school year for eighth-grade ELA and math. Table 6 exhibits the enCase data from the previous school year.
Table 6

2020-2021 EnCase Benchmark Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Term Two EnCase Proficiency</th>
<th>Term Three EnCase Growth</th>
<th>Term Three EnCase Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stovall (8th grade ELA)</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon (8th grade Math)</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are circumstances that impact the 2020-2021 enCase benchmark data and possibly make up the difference between the scores. In 2020-2021, Ms. Stovall split eighth-grade students with another ELA teacher. Ms. Stovall taught 44 of the 88 students tested in ELA last school year. Therefore, the scores presented for ELA growth and proficiency for Ms. Stovall reflect half of the eighth-grade student population. In addition, last school year ELA was taught in 90-minute blocks, which is different from 2021-2022 school in that it is taught in single 49-minute periods. In addition, Ms. Stovall teaches all 95 students this school year.

As with the discipline data, previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the enCase benchmark testing as well. Due to COVID-19 and transitioning to virtual learning, the first enCase benchmark was not administered, and growth could not be determined for the second enCase administration. In comparison, term two proficiency was slightly higher in 2020-2021 with 29% in ELA and 17.3% in math. However, term three enCase scores were higher in 2021-2022 with 52.6% growth in ELA and 52.1% growth in math. To demonstrate more than 50% growth in term three administration of the enCase benchmark reveals a possible positive projection of the state-wide assessment scores when students are assessed in the late Spring semester.
Summary

Chapter four revealed the results of this applied research study, which sought to create a culture of teaching and learning impacted by the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The data collected and analyzed were designed to provide thriving qualitative and quantitative data from the research study. There were four research questions involved in this study. The first research question involved teacher perceptions relating to the professional development and training I provided. The second research question involved the participants increasing culturally responsive pedagogy in ELA and math. The third research question examined student outcomes such as behavior to determine if culturally responsive pedagogy reduced disciplinary infractions from eighth-grade students. The fourth and final research question examined student growth and proficiency in ELA and math after the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. In addition, the findings of the cultural competence self-assessment survey revealed overall the participants occasionally engaged in behaviors that reflect cultural competence. The findings of the poverty and education survey revealed the participants were somewhat knowledgeable of the impact poverty has on education.

Moreover, the findings of this applied research study impacting student outcomes through the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy were presented in this chapter. Throughout program implementation, the immediate benefits were observed when the participants were consistent. There was a slight decrease in disciplinary infractions by the eighth-grade students as the participants provided culturally responsive teaching strategies. The culturally responsive teaching strategies led to increased student engagement. In addition, the ultimate benefit and goal were revealed through research question four as students have demonstrated an increase in
growth and proficiency in ELA and math. Chapter V will provide the discussion, program evaluation standards, limitations, and recommendations of this study.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION

Introduction

Culturally responsive pedagogy contends to transform the educational process among minority students who come from poverty. Minority students who are faced with the varying circumstances that evolve from poverty enter school at a disadvantage and the disadvantages perpetuate throughout their academic careers. As cited in Chapter II, “if teachers pretend not to see students’ racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs” (Ladson-Billings, p. 37, 2009). As mentioned in Chapter I, high poverty schools perpetuate the cycle of opportunity gaps as they experience significant barriers to academic achievement and student success for minority students. Educational institutions exacerbate the White and Black achievement gap by failing to support Black and minority students of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, to address this issue at Bryant-Shelby Middle School, an action plan was developed and implemented among the eighth-grade students in the English and Math courses.

In Chapter I, the problem of practice was introduced and presented as the barriers to academic achievement that Black students Bryant-Shelby Middle School face. The barriers to academic achievement include factors of poverty and race that negatively impact students from receiving high-quality educational opportunities and support. Moreover, the problem of practice led to the action plan being implemented at BSMS, which included professional development on poverty and education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the implementation of culturally
responsive pedagogy. Chapter II provided the review of literature relevant to culturally responsive pedagogy, poverty, and the achievement gap in Mississippi. Next, Chapter III outlined the methodology of the research study and action plan. In addition, Chapter III provided details of the collaborative effort of between me and the participants to carry out the action plan and program evaluation plan elements. Chapter IV presented the findings of the applied research study. Lastly, Chapter V presents the discussion, limitations, and recommendations of the research to study to maintain current efforts and provide guidance for future research and development of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation.

Discussion

As I conveyed in Chapter II, there are contributing factors to the misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy. The elements of the action plan and research findings detailed in Chapter IV provide ways to reduce misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy among teachers. Here I discuss key elements of the professional development component and the implementation process. Before I address the key elements, I will discuss the roadblocks to the implementation process of the action plan.

COVID-19 Impact of the Action Plan

The major roadblock that impeded the implementation of the action plan was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to COVID-19 outbreaks school and district-wide, the school year began in a traditional format and transitioned to virtual learning around September and October 2021. In addition, the participants were exposed to COVID-19 and required to quarantine several times throughout the school year, which impacted participant attendance. Student attendance was also impacted by COVID-19. During the peak of the COVID-19 outbreaks, students were required to quarantine for up to 14 days if they were not vaccinated. In
addition, during the transition to virtual instruction, student attendance decreased due to internet issues and a lack of parental reinforcement. The students were not logging into Google Meet for class or completing daily assignments during this time. The roadblocks caused a delay in implementing the program. In the future, the implementation of the program at the beginning of the school year would give the participants a deeper understanding of the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy. It would allow students to see the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy from the beginning to the end of the school year.

Furthermore, the initial action plan was to be implemented in September of 2021 and intended to include robust, lengthy, and sustainable data. Perhaps, the most impactful limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has had lasting effects since March 2020 and has dismantled educational institutions across the world. At BSMS, since March 2020, there have been uncertain waters to navigate through while providing instruction to the students. COVID-19 interrupted the program implementation from the beginning in a timely manner and caused a disruption in conducting interview sessions with the participants.

Several times throughout the 2021-2022 school year, the participants were quarantined, exposed, or tested positive for COVID-19. In addition, in Fall 2021, the school district transitioned to online learning due to massive COVID-19 outbreaks across the three schools. Moreover, during online learning, most of the students were not present. Therefore, this caused another delay in implementing the program and collecting data. The students were significant in program implementation as they were the recipients of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The participants were essential as they were recipients of the professional development and the implementers of the program.
Professional Development. In response to the problem presented at Bryant-Shelby Middle School, an action plan was developed. The first element of the action plan included professional development (PD). The PD was created to teach, inform, and build the capacity of the participants regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and how poverty impacts student achievement. The goal of the PD was to develop and increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and equip the participants with the tools for implementation in the classroom.

Over the span of two-days in the second semester of 2022, the participants received PD and training regarding the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy and poverty. I provided an overview of culturally responsive pedagogy to which included characteristics, competencies, and strategies the participants needed for implementation. In addition, professional development included an important section of poverty and the ways in which it causes obstacles for minority students. The section on poverty, education, and the achievement gap provided a powerful buy-in within the participants.

This type of professional development regarding culturally responsive pedagogy had not been provided in the past at BSMS or experienced by the participants. At the conclusion of the two-day PD sessions, the participants gained an understanding of the importance of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices with the eighth-grade student population. As mentioned in Chapter IV, the participants observed an increase in student engagement and participation in the classroom when culturally responsive pedagogy was implemented. During the PD, the participants were given a culturally responsive walkthrough tool (Appendix C) to guide the teachers’ practices for daily implementation. Examples of daily teaching practices included 1) creating expectations for peer collaboration and feedback, 2)
creating learning groups, and 3) creating equitable opportunities for students to learn. Creating learning groups with expectations for peer collaboration and feedback created a culture of community in the classroom. I observed the climate of the classroom to be warm and inclusive compared to before when the climate of the classroom was solemn and secluded. The students worked independently of each other prior to the implementation of the program. Creating equitable learning opportunities consisted of the participants accommodating students’ learning styles through small groups and remediation for ELA and math. Accommodating students’ learning styles included the participants using variance to present the ELA and math content. This included lecture, video, PowerPoint, technology, and handouts to adhere to all relevant learning styles in the classroom.

For future PD sessions, decisions should be made to implement a daily or weekly goal to work on specific culturally responsive teaching practices. For example, during week one of implementation, the goal will include: participants will focus on conveying high expectations, developing relationships, and creating an inclusive classroom with displays of culturally relevant pictures and artwork. Setting specific goals for weekly implementation will provide increased guidance and narrow the focus for implementation.

The PD gave the participants the background knowledge necessary for the second action plan element, which was the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. PD should be relevant, informative, engaging, relatable, create reflection, and inspire change. These factors are important when providing PD because they are necessary for yielding actionable outcomes for the participants. PD that is engaging and relevant will translate knowledge into application. The PD was a fundamental aspect of the research study as it provided foundational training and knowledge for the participants. The PD ensured the participants were equipped with the
knowledge and strategies mentioned in Chapter II to provide culturally responsive instruction to the students. Some of those strategies included 1) drawing on student culture to shape curriculum and instruction to integrate real-world issues into the classroom; (2) showing respect, empathy, and modeling high expectations. As the program continues to grow, the participants can become teacher leaders by facilitating and teaching culturally responsive pedagogy PD to their colleagues at BSMS.

**Implementation.** Culturally responsive pedagogy contends to be a conceptual framework that is inclusive of bringing cultural references, attitudes, values, and reality into the classroom to impact student achievement. In this action plan, this refers to the participants implementing the teacher practices reflected in the culturally responsive walkthrough tool (See Appendix C). Culturally responsive pedagogy challenges the process of teaching and learning to be reflective, engaging, and representative of diverse student populations. Implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy began in February of 2022 and occurred for approximately four weeks. The goal of implementation was to increase 1) student learning, 2) engagement in the learning process, and 3) student growth and proficiency.

As a result of beginning the program in the second semester, the participants somewhat struggled with consistently implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. The participants struggled with daily lesson plan integration of the culturally responsive teacher practices. Due to lack of preparation with integrating teacher practices into the lesson plan, the participants were inconsistent in daily implementation of the program. Implementation of the program required extra effort and preparation to modify lesson plans to include culturally responsive teacher practices. The extra effort and preparation to modify lesson plans were due to the ELA and math curriculums lacking cultural responsiveness. The extra effort required the
participants to be innovative through making the assignments relevant to the eighth-grade student population. This involved the participants modifying their lessons to include real world content aligned with ELA and math standards. This required a higher level of preparation in lesson planning each week.

In addition, implementation of the program felt like an additional duty because the English language arts (ELA) and math curriculums did not align with culturally responsive practices for the student population at BSMS. Therefore, the participants had to spend time preparing and cultivating adequate lessons to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy. Prior to program implementation, the participants merely included the bellringer, direct instruction, modeling, and independent practice. However, when the participants prepare lesson plans with culturally responsive teacher practices, they were inclusive of a section for implementing the program. The participants used this section in their lesson plan to demonstrate how they were planning to implement culturally responsive practices for the day or week. For example, Ms. Stovall included the affirmations and assignments that integrated the program in her lesson plans. Mrs. Brandon included real-word math problems in connection to the students’ lives in her lesson plans. As implementation of the program continues, the participants can inquire about culturally responsive curriculums that align to the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for eighth grade ELA and math. In addition, in the future, setting goals for weekly implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices and having resources readily accessible will improve implementation.

**Focus Group Sessions.** The weekly observations, focus group sessions, and interviews occurred for the purpose of progress monitoring and program improvement. Throughout the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, I observed the participants in their classrooms
one to two times a week, provided feedback regarding implementation culturally responsive teacher practices, and utilized the interview questions to guide the sessions (See Appendix E). The feedback was specific to each participant and a reflection of which culturally responsive teacher practices were relevant to improving the program. For example, the feedback provided to the participants could be considered as trial and error based on observations. An example of this included, after observing Ms. Stovall’s class, I provided feedback for her to create centers with the desks in her classroom to promote collaborative learning and inclusivity. Once Ms. Stovall rearranged her classroom and I conducted an observation, I provided feedback regarding the culture of the classroom being community oriented and easier for students learn from their peers.

The participants engaged in focus group interview sessions, which provided a time to reflect, collaborate, and learn ways to improve implementation of the program. The focus group sessions were mixture of a formal and informal climate. I conducted the focus group sessions face to face and via Zoom. The face-to-face sessions were more formal, and the sessions via Zoom were informal. The participants were comfortable answering the interview questions and communicating with me. However, in some instances the participants may have responded with bias as I am also in a supervisory role as the assistant principal at BSMS. This suggests ensuring the participants can acknowledge the benefits of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy without the influence of bias.

In examining the results of the participant focus group sessions (see Appendix E), the sessions yielded robust qualitative data that demonstrated growth. The participants revealed that the program was meaningful, and they experienced increased student engagement and participation from the students in the classroom. The participants conveyed that the program was meaningful, because it helped the teachers connect with the students, and the teachers observed
student learning and growth. They recognized there was increased student engagement through the student grades and performance on the benchmark assessment. In addition, during the assignments, the participants observed students engaged and working not only by themselves but with their groups.

Most importantly, the participants experienced an increase in growth and proficiency as measured by the enCase benchmark assessment. Each administration of the enCase benchmark assessment provided the participants with measures of growth and proficiency for the student population. The participants were able to compare student scores from term two and three benchmark administrations. Term three benchmark was administered after program implementation and indicated an increase in student growth and proficiency.

Throughout each focus group session, I utilized the glow and grow method to provide the participants with strengths and weaknesses of implementation and instructional practices. During this time, I reminded the participants of the culturally responsive walkthrough tool and to use it to guide lesson planning (See Appendix C). Utilizing the culturally responsive walkthrough tool was essential in implementing adequate culturally responsive teaching practices. The participants responded well to the glow and grow method as I observed the progress in classroom observations. The participants responded with reflection and application to the glow and grow method. The participants also provided feedback to me regarding my observations. The feedback from participants included statements such as, “the students liked the assignment today” “I think this works better for them” and “I’ll try that”. In addition, I utilized the focus group interview questions to help guide the sessions with the participants.

In the future, the culturally responsive walkthrough tool should reflect a rubric that easily translates into a classroom observation tool. The culturally responsive walkthrough tool was used
as a guide for classroom observation, but the results did not yield data needed for success to be measured. In the future, the instrument should be a definitive rubric with culturally responsive indicators and practices. The components should include building relationships, creating equitable opportunities for student learning, communication, creating high expectations with rigorous instruction, and creating opportunities for collaboration. In addition, one should ensure the focus group interview questions are valid and open-ended to gain sufficient qualitative data from the participants. Furthermore, the focus group interview questions lacked data questions. The participants provided qualitative responses regarding increased student engagement leading to a decrease in negative student behavior. However, I did not retrieve the data from the student information system to discuss in the weekly sessions. As the program continues, the focus group sessions should include more data talks around student discipline, grades, and benchmark assessment scores. Weekly data talks will inform decision making culturally teaching practices and improvement. Specific questions regarding discipline data would’ve shined light the current practices that were not working and possible practices that could be implemented to improve behavior. Secondly, data questions concerning grades benchmark assessment scores, would have provided clarity concerning teacher practices that could impact formal and summative assessments. This suggests, ensuring that the culturally responsive teacher practices also reflect merely good teaching such as checking for understanding through classwork and exit slips and providing remediation for low scoring students.

**Limitations.** One of the limitations of the research study could potentially be my role in relation to the participants. As one of the assistant principals at BSMS, the participants may not have felt they could be completely honest in their feelings about the program. My role as assistant principal is a supervisory role and that may have been hard to distinguish researcher
from supervisor. When I asked the participants about the professional development and the program, their responses were positive. However, if I was not the assistant principal, there responses may have been different.

Another limitation includes a convenient sample of two participants. Mrs. Brandon is the eighth-grade math teacher and Ms. Stovall is the eighth grade ELA teacher. A sample that included the entire eighth grade team of teachers may have made a stronger impact on student behavior and student achievement. A small sample size affects the reliability and validity of the results of the program. As previously mentioned, this could lead to bias. However, this sample size was purposeful and targeted to address the ELA and math skills of the eighth-grade student population.

The next limitation to this study would be the instruments. The instruments would need to be improved by adding an appropriate classroom observation tool, an adequate culturally responsive teacher rubric, and including valid questions for the interviews and surveys. In addition, an instrument that includes student response and feedback would improve triangulation of the results. In this research study, direct student feedback was not provided, but observed by me and the participants. Student feedback could potentially corroborate the importance of implementation of the program.

The last limitation of this study includes enCase benchmark administrations and alignment. The benchmark assessments are administered three times a year - each term or nine weeks of the school year. The enCase benchmark assessments provide a projection of growth and proficiency to correspond with state-wide assessments. When students have completed each benchmark assessment, they are given a scale score that translates into a level of mastery or the lack thereof as it is with state-wide assessments. In addition, the benchmark assessments are
utilized for exam grades each nine weeks term. The enCase benchmark assessments does not reflect a culturally responsive curriculum. This suggests participants should ensure culturally responsive teaching practices align with assessments to produce student growth and proficiency.

**Implications.** This study was designed to create a culture of teaching and learning that impacted student behavior, growth, and proficiency. The central phenomenon of this study was the need for teachers to become culturally responsive in their teaching practices. An implication of this research is to build teacher capacity and instructional that are reflective of the student population.

I found program implementation happens consistently when there is an inspection of what is expected, and participants recognize the benefits. This suggests routine observations and timely feedback are imperative in building the capacity of teachers. Routine observations should occur one to two times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes. Timely feedback should occur within 24 to 48 hours after the observation occurs. Routine observations allowed me to learn what was occurring in the classroom. Timely feedback allows communication, coaching, and collaboration to occur to build capacity and improve the program.

Implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy will be implemented appropriately when teachers and leaders view it as an avenue to transform education for the students we serve. This conveys the importance of engaging and relevant professional development of culturally responsive pedagogy. Therefore, misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy will diminish when educators see the value and utilize it as a tool to assist in changing how we educate black students in poverty. This indicates the importance of using appropriate formative and summative assessments to present data as evidence of effective program implementation. Appropriate formative assessments may include bellringers, classwork, homework, pop-quizzes,
and exit tickets to check for student understanding and mastery. Summative assessments may include end-of-the-week or unit tests and nine weeks exams (end-of-term exams).

**Recommendations for Future Research.** This study identified an area of improvement for Bryant-Shelby Middle School and Clayton School District, which included addressing the needs of Black students who live in poverty and attend a Title I school. Prior to the research study, the school did not have strategies for assessing cultural competence and awareness of teachers or ways in which culturally responsive pedagogy could be implemented. By developing the action plan and the C.A.R.E. Model, BSMS has the option to enhance the teaching and learning experiences of the students to result in academic growth and proficiency.

Throughout the implementation of the program, several recommendations emerged. The first recommendation contends that school districts should have a mandatory assessment of their employees for cultural competence and awareness. A mandatory assessment of the teachers will heighten their sensitivity and awareness of their thoughts and feelings concerning students in poverty and various cultures and races. Furthermore, cultural awareness and preparation should begin before teachers enter the classroom, which will yield a greater probability of teachers understanding, recognizing, and having the capacity to teach diverse students in high-poverty schools. Education preparation programs should provide teachers with coursework and training in culturally responsive pedagogy and poverty. Students will engage in the teaching and learning process when adequately trained teachers provide culturally teaching practices.

**The C.A.R.E. Model.** As mentioned above in Chapter III, the C.A.R.E. model refers to 1) teachers demonstrating cultural responsiveness and creativity, 2) integrating cultural awareness and curriculum alignment, 3) providing relevant context and content, and 4) empowering and creating high expectations for students. The C.A.R.E. Model is comprised of
four factors that teachers should utilize when implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. In collaboration with the participants, I facilitated the development of the C.A.R.E. Model as a systematic way to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. The C.A.R.E. Model contends that including those factors mentioned above will lead to positive student outcomes and achievement for Black students in high-poverty schools. Implementation of The C.A.R.E. model will help reduce the misappropriations of culturally responsive pedagogy.

The C.A.R.E model addresses the issue of disengagement among minority and low-SES students by strategically utilizing C.A.R.E. in the classroom. Moreover, when educators care about the students they encounter each day, using the C.A.R.E. model will become a daily strategy. Teachers and leaders who desire to see all students succeed will approach education in a way that requires a constant root-cause analysis to determine what works and what does not work. In essence, educational institutions that are not seeking to reimagine education for minority students in poverty will continue to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and expand the achievement gap between Black and White students.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the C.A.R.E. model seeks to provide teachers with actionable strategies to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. For improvement, the C.A.R.E. model should include a teacher guide and resources specifically for ELA and math teachers. A guide with resources would assist teachers in effectively implementing the model for the best results. The resources may include culturally relevant ELA passages and math problems for eighth graders. Second, the resources should include strategies to build relationships with minority students. Another resource regarding poverty and educating students from poverty should be included. In addition, as the C.A.R.E. model is development into guide, school
districts and teachers in high poverty areas should implement the model to transform the culture of teaching and learning to positively impact student behavior and academic performance.

The second recommendation involves school districts choosing curriculums that are culturally responsive and relevant to their respective student populations. This recommendation may also include curriculum companies publishing culturally responsive curriculums that align with state standards. This will decrease the extra effort by teachers in their attempts to modify lessons to ensure they are relevant and engaging for their students. This suggests future research regarding curriculum alignment with state-wide assessments and if there is a place for a culturally responsive curriculum in K-12 education.

The third recommendation involves ensuring the necessary data drives the focus group session and progress monitoring of the program. Data regarding behavior, grades, and benchmark performance scores should be retrieved and accessible to assist in navigating the next steps of program implementation. For future implementation, data talks should be embedded within the focus group sessions. In addition, the focus group interview questions should consist of valid data blended questions to corroborate the program implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

The last recommendation for future research includes utilizing a larger sample size. Larger sample sizes will reduce the bias and sampling size errors. These errors can occur when any aspect of the sample has the potential to compromise the accuracy of the results. This conveys, that reducing bias and sampling size errors will provide reliability and validity to the implementation and outcome of the program. Therefore, a larger sample size within the school or all eighth-grade teachers would strengthen the study significantly.
Future Considerations

Educating Black Students in Poverty. Teachers must first recognize their own biases and develop cultural awareness. The ability to acknowledge the differences in race, class, and ethnicity allows for equitable teaching practices to manifest in the classroom. This suggests that teachers must acknowledge the inevitable, which is the fact that there are differences in those factors mentioned above, and those differences impact student achievement. Therefore, acknowledging the differences leads to tailor-made instruction that fits the needs of all students.

In addition, White teachers need to acknowledge their culture, privilege, and class and the potential biases that impact their teaching styles. This is important, as minority students from low SES backgrounds may have a negative perception of White teachers that stems from home and environmental influences. Simultaneously, Black teachers need to examine the same factors, because Black teachers are not always equipped to teach in predominantly Black high-poverty schools. Although representation is massively important in high poverty schools with majority-minority students, effective teaching practices are essential to high academic performance regardless of race, gender, or class.

Culturally Responsive Teacher Practices. All teachers should provide equitable practices in the education profession. Specifically, those teachers who are educating high poverty and minority student groups. Teachers in predominantly Black schools with high poverty need to know the benefits of culturally responsive teaching practices, and the potential it has to impact the culture of teaching and learning and improve student behavior and achievement as shown in this research study. In addition, teachers need to understand the impact poverty bears on the academic success of students causing negative factors to deter student learning.
Moreover, teachers need to recognize culturally responsive teaching practices have the potential to level the playing field for students in high-poverty schools. The playing field becomes leveled when students are provided a culturally responsive education. A culturally responsive education involves teachers utilizing students’ cultures to build on their strengths and improve learning skills.

**Culturally Responsive Educational Leadership.** In pursuance of providing students with a culturally responsive education, school leaders must provide avenues to cultivate cultural responsiveness and equity in their schools. First, school leaders must provide annual professional development and insight to the teachers regarding cultural competence and poverty. This will enlighten teachers’ perspectives and generate reflection on the cultural bias that impacts teaching and learning. In addition, school leaders must allow open discussions to occur among teachers concerning race, privilege, and class. This will allow teachers to reflect, gain new perspectives, and grow in cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Next, school leaders must ensure culturally responsive practices are implemented school-wide to establish the mindset of equity over equality. This will ensure every student receives what they need to be successful. School leaders in high-poverty schools must understand the significance of including cultural responsiveness and equity to drive student success. Subsequently, school leaders need to recognize the importance of building relationships with students, parents, and the community. In high-poverty school districts, school leaders need to establish meaningful community connections that positively impact the school culture. Community support and engagement is a culturally responsive practice that has the potential to influence student success. Finally, school leaders in high-poverty schools need to understand that a culturally responsive education begins with the building-level leader. The building-level school
leader sets the tone for the school and has the potential to reduce inequities in education. These inequities are reduced when school leaders empower teachers and provide opportunities for creativity in implementing culturally responsive practices.

**Summary**

As a result of the collaborative efforts involved in this research study at BSMS, an action plan was developed to address the problem of practice regarding minority students in poverty and student achievement. The action plan consisted of two elements, professional development (PD) and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. The participants, Ms. Stovall and Mrs. Brandon, were utilized as a convenient sample of the eighth grade ELA and math teachers at BSMS for the purpose of this research study. The program of culturally responsive pedagogy was established and developed to improve the teaching and learning experiences of the students and teachers. The goals of the action plan elements were achieved.

The PD element developed and increased teacher capacity in culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching students in poverty. For the program implementation element, progress monitoring allowed me and the teachers to gain feedback concerning the program's implementation and how implementation needed to be delivered to give the most significant impact. Lastly, the goal for growth and proficiency occurred in ELA and math as measured by the enCase benchmark assessment.

This applied research study revealed several things about myself and my school. The first thing consisted of underestimating the challenges that delayed the implementation of the program. This revealed preparation and planning should include an alternate plan to ensure the program is on track for implementation. Second, I learned the importance of flexibility while working with the participants to ensure I was considerate of their time. The participants were
impacted by COVID-19, and family and work schedules. It was imperative that I remained flexible throughout the research study to accommodate the participants. Next, I learned the teachers and student population at BSMS need culturally responsive pedagogy to be implemented across all grade levels in the school. Based on the observations, teacher perceptions, and student outcomes, culturally responsive pedagogy positively impacted the eighth-grade students at BSMS. Lastly, throughout this research study, I gained a wealth of knowledge regarding the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in a high-poverty school with predominantly Black students. Daily, I was able to observe the impact of program implementation. The most fulfilling aspect of the program was witnessing the students engage in the learning process while the teachers utilized culturally responsive teaching practices.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Poverty and Education Survey

*Developed by Ghent, E., 2020 and edited by Shanika McKinney, 2022*

Directions: Please respond to each question as accurately as possible by checking one or more, if applicable, of the responses.

Basic Demographic Information Years of teaching experience:

___ 0-5 years ___ 6-10 years ___ 10+ years of teaching experience at this school site:

___ 0-5 years ___ 6-10 years ___ 10+ years Teacher’s Perspective

1. What percentage of your students do you believe are living in poverty?
   ___ None ___ Less than 25% ___ Between 25% to 50% ___ Between 51-75% ___ More than 75% ___ Don’t know

2. Which of the following educational barriers or challenges impact the students you work with?

   Check all that apply. ___ Low attendance ___ Transportation ___ Nutrition and health ___ Achievement gaps ___ Language and cognitive development ___ Lack of adult mentorship ___ Emotional concerns (including anxiety and stress-related concerns) ___ Social knowledge and competence (social skills, ability to self-regulate) ___ Lack of parental involvement ___ None

3. What challenges do you experience while teaching children affected by poverty?

   ____________________________________________________________

Use the following five-point scale to determine your response to the following questions.

Please circle your response 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

4. The school breakfast program is adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students who come to school hungry. 1 2 3 4 5.

5. The school snack and lunch programs are adequate to meet the nutritional needs of students throughout the day. 1 2 3 4 5.

6. I feel that there are adequate staffing resources at my school to meet the learning needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps. 1 2 3 4 5.
7. I feel that there are adequate resources at my school to meet the social-emotional needs of students living in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I feel well prepared to teach in a school where poverty-related issues are present on a regular basis. 1 2 3 4 5

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9. I feel my teacher training was adequate in preparing me for teaching students who live in poverty. 1 2 3 4 5
10. My professional development and school in-service opportunities have increased my awareness of poverty-related issues. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Which of the following school initiatives do you believe are helpful at mitigating educational barriers related to poverty? Check all that apply. 
___ Breakfast Program  
___ Lunch Program  
___ SEL Counseling  
___ School Clubs  
___ Family & Community Engagement  
___ School celebrations (sports day, assemblies, performances)  
___ P/T Conferences  
___ Extra-curricular activities available to students (basketball, football, cheer)  
___ Other (Please describe):
12. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in decreasing the learning gaps and improving learning outcomes for students affected by poverty?

Please comment or explain your response.

13. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful at increasing parent involvement? (e.g., PT conferences, Family & Community Engagement, etc.) Please comment or explain your response.
14. In your opinion, which school initiatives have been most helpful in fostering social-emotional growth and/or instilling hope? (e.g. sports, clubs) Please comment or explain your response.
15. In your opinion, which school initiatives have helped to increase identity and engagement for students, and have helped to foster a sense of belonging? Please comment or explain your response.

Please include any additional comments which you believe would aid my research, including your thoughts on current school strengths/successes and recommendations for school initiatives you would like to see in place in the future.

Please feel free to use this area for any more thoughts you would like to share with me about educational barriers and school initiatives.
Tool: Staff Cultural Competence Self-Assessment

Use this assessment with staff after you have begun discussions about this issue. Reassure them that this is a process to create feedback to identify ways to help them grow.

Directions: Please write 3, 2, or 1 in the space before each of the following statements.

3 = I do this frequently
2 = I do this occasionally
1 = I do this rarely or never

Physical Environment, Materials, and Resources
_____ I display pictures, posters, artwork and other décor that reflect the cultures and ethnic backgrounds of students and families served by our school.
_____ I ensure that magazines, brochures, and other printed materials reflect the different cultures of students and families served by our school.
_____ When using videos, films or other media resources, I ensure that they reflect the cultures and ethnic background of students and families served by our school.
_____ I ensure directly or indirectly (by reminding administration or other staff) that information sent home takes into account the average literacy levels and language of the students and families served by our school.
_____ subtotal/4 = ____ average

Communication
When interacting with students and families who have limited English proficiency I keep in mind that:
_____ Limitation in English proficiency is in no way a reflection of their level of intellectual functioning.
_____ Their limited ability to speak the language or to express themselves in the same way as the dominant culture has no bearing on their ability to communicate effectively.
_____ They may or may not be literate in their language of origin or English.
_____ I use bilingual-bicultural staff and/or personnel to interpret during meetings and other occasions for students and families who need or prefer this level of assistance.
_____ I attempt to understand any familial colloquialisms used by my students and families that may impact our communication.
_____ For students and families who speak languages or dialects other than English, I attempt to learn and use key words in their language so that I am better able to communicate with them.
I understand that it may be necessary to use alternatives to written communications for some students and families, as direct communication via phone or through another person or organization they are familiar with may be more effective and preferred.

subtotal/7 = _____ average

Values and Attitudes

I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with those of cultures or ethnic groups other than my own.

I screen books, movies, and other media resources for negative cultural, ethnic, or racial stereotypes before using them in curriculum and instruction or sharing them with students and families served by our school.

I intervene in an appropriate manner when I observe students or other staff engaging in behaviors that show cultural insensitivity, racial bias and prejudice.

I recognize and accept that individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds may desire varying degrees of acculturation into the dominant culture.

I understand and accept that family is defined differently by different cultures (e.g. extended family members, fictive kin, godparents).

I accept and respect that male-female roles may vary significantly among different cultures and ethnic groups (e.g. who makes major decisions for the family).

I understand that age and life cycle factors must be considered in interactions with individuals and families (e.g. high value place on the decision of elders, the role of eldest male or female in families, or roles and expectation of children within the family).

Even though my professional or moral viewpoints may differ, I accept the parent/guardian and families as the ultimate decision makers for educational services and, supports needed for their child.

I recognize that the value of education may vary greatly among cultures.

I understand that religion and other beliefs may influence how students and individuals respond to traditional education.

I understand that the perception of education has different meanings to different cultural or ethnic groups.

I seek information from students, families or key community resources that will assist in curriculum/instruction adaptation to respond to the needs and preferences of culturally and ethnically diverse groups served by our school.

Before making a home visit, I seek information on acceptable behaviors, courtesies, customs, and expectations that are unique to the culturally and ethnically diverse groups served in our school.

I keep abreast of the major educational concerns and issues for the ethnically and racially diverse student/family population served by our school.
I am aware of the socio-economic and environmental factors that can contribute to educational problems for the culturally, ethnically and racially diverse populations served by our school.

I do not use knowledge of these factors to lower my level of expectations for my students regarding their behavior or academic performance; rather, I provide additional support as needed.

I avail myself to professional development and training to enhance my knowledge and skills in the provision of services and supports to culturally, ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse students.

I strive to become competent in the most current and proven best practices for educating culturally, ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse students.

I advocate for the review of my school’s mission and vision, goals, policies, practices, and procedures to ensure that they incorporate and reflect principles and practices that promote cultural and linguistic competence.

subtotal/19 = average

How to Interpret Your Results
This checklist/assessment tool is intended to heighten awareness and sensitivity to the importance of cultural and linguistic cultural competence. It provides concrete examples of the kinds of beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices that foster cultural and linguistic competence. There is not an answer key with correct responses. However, if you frequently responded “1” you may not necessarily demonstrate beliefs, attitudes, values and practices that promote cultural and linguistic competence within an educational setting.

Source: Adapted from Material Developed by the National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, Washington, D.C. April 2004.
Appendix C

Culturally Responsive Walkthrough Tool

*Developed by Karla E. Vigil and Emily Abedon for the Equity Institute, 2021*

Classroom Culture/Environment: How do I create an inclusive environment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
<th>Student Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The environment is socially and intellectually safe for all students</td>
<td>Teachers use language that validates multiple identities, encourages questioning and builds discourse. Teachers instruct and model a growth mindset. Teachers emphasize effort. Teachers create expectations and criteria for peer collaboration and feedback.</td>
<td>Students take risks in their learning. Students engage cooperatively and collaboratively in their learning. Students engage in exploration, discovery and hands-on learning activities. Students admit when they need help or don’t know something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The classroom has been organized so that the physical landscape includes images, materials, and resources that reflect a wide range of diverse people and perspectives</td>
<td>Teachers provide an opportunity for verbal and written reflections. Teachers embed self-evaluation into lessons. Teachers create learning groups in which all students learn to work collaboratively and independently. Teachers give timely feedback on student work. Teachers familiarize students with how they learn.</td>
<td>Students reflect on their learning. Students exercise voice and choice in their learning. Students are able to provide feedback on lessons. Students can process feedback with the teacher. Students are able to work for appropriate periods of time without direct teacher directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key concepts and facts are interrogated across subject areas to account for multiple perspectives and representation</td>
<td>Teachers use lessons that represent differing viewpoints. Teachers encourage all students to see, question, and interpret concepts from a variety of perspectives.</td>
<td>Students are able to cite multiple points of view on a given topic. Students engage in critical conversations about complex topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Relationship Building: How do I build trust and respect with my students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
<th>Student Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is evidence of understanding of how race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual identity are powerful factors that shape students' identities and therefore impact their educational experience</td>
<td>Teachers use empowering language like “I” statements and choices. Teachers show high expectations for all students. Teachers involve students in reflecting on teaching practices and the learning environment. Teachers provide equitable opportunities for support, praise, and participation.</td>
<td>Students are provided opportunities to reflect on their own learning and behavior. Students acknowledge when they make mistakes and hold themselves accountable. Students practice giving and receiving critical feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations for achievement are clear and allow all students to take responsibility and advocate for their own learning*</td>
<td>Teachers use formative assessment for instructional purposes. Teachers support productive disagreements. Teachers clearly state, post, and maintain high and clear standards for all students. Teachers provide rubrics that are engaging and transparent.</td>
<td>Students are able to paraphrase expectations for their work as well as teacher feedback. Students support statements about their own learning with evidence. Students advocate appropriately for what they need in the classroom. Students engage with rubrics that are visible and transparent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of biases is demonstrated*</td>
<td>Teachers provide encouragement and affirmation to all students. Teachers create meeting high expectations for all students. Teachers create evaluations that measure the multiple ways students learn information. Teachers solicit feedback about classroom culture from students. Teachers provide space for restorative practices.</td>
<td>Students contribute feedback regarding experiences with bias and overall classroom culture. Students are given structure and space to articulate harm or perceived bias. Students can share perspectives about classroom culture without fear of retribution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Communicates clear criteria for success

*Also applies to building a safe classroom culture
**Instructional Strategies: How do I ensure that I’m being culturally responsive with my instruction strategies?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
<th>Student Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lessons are developed using student experiences and prior knowledge</td>
<td>Teachers use students' backgrounds to activate prior knowledge.</td>
<td>Students indicate interest and understanding of the context and framing for new learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers provide multiple access points to challenging assignments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key concepts and facts are interrogated across subject areas to account for multiple perspectives and representation</td>
<td>Teachers use lessons that represent differing viewpoints. Teachers encourage all students to see, question, and interpret concepts from a variety of perspectives.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT

Research Topic: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: A MODEL TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN A HIGH POVERTY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Research Questions:
1. What are teacher perceptions after receiving CRP professional development?
2. After receiving CRP training, was there a difference in the usage of culturally responsive strategies by teachers and inclusion of CRP in the lesson plan design?
3. To what extent did implementation of CRP improve student behavior and discipline in the classroom?
4. To what extent did implementation of CRP improve ELA and Math benchmark growth and proficiency?

Conceptual frameworks: culturally responsive pedagogy, equity, poverty, student achievement

Statement of Consent:

This interview is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Shanika McKinney from The University of Mississippi. The study aims to create a positive culture of learning through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that will improve student outcomes and achievement as measured by school-wide benchmark assessments with a focus on reading and math proficiency and growth. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:

smckinney@asdms.us
smckinn3@go.olemiss.edu

Any question can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis or Dr. Angus Mungal by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:

drdavis@olemiss.edu- Phone: (662)915-1459; amungal@olemiss.edu- Phone: (662)915-7069

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences at BSMS. The purpose of this interview is to capture your perspectives regarding the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and barriers to student achievement at BSMS. The information you share will be used to help the school administration be more effective in implementing equitable and culturally responsive practices school-wide. You are going to be asked a series of questions that relate to your experiences as participants in implementing the program. Your personal
information, including your name, will not be included in any part of the report or the findings. I encourage you to be comfortable sharing your thoughts, opinions, or concerns as I am interested in your uncensored responses. I will be recording your responses to precisely capture your answers in detail. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can stop the interview. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?
Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. After receiving the training, what is your perception of culturally responsive pedagogy?

2. How are you implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in your classroom and instruction?

3. How are you integrating culturally responsive pedagogy in your lesson plans?

4. Are you utilizing the culturally responsive walkthrough tool to assist with instruction, why or why not?

5. Within the indicators on the culturally responsive walkthrough tool, what is a challenge for you and why?

6. Within the indicators on the culturally responsive walkthrough tool, what comes easy for you and why?

7. How can we improve the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in your classroom and instruction?

8. How are you providing equitable practices in the classroom?

9. How are you developing relationships with students and families?

10. How are you creating an inclusive classroom?

11. How are you using cultural referents in the classroom and in instruction?

12. How are you creating opportunities for student voice and experiences?
Appendix F

Post Survey Questions

Rate your understanding and utilization of the culturally responsive training and program implementation.

Strongly Disagree -1 Disagree -2 Neutral -3 Agree -4 Strongly Agree -5

The delivery of the culturally responsive training was engaging and impactful. 1 2 3 4 5

Did knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy impact your lesson planning and instruction? 
1 2 3 4 5

Did background knowledge of poverty and education impact your lesson planning and instruction? 1 2 3 4 5

After receiving the training, I am more culturally aware and competent. 1 2 3 4 5

Student engagement among the students improved in my classroom. 1 2 3 4 5

If student engagement improved, did classroom disruptions and negative behavior decrease? 
1 2 3 4 5

Student achievement improved as measured by school-wide benchmark assessments. 
1 2 3 4 5

I utilized culturally responsive training daily in the classroom after receiving the training. 
1 2 3 4 5

The focus group sessions were effective for improving culturally responsive pedagogy in my classroom.
1 2 3 4 5

Additional comments

________________________________________________________________________
VITA
Shanika C. McKinney

EDUCATION

2022
Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, The University of Mississippi

2018
Educational Specialist, Counselor Education, Mississippi State University

2013
Master of Science, School Counseling, Mississippi State University

2010
Bachelor of Science, Educational Psychology, Mississippi State University

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

2019- Present
Assistant Principal, Aberdeen School District, Belle-Shivers Middle School

2015-2019
School Counselor, Aberdeen School District, Belle-Shivers Middle School

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

Administrator, Career Level, Mississippi License
Professional School Counselor, Mississippi License
National Certified Counselor, National Board for Certified Counselors