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An Exploration of Middle School Teachers' Utilization of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Samantha Phillips

Eastern Illinois University

### **Abstract**

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) can be used as a means for effectively teaching and managing students and decreases the achievement gap between students of Color and their White counterparts. This qualitative study with an ethnographic design examines the utilization of culturally responsive teaching strategies of two middle school teachers and two principals in public schools on the Southwest side of Chicago. The study is guided by one research question: What aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies? The study has two purposes: To analyze the effectiveness of two middle school teachers' utilization of culturally responsive teaching principles within the public-school district and determine if cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT. The data was collected using the following methods for five weeks: teacher observations, teacher interviews, self-assessment survey, principal questionnaires, and classroom resources. The results of the study reported that the two teachers utilized validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering and transformative from Gay's (2018) CRT framework. The principal's questionnaire revealed that the teachers must have ongoing professional development opportunities on CRT in order for their teaching strategies to effectively accommodate the changing demographics of their students.

*Keywords:* culture, culturally responsive teaching, culturally diverse students, cultural awareness, demographics

### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who have loved, supported, encouraged me to be the best I can be throughout everything I do. I can't thank my family and friends enough for being there every step of the way. I love and appreciate each and every one of you with all my heart.

### **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to thank all four participants of the study who took the time out of their busy schedules to do all that they could to ensure this was a success.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The United States (U.S.) is considered to be the land of the free; where all are welcomed and searching for bigger and better opportunities. Consequently, “As the American population continues to grow in racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, the students in the nation’s classrooms increasingly represent a wide variety of cultural backgrounds” (Moore et. al, 2021, p. 1).

Educators and administrators are responsible for the achievement of all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and racial and ethnic minorities per the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a federal legislation that serves the purpose of providing all students with the opportunity to receive fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. It requires that all students in the U.S. be held to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. According to the National Education Association (2020), teacher evaluation systems are different under the ESSA. State accountability systems look for three indicators of student growth: performance on state assessments, English language proficiency, and one indicator of school quality (student engagement, educator engagement, school climate, access to resources, etc.).

Teachers are expected to meet the expectations expressed in the ESSA when teaching culturally diverse students (CDS). Therefore, educators much commit to understanding culturally responsive teaching (CRT), becoming culturally aware and competent, implementing best practices, and developing culturally responsive classroom management skills because it is essential for closing the achievement gap between students of color and their White

counterparts. This demonstrates how CRT is a necessity for teachers to meet the demands of the ESSA.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (2021), State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Carmen I Ayala, stated, "Cultural responsiveness is inclusive of all the experiences our educators, students, and families bring to the classroom. Our state produces a 30-point achievement gap between Black and White students and a 22-point achievement gap between Hispanic and white students" (p.1). To achieve the goal of closing the achievement gap in the state of Illinois, in March 2021, the state of Illinois adopted the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS). These standards were constructed from research-based practices for closing achievement gaps. Gay (2002) notes that teacher education programs inadequately prepare teachers for ethnically diverse students. As a result, according to the Illinois State Board of Education (2021), the purpose of the CRTLS, is to establish specific criteria for preparing teachers for working with CDS on the topics of systems of oppression, students as individuals, students as co-creators, leveraging student advocacy, family and community collaboration, content selections, and student representation in the learning environment. The standards are designed to help future teachers engage and connect with students from all different backgrounds in order to create an environment most conducive to learning. Thus, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive teaching and standards to make progress toward closing the achievement gap in the state of Illinois. It is imperative to assess the utilization of CRT strategies currently happening in classrooms so that teacher education programs can adjust their programs to effectively prepare preservice teachers for implementing the CRTLS.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study has two purposes. The first purpose is to analyze the utilization of two middle school teachers' culturally responsive teaching strategies within a large metropolitan city and midwestern school district, Gilmore Public Schools. Second, to determine if cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT strategies.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by one research question: What aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies?

### **Hypotheses**

Teachers with more teaching experience will utilize more culturally responsive teaching strategies. Further, teachers' level of cultural awareness as measured by the self-assessment survey affects their selection of CRT strategies. In addition, the utilization of culturally responsive teaching strategies will be based on the socially constructed composition of the school, neighborhood, level of diversity, and cultural background.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because the findings pose implications for the state of Illinois on the current utilization of culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom. The findings of the study may give insight into the professional development current teachers need to use more effectively CRT strategies. The evaluation of teachers' cultural awareness will allow teachers to learn that they might need more training and knowledge on CRT in order to meet the needs of the increasing population of diversity in the classroom. The findings will further provide insight into teacher education programs in Illinois to better equip preservice teachers for teaching CDS. These programs will see that they need to address the issue of preservice teacher'

personal biases, experiences, and knowledge of culture to determine how they affect their teaching practices.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Diversity.** Individual differences (e.g. personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender, identity or expression, country of origin, ab ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations) that can be engaged in the service of teaching, learning, and advancing the human condition. Additionally, it includes tracking the numerical and proportional representation of various racial and ethnic groups among students and employees (Illinois Mathematics & Science Academy, 2018).

**Culture.** The socially transmitted ways of thinking, believing, feeling, and acting within a group that has a shared history and life experiences (Gollnick & Chinn, 2016).

**Dominant Culture/Group.** The culture whose values and behaviors have been adopted by most institutions in society, including schools. In the United States, middle-class, White, English-speaking, heterosexual Christian culture with its historical roots in Europe. Dominant culture and dominant groups are used interchangeably (Gollnick & Chinn, 2016).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** A pedagogy that affirms the cultures of students, views the cultures and experiences of students as strengths, and reflects the students' cultures in the teaching process. The pedagogy is sometimes called culturally relevant teaching (Gollnick & Chinn, 2016). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. CRT affirms that all students, regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have equal access to school learning (Banks, 2010).

**Cultural Awareness.** The idea of sympathy in communication by displaying subtlety to the difference between what you code and/or decode and what the interlocutor code and/or decodes, i.e being conscious that human interaction differs from one people to another, from one culture to another, from one society to another, from one nation to another (Echifor & Borca, 2020).

**Cultural Competence.** The ability to understand and relate to the uniqueness of individual cultures that influence each person's perspective (Stuart, 2004). Set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Diller & Moule, 2005).

### **Summary**

The demographics of students in classrooms across the U.S. and Illinois are growing at a rapidly increasing rate. Therefore, teachers must be prepared and knowledgeable to provide CDS with an adequate education. CRT is an educational theory that embraces the cultural background of all students and can be used as means to improve academic achievement. It can also be used to inform administrators of necessary professional development for current and prospective teachers. The purpose of the study is to analyze the current use of CRT strategies in two seventh-grade math classrooms on the southwest side of Chicago, Illinois. The findings of the study will pose implications regarding cultural awareness, the use of CRT strategies, and professional development. The following chapter will further outline research to support the need for CRT and its benefits.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

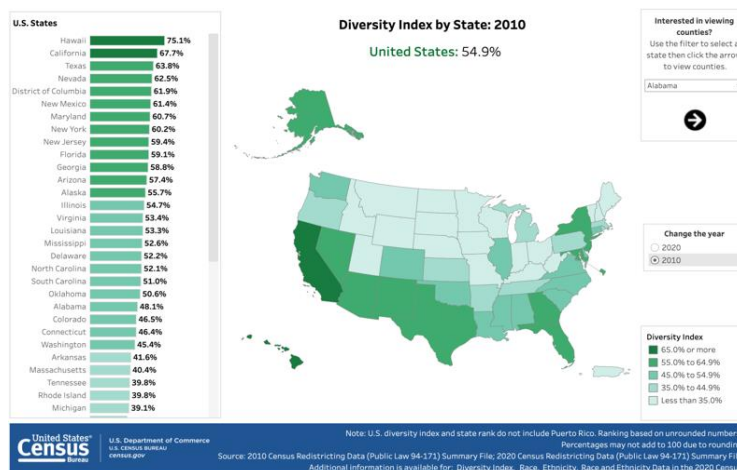
Within this chapter, an explanation of the changing demographics in the United States will be presented. Culturally responsive teaching will be defined according to the theoretical framework. Finally, in-depth considerations for cultural awareness and competence, best practices, culturally responsive classroom management, and teacher preparation will be outlined according to the literature.

### Changing Demographics

Examining student demographics in the United States (U.S.) and Illinois assists in understanding the importance and need for culturally responsive teaching. As it relates to education, changing demographics means that changing perspectives are present in the classroom. As student populations increase in diversity, teachers must recognize that cultural backgrounds can significantly affect the experiences and mindset of students. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below show changing demographics in the U.S. from 2010 to 2020.

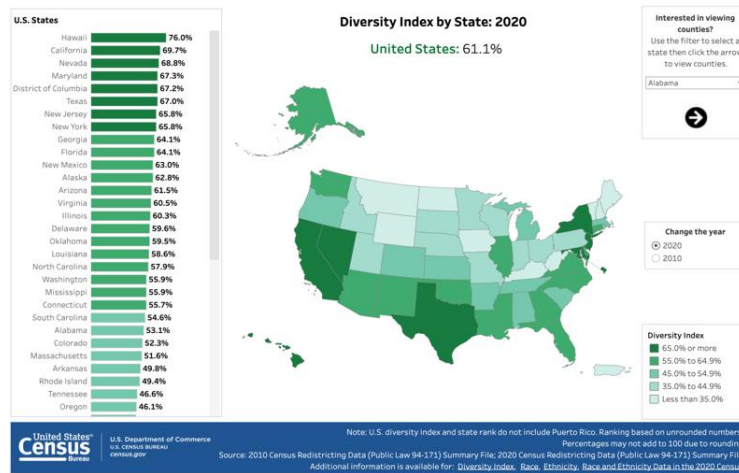
**Figure 1.**

*Diversity Index in the United States 2010*



Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010



**Figure 2.***Diversity Index in the United States 2020*

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020

Diverse populations are continuously and rapidly growing all over the United States of America. The Census Bureau explains, “We use the Diversity Index (DI) to measure the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different race and ethnic groups” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, p.1). In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the diversity index for the U.S. at 54.9% (Figure 1). Ten years later, the Census Bureau reported the diversity index at 61.1% (Figure 2). This fact demonstrates an increase of 6.2% within a ten-year duration. Presuming the diversity index will continue to increase as shown in the figures above, in the next ten years, the DI could double. These changing demographics have the most significance in the number of diverse students that teachers will encounter in classrooms across the U.S.

According to the Illinois Report Card (2020), more than half of the student population of Illinois, 52.6%, identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races. In comparison, the state teacher demographics by ethnicity (2020) demonstrates that only, 15.7%, of teachers identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Pacific

Islander, and Two or More Races. Thus, there is an extensive cultural difference between the number of culturally diverse students and teachers in the state of Illinois.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

For the purpose of this review, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), will have the same meaning. Culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy will be used as a synonym for culturally responsive. There are many aspects to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. Knowledge of this subject is the foundation of CRT making it one of the most important aspects. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them effectively” (p.106). Banks (2010) explains that culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning. CRT affirms that all students, regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have equal access to school learning. Gollnick and Chinn (2021) define culturally relevant teaching as “a pedagogy that affirms the cultures of students, views the cultures and experiences of students as strengths, and reflects the students’ cultures in the teaching process” (p.332). Rychly and Graves (2012) further validate the idea that culturally responsive pedagogy has to respond to all cultures that are present in one’s classroom. Using this pedagogy makes a connection between a student's background knowledge and new information that is based on their natural way of learning. Teachers will begin to see that using culturally responsive teaching will give students validation and confidence as active members of the learning environment. This increases the level of student achievement as well as overall success when the methods used to present information are culturally responsive. Gay (2002) supports this by explaining that CRT can be measured by an increase in attendance, student

engagement, and test scores. Educators must access a wide range of cultural elements to be successful in this form of teaching.

### **Cultural Awareness and Cultural Competence**

To become a culturally responsive teacher, teachers must first assess their personal level of cultural awareness (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Cultural awareness serves as the foundation for accurate communication with students in the classroom. It becomes prominent as teachers meet students from different cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, teachers must take a step back and evaluate their cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions. A part of being culturally aware is understanding why we do things a certain way, how we see the world, and why we react to things as we do. The other side of this is knowing the elements of other cultures. Dolidze (2017) agrees that elements of culture refer to the beliefs, values, customs, products, and communication styles of a specific group or society. A culture can also be broken down into three parts: perspectives, practices, and products. Products of culture include food, music, and art. These are easier identifiers of a culture because they are at the forefront. Perspectives and practices, on the other hand, are harder to recognize. What members of a culture think and feel as well as how members communicate and interact are embedded deeper within the culture.

Cultural awareness contains gaining insight into what other cultures are made of. However, being culturally aware does not mean one is culturally competent. Stuart (2004) explains that cultural competence includes the ability to understand and relate to the uniqueness of individual cultures that influence each person's perspective. It is being able to effectively communicate and collaborate with diverse people as well as demonstrating value for one's cultural identity. Wachtler and Troein (2003) support the idea that becoming culturally competent encompasses gaining a momentous appreciation for cultural differences related to

personal identities, values, and beliefs. Teachers must build a knowledge base that includes three important things: an understanding of cultural characteristics and contributions to different ethnic groups; detailed information about the cultural idiosyncrasies of specific ethnic groups; and contributions different ethnic groups make to a variety of disciplines and deeper understanding of multicultural education supported in Gay (2002).

In the end, teachers must develop cultural awareness and cultural competence to effectively teach diverse student populations. The first step is assessing their personal levels of cultural awareness. The second is building a knowledge base of various ethnic groups that includes factual information which will contribute to one's level of cultural awareness and cultural competence.

### **Best Practices**

There are a variety of teaching strategies that can be used as best practices that reflect a culturally responsive learning environment. However, when implementing teaching strategies in the classroom, teachers need to be aware of and consider all the attributes of the best practices.

Gay (2018) reveals that culturally responsive teaching practices should be:

- **Validating.** Culturally responsive teaching is validating and affirming because it acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum; it builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic and abstractions and lived sociocultural realities; it teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages; it

incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skill routinely taught in schools. (p. 37)

- **Comprehensive and Inclusive.** Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire ethnic of success. (p. 38)
- **Multidimensional.** Multidimensional culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques classroom management, and performance assessments. (p. 39)
- **Empowering.** Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act. In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained. (p. 40)
- **Transformative.** It is very explicit about respecting the cultures and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian American students, and it uses these as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning. It recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process. (p. 41)
- **Emancipatory.** Culturally responsive pedagogy is liberating in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream

canons of knowledge and ways of knowing. Central to this kind of teaching is making knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. (p. 42)

- **Humanistic.** As such, it is ultimately concerned with the human welfare, dignity, and respect of the various, individuals and groups who comprise the United States and the world. (p. 44)
- **Normative and Ethical.** Educational discourse about equity and social justice recommends extending similar rights and opportunities to students from other ethnic groups, especially those discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized (that is, minority groups of color). (p. 45)

These attributes give students a sense of belonging and self-pride, an understanding of the many layers of culture, and a realistic idea of how students of various ethnic groups interact with the world around them. It allows students to see the value and explore cultures that they may not be taught explicitly. Ensuring that teachers consider and have knowledge of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching and learning makes all of the difference in being able to decipher the best practices for diverse students.

### ***Cooperative Learning***

Although there is a variety of techniques to choose from, research proves that cooperative learning is the more effective and dominant instructional approach. This is a technique seen in many classrooms across the country and can be applied to all content areas and grade levels. Toppel (2015) notes that cooperative learning engages student voices because students have the opportunities to share ideas and to talk to each other which contributes to students feeling validated as members of the learning community. Furthermore, Bui and Fagan (2013) emphasize that cooperative learning is effective for students from culturally diverse backgrounds and

English Language Learners (ELLs). It provides opportunities to practice oral language skills. Also, it creates a supportive community of completing tasks collectively which is a part of students' everyday lives. Therefore, cooperative learning allows students to see their cultures from home reflected in their learning environment. This is a practical example of what culturally responsive teaching looks like in the classroom.

### **Culturally Responsive Classroom Management**

Classroom management is an aspect of teaching many teachers struggle with. Culturally responsive teachers ensure that their classroom management skills are also culturally responsive. "Given that most referrals that lead to exclusionary discipline practices are written by teachers for disruptive behaviors that begin in the classroom, it is argued that disproportionality and the subsequent school-to-prison pipeline begin in the classroom and therefore must be addressed in the classroom" (Larson et. al, 2018, p. 154). Weinstein et. al (2003) explains that there are equities of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). This includes recognizing that everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, contributes to the culture, acknowledging the cultural differences amongst everyone, and understanding schools as a larger institution in society. Once teachers are made aware of these prerequisites, they will see why CRCM is important for culturally responsive teaching. Bondy et al. (2007) point out that CRCM is "grounded in the teachers' judgments about appropriate behavior and these judgments are informed by cultural assumptions" (p. 326). After examining a class' diversity, teachers can use social stereotypes such as racial profiling, gender profiling, cultural identifiers, and groups of individuals to influence classroom management strategies. CRCM alleviates the inappropriate use of these factors as a form of managing student behavior.

Particularly, there is an overrepresentation of African American students in discipline data. Losen and Gillespie (2012) suggests they are three times as likely to get suspended as White students. As a result, African American students lose approximately twice as many days of instruction as a result of discipline as White students (Vincent et al., 2012). Larson et. al (2018) note “Extant literature exploring teachers’ use of culturally responsive practices is currently inconclusive (Bottiani et al., 2017); however, it is hypothesized that using such practices would further and more equitably improve student behavioral outcomes and reduce disproportionality” (p.154). Culturally responsive practices insist that teachers think carefully and deliberately about what, why, and how they are managing their classrooms. Thus, classroom management is about the teachers’ ability to respectfully develop culturally responsive practices and discourse.

### **Teacher Preparation**

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is becoming more prominent to current and preservice teachers with the continual growth in diverse student populations. Rychly and Graves (2012) suggest that there are two groups of students to consider when addressing the importance of culturally relevant teaching: underachieving students in the U.S. and the anticipated arrival of new students. Hence, some students are not meeting expectations because of cultural differences. Teachers often have challenges teaching diverse students in the way that they learn whether it is experience, teaching strategies, or language. Griner and Stewart (2013) agree that there is a disconnect between the cultures of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students and the education systems serving them as the central origin of the achievement gap. Schellenberg and Grothaus (2009) further explain that, in history, students of color and their families have experienced a significantly lower rate of academic achievement compared to their



peers who identify as White. This results in growth in student underachievement. Various pieces of literature have emphasized that practicing CRT is an effective means for “addressing this unjust and imbalance in education” (Griner & Stewart, 2013, p. 587).

The utilization of culturally responsive teaching is a skill that prospective teachers should be taught within their teacher education programs. Teacher candidates must be granted the opportunity to critically analyze important issues such as race, ethnicity, and culture. They also understand how these important concepts shape the learning experience for many students. Consequently, “Preservice teachers should learn about multicultural education and different aspects of diversity through experiences fully integrated into all classes and field placements in order to acquire the appropriate awareness, knowledge, and skills that support their understanding of and commitment to culturally responsive teaching” (Moore et. al, 2021, p. 2).

### ***Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS)***

In efforts to accommodate to accommodate CDS in classrooms across the state, the Illinois State Board of Education (2021) adopted the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards in March 2021. The standards were designed to encourage future teachers to engage in self-reflection, to get to know their students’ families, to connect the curriculum to students’ lives, and to support student leadership. The standards will be implemented in educator preparation programs and will help aspiring educators build the skills they need to engage students who may come from a different backgrounds and cultures than them, in order to create an environment most conducive to learning.

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed emphasizes a need for the utilization of more culturally responsive teaching strategies in the U.S. to actively address the achievement gap and meet the

needs of all students. Changing demographics demonstrate the rapid and continuous growth in ethnically diverse populations. Due to these facts, teacher preparation programs much prepare preservice teachers for teaching culturally diverse students. CRT can be used as a means for effectively teaching and managing students. Teachers must assess their level of cultural awareness, build an extensive knowledge base, and implement the best CRT strategies in their classrooms. In the end, the goal is to notice a steady close in the achievement gap.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methods**

This chapter describes the methods of the study. It explains how the sample and research site was selected. Then, this chapter describes the instruments that were used for data collection as well as how the data was analyzed.

#### **Design of the Study**

The study used an ethnographic design. Ethnography focuses on “discovering and describing the culture of a group of people” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 427). It places emphasis on the nature of observation which studies groups and individuals in a natural setting in an attempt to understand insider views, meaning, and perspectives. Additionally, this was a naturalistic inquiry that studies real-world situations as they unfold naturally in a non-manipulative and non-controlling way. The goal is to explore human thoughts and behaviors in a way that is situational, social, contextual, personal, and unpredictable. Ethnographic designs also analyze the focus and interest of the participants. The focus of this study includes a deep-angle lens, examining the depth of the phenomena to learn more about them. For the interest, it aims to understand and appreciate particular groups and individuals to inform local policies.

#### **Approach of the Study**

The study used a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, largely narrative in nature to gain insights into a particular phenomenon from observations, interviews, questionnaires, and data sources. This approach explores and understands the meaning of individuals in a group ascribing to a social or human problem. “Qualitative research refers to scientific practices that are used to generate knowledge about human experience and/or action, including social processes” (American

Psychological Association, 2010, p. 5). The study seeks to understand information from another person's point of view of CRT. This is an approach of empathetic understanding of others' viewpoints, meaning, intentions, and cultural beliefs which will generate data inductively.

A qualitative approach was chosen because the data that was analyzed and collected will consist of "natural language (i.e., words), researcher observations (i.e., social interactions), and or/participants' expression (i.e., artistic presentations)" (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 5). The data analysis included findings from teacher observations, interviews, self-assessments, and classroom materials. Through four methods of data collection: teacher observations, teacher interviews, teacher self-assessments, and classroom materials, the study presented findings from two schools in one district. The findings from this study will only analyze the utilization of CRT strategies at two schools in the same school district for a set duration. The findings from this study could evolve over time.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study has two purposes. The first purpose is to analyze the utilization of two middle school teachers' culturally responsive teaching strategies within the Gilmore Public School district. Second, to determine if cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT strategies.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by one research question: what aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies?

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The researcher hypothesizes that teachers with more teaching experience will utilize more culturally responsive teaching strategies. Further, teachers' level of cultural awareness as measured by the self-assessment survey affects their selection of CRT strategies. In addition, the

utilization of culturally responsive teaching strategies was based on the socially constructed composition of the school, neighborhood, level of diversity, and cultural background.

**Setting**

Chicago is home to 2,716,450 residents, 50 wards, 77 community areas, and 100 neighborhoods. The schools that were selected are located on the southwest side of Chicago, Illinois. Figure 3 illustrates the Southwest Side and Chicago in terms of race and ethnicity, housing annual income, percentage of high schoolers in Gilmore School District, and the highest level of education for ages 25 and over.

**Figure 3**

Demographic Information of Southwest Side and Chicago

	Southwest Side	Chicago
<b>Total Population</b>	364,780	2,709,534
<b>Race and Ethnic Breakdown of Total Population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60% Latino</li> <li>• 14% White</li> <li>• 23% Black</li> <li>• 3% Asian/Pacific Islander</li> <li>• 1% Other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29% Latino</li> <li>• 33% White</li> <li>• 29% Black</li> <li>• 7% Asian/Pacific Islander</li> <li>• 2% Other</li> </ul>
<b>Household Annual Income Breakdown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29% below \$25,000</li> <li>• 35% \$25,000 - \$59,999</li> <li>• 19% \$60,000 - \$99,999</li> <li>• 16% \$100,000 or above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24% below \$25,000</li> <li>• 27% \$25,000 - \$59,999</li> <li>• 19% \$60,000 - \$99,999</li> <li>• 29% \$100,000 or above</li> </ul>
<b>Percentage of High Schoolers in Chicago Public Schools</b>	92%	87%
<b>Highest Education Level of Population Age 25 and Over</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26% high school or less</li> <li>• 38% high school diploma</li> <li>• 18% some college, no degree</li> <li>• 18% college degree</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15% high school or less</li> <li>• 23% high school diploma</li> <li>• 17% some college, no degree</li> <li>• 45% college degree</li> </ul>

Data Source: 2015–2020 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Based on Figure 3, the Southwest Side of Chicago appears to be the better side of the city for the purposes of the study. It has a higher percentage of people who identify as non-white which increases its level of diversity. The Southwest side also has higher percentages in academic achievement based on the percentage of high school students in the district at 92% compared to Chicago in general at 87%. It also has higher percentages for the population of ages twenty-five and over for their highest level of education. This demonstrates the success of the Southwest Side compared to Chicago as a whole.

### **Sample**

The study uses two teachers from Gilmore Public Schools (GPS) who volunteered to take part in the study. The teachers were invited to participate through email. The email was sent to a total of four teachers within the Gilmore Public School district. Two of those teachers agreed to participate in the study. The two teachers are Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School and Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy. The teachers were selected based on the criteria that they have been teaching in Gilmore Public Schools for at least three years. All the names of the district, schools, and teachers are pseudonyms. The study was conducted in Gilmore Public Schools located in the Chicagoland area. The sample of the study was purposefully selected. The research site was selected based on where the teachers were located. Following is the description of the teachers in the sample based on the two research sites.

### **Research Site 1**

#### ***Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School***

Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School has been teaching in Gilmore Public Schools for fifteen years. Before coming to Ambition, she worked at one other school in the same school district. She has a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and is currently

working on obtaining a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. Aside from that, she has the following endorsements: Middle School Math (5-8), Middle School Social Studies (5-8), Self-Contained General Education (K-8), English as a Second Language (K-8), and Gifted Education Certification (K-8), Algebra I (5-8). She has also been certified through Gilmore Public Schools to be the head of the algebra initiative at Ambition Community School. In 2020, Mrs. Calcote completed all the modules for Achieve the Core's Dismantling Racism in Mathematics but has no formal professional development training on CRT. She has 15 years of experience teaching students of various cultural backgrounds. She identifies as a White female. Her feelings towards working with culturally diverse students include believing that the more she gets to know her students, the more she can make their learning experience more relevant.

***Mrs. Harris, Principal of Ambition Community School***

Mrs. Harris, the principal of Ambition Community School, self-reported that she identifies as an African American female. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Biology and a Master of Arts in Teaching. She is currently in the process of getting a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership.

***Ambition Community School***

The Illinois Report Card (2021) reports that Ambition Community School has a total of 397 students. Ambition has a high rate of racial and ethnically diverse students: 82.9% Black, 14.9% Hispanic, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.8% White. In addition, Ambition presents a teacher retention rate of 88.9% which exceeds the rates of the district and state. In comparison to the district (78%) and state (48.1%), 90.2% of Ambition's population are low-income students meaning that they qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid. Eighteen percent of Ambition's population are students with

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 8.8% are English Language Learners (ELLs). The student mobility rate is lower than it has been since 2017 at 2%. It also has an average class size of 19:1. In terms of academic achievement, Ambition is classified as a commendable school. This means that this school has no underperforming student groups, a graduation rate greater than 67%, and whose performance is not in the top 10% of schools statewide.

## **Research Site 2**

### ***Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy***

Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy has been an educator for 20 years. She obtained a Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in Transportation and Logistics, a Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Management, and a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. Aside from that, she has the following endorsements: Math, Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts, and Computer Technology. She has had three years of formal professional development training on CRT through Teach Plus. Mrs. Jones has been teaching students from various cultural backgrounds for 5 years. She identifies as a African American female. Her feelings towards working with culturally diverse students include believing that a diverse classroom adds so much to the learning environment and is beneficial to students.

### ***Mrs. Smith, Principal of Victorious Academy***

Mrs. Smith, the principal of Victorious Academy, self-reported that she identifies as an African American female. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Middle School Education, a Master of Science in Non-Profit Management: Specialization in Grant Writing, a Master of Arts in Education: Specialization in Reading and Literacy, and a Master of Arts in Education Leadership: Principal's Endorsement.



### ***Victorious Academy***

The Illinois Report Card (2021) reports that Victorious Academy has a total of 258 students. Victorious has a high rate of minority students as well. Their students are 98.8% Black, 0.4% Hispanic, and 0.8% White. In comparison to the district (78%) and state (48.1%), 57.4% of Victorious' student population qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid making them low-income students. Twelve percent are students with IEPs and 0.4% are ELLs. The student mobility rate is at its highest since 2018 at 5%. Victorious has a teacher retention rate of 85.3% which matches the district's and is less than the state's rate. Their average class size is 27:1. For academic achievement, Victorious Academy is classified as a targeted school. This means that the school has one or more groups performing at or below the level of all students group in the lowest-performing 5% of schools.

### **Instrument**

The data was collected using four instruments and one data source. The instruments that were used are an observation checklist, interview questions, a questionnaire, and a self-assessment survey and the classroom materials as the data source.

### ***Observation Checklist***

A total of 20 observations were conducted. There were ten observations for each classroom that had a duration of 60 minutes. Therefore, a total of approximately 1,200 minutes over the course of five weeks of data was gathered from the observations. The observations took place in a seventh-grade mathematics classroom. During the observations, the researcher acted as a non-participatory observer. Observations were completed at the same time and on different days for each of the observations to get a well-rounded perspective of the class and the teacher's teaching strategies. A detailed checklist and field notes were completed during each observation

(See Appendix B). The checklist analyzed Gay's (2018) framework, physical environment, materials (textbooks, resources, handouts), and teacher-to-student interactions. The qualitative data that was gathered from the observations will show the teacher's natural language, social interactions, and human experiences.

### ***Interview Questions***

The purpose of the interview was to gather data on the teachers' personal and professional experiences and understanding of CRT. Two interviews were conducted in person and via Zoom. The interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes per teacher. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the teacher. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the study to get baseline data. This interview focused on the teacher's philosophy of education, current knowledge of CRT, and their best teaching strategies. It consisted of fourteen questions (See Appendix C). Appendix C list the fourteen questions for the initial interview. The second interview was conducted at the end of the study. This interview focused on the data from the observations including the effectiveness of teaching strategies, teacher-to-student interactions, and possible improvements/recommendations. It consisted of eight questions (See Appendix D). Appendix D was constructed after the observations are conducted. The qualitative data from the first and second interviews were transcribed and put into coding to find themes. These themes were triangulated with the data from observations and self-assessment surveys.

### ***Self-Assessment Survey***

One survey that consists of 22 questions, using Likert scale and open-ended, were administered to both teachers. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the teachers' level of cultural awareness and determine how it influences their teaching strategies. It seeks to unpack their understanding of their students' demographics as well as the role it plays in their decisions

for their classroom. The survey also determines if their level of teaching experience influences their likeliness to use CRT strategies (See Appendix F). The data from the Likert scale will be analyzed descriptively and data from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively. This data was used to determine if the teachers are truly culturally aware as it relates to personal biases, values, beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and privileges.

### ***Principal Questionnaire***

The principal questionnaire consists of five open-ended questions (See Appendix E). This questionnaire seeks to investigate if and how two principals are preparing their teachers to teach CDS. This questionnaire focuses on current professional development opportunities the principals are providing for their teachers. Effective principals support teachers in improving their instruction by observing teachers in the classroom, evaluating and providing high-quality feedback, coaching teachers in instructional practices, and helping teachers use data to monitor and address students' needs. They help build a productive climate. The qualitative data from the questionnaire were triangulated with the data from observations.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using four instruments and one data source over the course of five weeks during the fall semester of 2022. The instruments that were used are an observation checklist, interview questions, a questionnaire, and a self-assessment survey. The survey was administered before the initial interview is conducted and observations begin. After the initial interview, observations took place for a consecutive five weeks. Following that, the teachers participated in a closing interview and the same survey was administered again. Classroom materials were collected in combination with the four instruments to supplement the information provided in the observations, interviews, and surveys. Mathematics was selected as the content

area due to the reliability of the content of the subject area to address students' diverse learning styles, interests, and abilities. Mathematics as a content area is objective and produces nonbiased results. These materials include a hard copy and e-copy of the math textbook/curriculum, additional resources, and student work samples.

### **Data Analysis**

All data were analyzed qualitatively. The only exception is the data from the survey that uses the Likert scale. The data analysis includes an inductive and creative synthesis, holistic perspective, voice, perspective, and reflexivity. It also includes findings from teacher interviews, principal questionnaires, observations, surveys, and classroom materials.

### ***Observation***

A checklist was used during observations (See Appendix B). The data from observations using a checklist will be analyzed descriptively. In addition, data from the field notes will be analyzed qualitatively. The data from the checklist will analyze the physical environment, materials (textbooks, resources, handouts), Gay's (2018) framework, teaching strategies, and teacher-to-student interactions. The analysis will use descriptive data and search for local patterns, themes, and holistic features.

### ***Interview***

Data from the interview was transcribed and put into coding using Saldana (2018) to look for predetermined themes from Gay's (2018) framework. The interview questions seek to discover the teacher's perspective on culturally responsive teaching as well as their current level of understanding of culture in their classrooms.

### ***Questionnaire***

The data from the questionnaire consist of five open-ended questions. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively. The principals completed the questionnaire online. The researcher summarized the responses to items that belong to the same theme. Three out of the five questions covered professional development opportunities in the school. After cross-examination, the researcher matched the themes from the questionnaire with the aspects of the framework.

### ***Survey***

The data from the survey consist of both direct answers and open-ended questions. Therefore, the data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Data from other resources/materials from teaching and modules will be analyzed based on the learning standards and will be compared with the CRT standards outlined by the Illinois State Board of Education.

### **Summary**

The study uses a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design. It analyzes real-world situations as they happen naturally. The data were collected for five weeks from four sources: observations, interviews, questionnaires surveys, and classroom materials. The instruments were self-developed and modified based on previous theoretical research on CRT. Two middle school math teachers volunteered to participate in the study. The teachers are from different schools in the same school district on the southwest side of Chicago, Illinois. The principal's participation in the study is crucial for gaining insight into the role that administrators play in the teacher's use of CRT strategies. The data were analyzed qualitatively to determine what aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies as well as evaluate layers of reality such as the type of people in the group, how they think, and their interactions.

All the data sources were used to answer the research question: what aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies?

## CHAPTER IV

### Results and Findings

This chapter presents the results of the study that were reported from the data analysis of four instruments and one data source of the study. Results were reported based on each of the instruments and data source for each teacher. The four instruments that were used for data collections was an observations checklist, teacher interviews, self-assessment surveys and principal questionnaires. One data source included classroom materials (textbook, resources, and handouts). All of the data was analyzed qualitatively. The only exception is the data from the survey that used the Likert scale was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The data analysis includes an inductive and creative synthesis, holistic perspective, voice, perspective, and reflexivity. Mathematics was selected as the content area due to the reliability of the content to address students' diverse learning styles, interests, and abilities. The study was guided by one research question: What aspect of culturally responsive teaching practices are teachers using in their teaching strategies? The result of the study will be reported based on the data from the instruments.

#### Observations

##### *Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School*

Mrs. Calcote demonstrated that her teaching strategies were culturally responsive because six of the aspects of Gay's (2018) framework were present throughout the observations: validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and humanistic. The teacher displayed cultural responsiveness by focusing on the student's identity through the teaching strategies. She quite frequently validated and empowered the students by reminding them to "Use the strategy that works best for you" and stating "I don't give you these

assignments because they are easy to grade. It's because I get to see who you are as a math student". These statements are targeted towards the student's dispositions and attitudes as they approach learning as well as translate into academic competence and personal confidence. This exhibits how the foundation of the teaching strategies is the student's math identity making Mrs. Calcote's teaching strategies culturally responsive.

However, Mrs. Calcote's choice of teaching strategies was not emancipatory and normative and ethical as much as the other aspects. Table 1 shows the aspects of the Gay (2018) framework that this teacher, from Ambition Community School, used the first seven aspects more often. Mrs. Calcote struggled to display that her teaching strategies were normative and ethical. Table 1 also shows that day nine was an outlier because the teaching strategies lacked four of the aspects: comprehensive and inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. This is unusual given that for all nine days Mrs. Calcote was very consistent in the utilization of teaching strategies.

**Table 1**

*Teachers' Demonstrated Skills Teaching Using Gay's Framework*

Observation	Teacher 1 (Ambition)		Teacher 2 (Victorious)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,3,4,5,7	2,6,8
2	1,2,3,4,5,7	6,8	1,2,3,4,5	6,7,8
3	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,3,4,5	2,6,7,8
4	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,3,4,5	2,6,7,8
5	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,2,3,4,5,7	6,8
6	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,3,4,5	2,6,7,8



7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	-	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8
8	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	8	1,2,3,4,5	6,7,8
9	1,3,4,5	2,6,7,8	1,2,3,4,5	6,7,8
10	1,2,3,4,5,6	7,8	1,2,3,4,5	6,7,8

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Note: Number in columns “Yes” and “No” indicates the Gay’s Framework. 1=Validating, 2= Comprehensive and Inclusive, 3= Multidimensional, 4= Empowering, 5 = Transformative 6 = Emancipatory, 7= Humanistic, 8 = Normative and Ethical

### *Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy*

Throughout the observations, Mrs. Jones’ teaching strategies presented less aspects of the framework. Table 1 above shows how frequently each of the Gay (2018) framework aspects were present in Mrs. Jones’ teaching strategies. In Table 1, the teacher demonstrated cultural responsiveness in the choice of teaching strategies because four of the aspects were consistently present throughout the observations: validating, multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. Occasionally, her teaching strategies were comprehensive and inclusive. She would allow students to work together on some assignments but in only six of the ten observations, Mrs. Jones developed a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility through the teaching strategies.

Equally important, Mrs. Jones’ teaching strategies were rarely emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. The teacher’s lack of complete cultural responsiveness comes from her approach to teaching. Her teaching strategies reflect that of traditional style teaching. Traditional teaching methods focused on the teacher as the only source of information in the classroom. It embraces the idea of a teacher-centered method involving face-to-face interaction, mainly from the teacher to the student (Balliu, 2017).

### **Physical Environment**

***Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School***

The physical environment of the classroom was organized in a way that was set up for the students to collaborate. Mrs. Calcote's classroom has five tables that allow six students to be seated at each of them. There are also some flexible seating options such as the game chairs on the floor that are positioned closer to the SMART board. Table 2 vividly shows that the physical environment of this classroom is culturally responsive because the teacher has organized the class in a way that is most suitable for the teaching strategies that were used. For example, one of the teaching strategies that were present in the classroom was math talks. The math talks happened daily and were the first thing the students engaged in after entering the classroom. The content of the math talk was pulled from the school's selected math curriculum. Math Talks are open conversations that require students to collaborate with one another. The physical environment of the classroom allows the teacher to use collaboration as an effective teaching strategy.

**Table 2***Frequency of Physical Environment for Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 Throughout Observations*

Day	Teacher 1 (Ambition)		Teacher 2 (Victorious)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
2	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
3	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
4	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
5	1,2,3,4	-	2	1,3,4
6	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3

7	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
8	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
9	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3
10	1,2,3,4	-	2,4	1,3

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Note: 1=Arrange Classroom Furniture, 2= Manage Materials, 3= Wall Space, 4= Environmental Preference.

***Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy***

The physical environment of this classroom is organized in a way that reflects a traditional classroom. Mrs. Jones' classroom is set up in four rows and all students are facing forward toward the SMART board. There are no flexible seating options available for the students. Table 2 shows that Mrs. Jones was consistent in how she organized the class. Table 2 further reveals that overall half of the physical environment was not culturally responsive. The usage of the wall space was not culturally responsive because there was no indication of the student's identity on the posters and signs. The arrangement of the classroom furniture was also not culturally responsive because the classroom was not organized in a way that allowed flow, collaboration, and active learning to take place. However, the materials were stored in an easily organized and accessible way and the environmental preferences were suitable for what the students were learning at the time making those parts of the physical environment culturally responsive.

**Teaching Materials Used In Teaching**

***Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School***

When analyzing the materials used in this classroom the focus was to determine if the materials being used were beneficial to the students. The teacher primarily used the online

version of the chosen math textbook. However, there were additional resources that were implemented into the teaching strategies such as IXL, Go Math, Virtual Nerd, and Bluestreak. The teacher very seldomly used handouts during instruction. Table 3 shows how frequently the textbook, resources, and handouts were used throughout all ten observations. Resources were used the most as they ensure that the students are mastering the content and can be used as evidence in the teacher's personalized learning plans for the students.

**Table 3***Frequency of Materials Used for Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 Throughout Observations*

Day	Teacher 1 (Ambition)		Teacher 2 (Victorious)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	2	1,3	1,2,3	-
2	2	1,3	2,3	1
3	2	1,3	1,2	3
4	1,2	3	1,2	3
5	1,2	3	1,2,3	-
6	1,2,3	-	1,2	3
7	1,2	3	2	1,3
8	1,2	3	1,2	3
9	3	1,2	3	1,2
10	1,2	3	3	1,2

Note: 1=Textbook, 2 = Resources, 3= Handout

*Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy*

When analyzing the materials used in this classroom the focus was to determine if the materials being used were beneficial to the students. Similar to Mrs. Calcote, Mrs. Jones primarily used the online version of the chosen math textbook. Additional resources included IXL and Virtual Nerd which are the same resources that were used at Ambition Community School. Table 3 shows that the teacher most frequently used the textbook and additional resources to ensure mastery of the content. Mrs. Jones uses the data generated from IXL to make informed decisions about instructional practices. In comparison to Mrs. Calcote, Mrs. Jones used all three forms of materials (textbook, resources, and handouts) more often than not.

### **Teacher-to-Student Interactions**

#### ***Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School***

Mrs. Calcote's interactions with the students included a foundation of social-emotional learning (SEL). The observations revealed that this teacher noticed immediately when her students were not mentally engaged in learning. She often took time to do SEL check-ins at the beginning of class to gauge where the students are socially and emotionally. The teacher-to-student interactions also included heavily encouraging the students to interact positively with one another and promoting collaboration. Mrs. Calcote often made comments such as: "Just know that you are a resource to one another", "I see that we're all struggling with this. Let's figure it out together", and "Speak up. I want your voice to be heard". Table 4 shows that Mrs. Calcote's teacher-to-student interactions are culturally responsive because of how often she demonstrated that she knew her students, created a welcoming learning environment, set and communicated expectations, encouraged students to interact positively with one another, promoted collaboration, provided academic supports/interventions, and accommodated students learning styles.

Additionally, Gay's (2018) framework was present throughout these interactions. Mrs. Calcote's interactions with the students were comprehensive and inclusive because they developed a sense of community when she often told students to "Share your knowledge and strategies". The interactions were transformative because they recognized the students' existing strengths by stating "I am thoroughly impressed with your performance". According to Gay (2018) being transformative includes enhancing a student's strengths through the instruction process. Mrs. Calcote does this through these interactions by telling them "Don't ever erase your brilliance. It's about the process". Lastly, Mrs. Calcote stated, "I know what your personal goals are, and make sure that your performance is reflecting that". This is multidimensional because it builds student-teacher relationships.

**Table 4***Frequency of Teacher-to-Student Interactions*

Day	Teacher 1 (Ambition)		Teacher 2 (Victorious)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	1,2,3,4,5,7	6	1,2,3,7	4,5,6
2	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,4,5	6,7
3	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,6,7	4,5
4	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,7	4,5,6
5	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	2,3,6,7	1,4,5
6	1,2,3,4,6	5,7	1,2,3,6	4,5,7
7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,4,5	6,7
8	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,4	5,6,7
9	1,2,3,	4,5,6,7	1,2,3,4,5	6,7

10	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	-	1,2,3,4,5	6,7
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Note: 1= Know Your Students, 2= Create a Welcoming Learning Environment, 3= Set and Communicate Expectations, 4= Encourage Students to Interact Positively with One Another, 5= Promotes Collaboration, 6=Provides Academic Supports/Interventions, 7= Accommodates Students Learning Styles

***Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy***

Mrs. Jones' interactions with the students were centered around classroom management. She tended to address the student's behavior in front of the class and proceeded to inform the rest of the students not to do the same thing. For example, during direct instruction, she would constantly redirect the students by telling them to "Turn around", "Face forward", "We are at level 0", and "Listen to these instructions".

Table 4 shows how frequently the teacher-to-student interactions were culturally responsive. Mrs. Jones, from Victorious Academy, demonstrated that she knew her students, created a welcoming learning environment, and set and communicated expectations most often. Sometimes she encouraged students to interact positively with one another and promote collaboration. She very seldomly provided academic support/interventions and accommodated students' learning styles.

Gay's (2018) framework was present throughout these interactions. The teacher-to-student interactions also included a substantial amount of validation. Mrs. Jones' interactions built bridges of meaningfulness between students' experiences by stating "Take your time. Use what you know and what you've experienced to support your answers. If you need to, use real-world scenarios to help you understand." According to the framework, CRT should be multidimensional in that it encompasses curriculum content and instructional techniques. Mrs. Jones does this by informing students that "You will be dealing with transactions and money for

the rest of your life. So it's important that you learn how to write checks and balance checkbooks” as she introduced a project. Finally, Mrs. Jones regularly empowered the students by advising them to “Say your answers with confidence”.

### **Findings**

Overall, the teacher observations revealed that the approach to teaching is what made the most significant difference in how many aspects of the Gay (2018) framework the teachers used in their teaching strategies. Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School takes a personalized learning approach to teaching. Thus, the utilization of teaching strategies was more culturally responsive because of how much she focused on the student’s identities. Her daily class periods with the 7th graders began with a Math Talk where everyone was required to voice their strategies for solving a problem chosen from the textbook. Then, the students were assigned practice problems to complete with the help of their peers. The only time that students worked individually was doing personalized learning times which happened in the last twenty minutes of the class period. During this time, the students created products from their learning menus. The products that each student produces while sticking to the learning target looks different from that of their peers. The students can show their mastery of the content in the way that they want to be assessed.

On the other hand, Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy takes a traditional approach to teaching. As a result, her teaching strategies are less culturally responsive. Her daily instruction included a video or direct instruction while the students took notes. Following that, the students would complete practice problems. During this time, the students were instructed to work quietly and individually. The students felt comfortable enough to ask questions during this time. When Mrs. Jones noticed that more than one student was asking the same question she would reteach



the skill needed to complete the assignment. In the end, the students always went back to working quietly and individually. This approach to teaching is reflected in the utilization of CRT strategies and the aspects of the Gay (2018) frameworks highlighted in the observations.

## **Interview**

### ***Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School***

During the initial interview, Mrs. Calcote began by explaining that her philosophy of education is very closely aligned with the mission and vision of Ambition Community School. She believes in allowing students to be assessed in a way that they typically would not. In fact, she states “Rather, to allow them to have a choice and voice in how they show their learning, and that it reflects who they are so that it can be relevant to them”. The interview revealed that at the beginning of the school year the teaching strategies she uses include more modeling and it is teacher-centered. This was supported in the observations.

As the school year progresses, Mrs. Calcote actively moves from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. She states “It becomes less of me and more of them”. The interview further discovered that Mrs. Calcote uses current figures in mathematics, specifically figures of Color, to empower her seventh-grade students. She believes in making a connection between the past and present history of math to show students that historically there are careers in math that demonstrate high levels of achievement.

This teacher also self-reports that she heavily emphasizes the need to focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) as an aspect that contributes to students' performance in the classroom. She states, “It brings those things to light like real social factors that contribute to those inequities. In that piece, I think we get into the social factors and I love that”. Her argument was if students cannot focus on their work because of social conflicts and emotional turmoil their

performance will not meet expectations. She extends rights and opportunities to students from other ethnic groups, especially those discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized by “empowering them socially and emotionally first. I can tell them that they can overcome and be better than what they’ve experienced.”

Ambition Community School prioritizes social-emotional learning and personalized learning. A part of Ambition's personalized learning curriculum is the learning menus. It allows the students to work outside of the textbook and is grounded in Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK). The learning menu is divided into the four levels of DOK and consists of creative, relevant, and technology-based assignments. Mrs. Calcote explained that “It gives them the opportunity to be independent about how they show their work and be assessed”.

During the closing interview, Mrs. Calcote also stood firmly in her belief that there is continuous growth to be made when it comes to making knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to all students. Math is content that originates from Egyptian, Babylonian, and Middle Eastern cultures. However, it is important to consider who is contributing now in the more current times. Looking into those resources will allow Mrs. Calcote to enhance her efforts to make knowledge accessible.

This interview further reveals the rationale as to why the physical environment of the classroom is organized in the way that it is. She self-reported that the goal was to organize the classroom in a way that reflected a high school classroom or a collaborative college course. Having the tables and flexible seating options serves two purposes: providing students with autonomy over their learning and forcing academic collaboration. Lastly, Mrs. Calcote claims that even though she does a lot of open discussions, small group work, and learning menus, having formal CRT training would be beneficial. She states “I would like to grow in the area of

that modern approach like maybe getting some fresher resources on how to bring in more of a cultural perspective”.

As it relates to the Gay (2018) framework, Mrs. Calcote’s philosophy of education and current teaching strategies makes connections to the students’ outside experiences, create a safe space to have controversial conversations, and provide multiple entry points for her students. In the initial interview, Mrs. Calcote explained “Allowing for that open-endedness for them to research whatever they want with respect to how their culture and ethnicity have brought contributions to math. The encompassing of the product choice that they have. Because part of their culture is the things they like; their interest. So allowing that open-endedness in how they demonstrate their learning”. That alone shows how her teaching strategies are validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. The interviews highlight that at the core of the teaching strategies is the student’s identity. The interviews indicate that the teacher uses students’ characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as a tool for better instruction. The students of Color see themselves and their communities as a part of the academic space created in this classroom. Thus, allowing her to be more culturally responsive according to the Gay (2018) framework.

### **Table 5**

#### *Narrative Voice of Teachers: Aspects of CRT Practices used in Teaching Strategy*

Gays’ CRT Framework	Example Quote/ Verbatim
Validating	<p>“Rather, to allow them to have a choice and voice in how they show their learning, and that it reflects who they are so that it can be relevant to them”. (Mrs. Calcote)</p> <p>“The third floor has been turned into a black excellence gallery. We just did that this year. On every wall, you see black excellence. It goes from one end of the hall to the other”. (Mrs. Jones)</p>

Comprehensive and Inclusive	<p>“It allows for you to work outside of the textbook. It encompasses Webb's depth of knowledge. So we base it off of that and it's the depth of knowledge 1, 2, 3, and 4”.</p> <p>(Mrs. Calcote)</p> <p>“You're allowed to exist to practice whatever culture you have. It's an all-inclusive accepting environment. It's a lot of telling kids that and getting kids to share what their traditions are” (Mrs. Jones)</p>
Multidimensional	<p>“Allowing for that open-endedness for them to research whatever they want with respect to how their culture and ethnicity have brought contributions to math. The encompassing of the product choice that they have. Because part of their culture is the things they like; their interest”. (Mrs. Calcote)</p> <p>“In the beginning, my philosophy on education was that every child can learn with just different learning styles and focus on every child where they are and just move them along”. (Mrs. Jones)</p>
Empowering	<p>“By empowering them socially and emotionally first, I can tell them that they can overcome and be better than what they've experienced”. (Mrs. Calcote)</p> <p>“With children, you just have to build them up. You just have to tell them “I know that you can do this. I know that you're equipped to do this. I know that you have the tools to do this. I want you to be resourceful in doing this”. (Mrs. Jones)</p>
Transformative	<p>“I would like to grow in the area of that modern approach like maybe getting some fresher resources on how to bring in more of a cultural perspective”. (Mrs. Calcote)</p> <p>“That kind of just goes back to knowing the kid and what their strengths are. I know what their strengths are and it's important you know what their strengths are”. (Mrs. Jones)</p>
Emancipatory	<p>“Okay yeah, we can talk about Egyptians, Babylonians, Middle Eastern, and all these people from way back when. But what about who's contributing now in the more current</p>

	times? I think there's room for growth are getting some resources. (Mrs. Calcote)
	“There is definitely an Afrocentric focus here. If it comes up then, yes. But I don’t reach outside of my community”. (Mrs. Jones)
Humanistic	“It brings those things to light like real social factors that contribute to those inequities. In that piece, I think we get into the social factors and I love that”. (Mrs. Calcote)
	“When everyone does well, we all do well. So it’s the same adage that we were told: Pull somebody else up by their bootstraps. You make it up there, reach back, and pull somebody up” (Mrs. Jones)
Normative and Ethical	“I do find it difficult in math because most of the time, they are speaking about the math. But inevitably, my goal is to have students making their own leaning menus”. (Mrs. Calcote)
	“Student-to-student I like to let them explain things to each other, especially somebody who gets it. I tell them to explain to them in your language. Because sometimes they speak a whole different language that we don’t understand” (Mrs. Jones)

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***Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy***

Mrs. Jones also began the initial interview by explaining that her philosophy of education is multifaceted by stating “In the beginning, my philosophy on education was that every child can learn with just different learning styles and focus on every child where they are and just move them along”. With the recent turn of events in the world, Mrs. Jones’ philosophy of education has shifted to what prepares the students for the environment that they are living in.

The interview revealed that this teacher has limited knowledge on culturally responsive teaching even though she previously taught in an environment where 50% of her students were African American and the other 50% were Latinx. The interview further disclosed that this

teacher does not use the teaching strategy that works best for her students. She explained that from her experiences she found that since her students enjoy each other so much she has to have a more structured environment that is not built for collaboration. She states “But we have to go back here to receive instruction because I can't get their attention here if they are at a table. That's because we have happy kids. Happy kids talk a lot.” In her efforts to implement more collaborative learning activities, she found that her students don't know how to effectively collaborate which gives reasoning as to why Mrs. Jones' teaching style is traditional.

When discussing how the teacher helps students maintain identity and connections to their ethnic groups, Mrs. Jones provided a macroscopic view of this. She referred to how the social studies teacher and the school as a whole focused on African-American history and black excellence. In response to parent surveys, the middle school teachers at Victorious Academy decided to turn the third floor of the building (where the middle school classes are located) into a black excellence gallery. From one end of the hallway to the other, the walls are framed with Black artwork and contributions of African Americans past and present. Mrs. Jones stated, “Our population is still 99.9% African American so we celebrate who we are and the contributions that we've made to society”. There was no reference to how this happened in her classroom and through her teaching strategies. Nonetheless, through an outside professional learning community and the network school improvement program, Mrs. Jones conducts empathy interviews at the beginning of every school year. She pointed out that “the empathy interviews give me a multifaceted look at each student and I found that I have a deeper connection with them”.

In the closing interview, Mrs. Jones self-reports some extensive reflection on her current teaching strategies. Surprisingly, she does not believe that her teaching strategies make

knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to her students by saying “There is definitely an Afrocentric focus here. If it comes up then, yes. But I don’t reach outside of my community.” Her explanations also included the idea that the middle school teachers at Victorious Academy need to instill more pride into their students. The Afrocentric focus in their teaching strategies allows them to do so. When providing the rationale for the organization of the physical environment of the classroom, she admitted to knowing that it was wrong and needed to be changed. The rationale included references to the student's behavior and their ability to stay focused during instruction. Mrs. Jones believes that the students have to be seated independently to keep their attention. “My classroom is set up for focus and it's not set up for collaboration right now.” Most importantly when given the opportunity to discuss how she would change her approach to teaching she wishes that she could be more relaxed and not so rigid. In fact, she stated, “I wish that there was a more artsy side and lightheartedness to the things I do. If I could just get a little bit over there on the artsy side, I think that would help my teaching because it's very structured.”

As it relates to the Gay (2018) framework, the interviews show that Mrs. Jones cares about who the students are individually and what that brings to the classroom. Mrs. Jones spends a lot of time getting to know the students on a personal level. As a result, the knowledge that she has about the students is reflected in her teaching strategies. Consequently, she can be validating, multidimensional, empowering, and transformative routinely. The current teaching strategies don't lend themselves to being comprehensive and inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and normative and ethical. Thus, exposing her to be less culturally responsive according to the Gay (2018) framework.

## **Findings**

From the observations, the teaching strategies used by both teachers, Mrs. Calcote and Mrs. Jones, it appears she struggled to address the last aspect of the framework which is normative and ethical. In their closing interviews, they both were asked: how can you incorporate more educational discourse about equity and social justice for students? Both teachers agreed that they want to incorporate activities into their teaching strategies that allow the students to engage in this discourse about equity and social justice on their own. For example, Mrs. Calcote said that “inevitably, my goal is to have students make their own learning menus. So then the other students are going to complete it. Therefore, encouraging the discourse.” In agreement with this, Mrs. Jones said “Student-to-student I like to let them explain things to each other, especially somebody who gets it. I tell them to explain to them in your language. Because sometimes they speak a whole different language that we don't understand”. Also, both of their answers included remarks on how math as a content area does not create conversations that are centered around equity and social justice. Hence, supports the notion that the content area restricted the type of discourse that the teacher was able to use in their teaching strategies which limited the level of cultural responsiveness.

### **Self-Assessment Survey**

One of the purposes of the study was to determine if cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT strategies. The data from the self-assessment surveys examine the teacher's cultural awareness, teaching CDS, and student demographics. Mrs. Calcote ensures that the teaching strategies used in the classroom are culturally responsive by embracing one's identity both personally and academically, allowing voice and choice on how students want to demonstrate their learning and, including activities that dive into coaches and job career options. The student demographics that influence the use of teaching strategies are ethnicity, race, gender, and age.



Mrs. Calcote's feelings towards working with culturally diverse students include making learning experiences more relevant for them and preparing them for the real world. Table 5 shows Mrs. Calcote's level of cultural awareness. Mrs. Calcote answered always to nine of the items on the self-assessment survey. That indicates that she believes that she is always aware of her personal biases, values, beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and privileges. This level of cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT strategies. As seen in the observations, Mrs. Calcote's teaching strategies displayed almost all of the aspects of the Gay (2018) framework throughout the five weeks. A high level of cultural awareness translates into how she approaches teaching in her classroom, her choice of teaching strategies, and teacher-to-student interactions. Being culturally aware, helps Mrs. Calcote recognize and appreciate her student's beliefs, customs, and values to interact with them without prejudice or judgment. This leads to more cultural connections and fewer interpersonal conflicts arising from cultural differences. By acknowledging and understanding the culture of the students in her classroom she can incorporate that into the personalized learning curriculum at Ambition Community School. This is seen specifically in the various levels of DOK in the learning menus. Correspondingly, the students are motivated to participate in class as well as to create products from the learning menus.

**Table 6**

*Frequency of Self-Assessment Survey Responses Teacher 1 (Ambition)*

Question/Item	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
1	0	0	0	0	2
2	0	0	0	0	2
3	0	0	0	0	2

4	0	0	0	0	2
5	0	0	0	0	2
6	0	0	0	0	2
7	1 (Post)	0	0	0	1 (Pre)
8	0	0	0	0	2
9	0	0	0	0	2
10	0	0	0	0	2
11	2	0	0	0	0
Total	3	0	0	0	19

Conversely, Mrs. Jones ensures that the teaching strategies are culturally responsive by focusing on what makes each individual student different. To accommodate the demographic of students this teacher modifies word problems in math to be more reflective of the culture by changing names and scenarios. All participant's feelings toward working with culturally diverse students include inviting the opportunity because a classroom is beneficial to all students. Table 6 displays Mrs. Jones's level of cultural awareness. Mrs. Jones answered always to Majority of the items on the self-assessment survey. At the same time, she answered sometimes for three of the items and almost always for one of the items. That is, Mrs. Jones understands that sometimes she is aware of her weaknesses in the area of cultural diversity and tries to improve them as well as modifying her lessons and teaching strategies to ensure that they are culturally responsive.

**Table 7**

*Frequency of Self-Assessment Survey Responses Teacher 2 (Victorious)*

Question/Item	Never	Almost	Sometimes	Almost	Always
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		Never		Always	
1	0	0	1 (Pre)	0	1 (Post)
2	0	0	0	0	2
3	0	0	0	0	2
4	0	0	0	0	2
5	0	0	0	1 (Pre)	1 (Post)
6	0	0	2	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	2
8	0	0	0	0	2
9	0	0	0	0	2
10	0	0	2	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	5	1	16

This level of cultural awareness is translated to the choice of teaching strategies and teaching style. As seen in the observations, Mrs. Jones was consistent in demonstrating half of the aspects of the Gay (2018) framework. It can be concluded that because Mrs. Jones does not always modify lessons and is less aware of her weaknesses when it comes to cultural responsiveness, she cannot effectively use CRT strategies. The data that is provided in the self-assessment survey supports that of the observations. Thus, illustrating that her lower level of cultural awareness contributed to the aspects of the framework seen in the teaching strategies.

### **Findings**

Altogether, the self-assessment survey suggests that both teachers were consistent in their level of cultural awareness before, during, and after the study. There was one significant difference in the responses between the two teachers. Mrs. Calcote from Ambition Community School is never aware that student demographics affect the overall success of the classroom compared to Mrs. Jones from Victorious Academy who is always aware of this. From the observations and interviews, it seems as though their responses would be flipped. Mrs. Calcote's response to this item shows that she's less culturally aware of her experiences and background play in her interactions with others. Additionally, Mrs. Calcote's response to the seventh item of the survey changes from the beginning to the end of the study. At the beginning of the study, she responded that she was always aware and accepted that her experiences and background impact how she interacts with and trusts others. At the end of the study, her response to this item shifted from always to never. The participant's response challenges what was seen in the observations. No evidence from the study explains why there was such a significant change. The participant could have either given a socially desirable answer or mismarked while completing the survey.

### **Principal Questionnaire**

#### ***Principal Harris of Ambition Community School***

At Ambition Community School Mrs. Harris provides professional development for teachers in the areas of SEL, multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), data-driven instruction, and curriculum. Professional development opportunities take place often. Mrs. Harris provides weekly teacher team meetings (TTMs), monthly teacher leadership meetings, and quarterly principal-directed days. This participant believes that involving the instructional leadership team and monitoring the effectiveness of these opportunities are all ways to improve professional development planning at the school. In order to meet the needs of the culturally diverse student

population at Ambition Community School, Mrs. Harris looks for teachers who have experience with them or have an ESL endorsement. Last year, a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) committee was formed to work on teacher mindset.

### ***Principal Smith of Victorious Academy***

At Victorious Academy, Mrs. Smith provides professional development opportunities for teachers in the areas of planning and preparation, standards and objectives, questioning and discussion, student engagement, and using data to inform and assess instruction. In addition to the professional development center downtown instruction, Mrs. Smith offers additional opportunities in the areas of SEL standards and implementation, schoolwide climate and culture management, and MTSS. There is some form of professional development or coaching cycle support offered weekly. Improvements in professional development planning include implementing blocked time into the weekly or bi-weekly schedules to provide consistent training that is responsive to school data. To prepare teachers for working with CDS, Mrs. Smith provides appropriate curriculum and instructional resources as well as student perspective surveys to inform students' choices and preferences. Victorious Academy also has incorporated Humanities Fine Arts and Performing into the curriculum. However, in the end, given that Victorious Academy has a nearly 100% African-American student population they teach African American culture more than anything.

### **Conclusion**

The biggest difference between the two schools is how often they have professional development opportunities available to the teachers. Ambition Community School has weekly professional development for teachers to look at instruction and how will the curriculum is benefiting the students through TTMs. The opportunities provided by Mrs. Harris support what

the researchers saw in the teacher observations with Mrs. Calcote. They can continuously modify and revise the curriculum because of how often they are given the opportunity to engage in a professional learning community. This is directly connected to the aspects of the Gay (2018) framework that was seen in the observation.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion and Conclusion

The study has two purposes. The first purpose is to analyze the utilization of two middle school teachers' culturally responsive teaching strategies within the Gilmore Public School district. Second, to determine if cultural awareness contributes to the use of CRT strategies. This chapter includes the discussion, implications, recommendations, limitations, future research, and the conclusion of the study.

#### Discussion

The research question that guided this qualitative study was what aspects of culturally responsive teaching are teachers using in their teaching strategies. The research question sought to determine what aspects of the Gay (2018) framework teachers were currently using in the classroom. The aspects that emerge from the data indicated how culturally responsive their teaching strategies are currently. The best practices of CRT should be validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical (Gay, 2018).

The observation, interview, and self-assessment survey support the conclusion that the aspects that teachers are currently using are validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. Through the interview and self-assessment surveys, the researcher was able to identify how the teacher's educational background and experiences with culturally diverse students (CDS) played a role in their level of cultural awareness. Through the observations that took place over five weeks, the researcher was able to see if the aspects of the teaching strategies that were revealed in the interviews were seen in the observations. The results and findings further disclosed how professional development

opportunities provided by the school's principal can contribute to cultural responsiveness which, in turn, is reflected in the teaching strategies chosen by the teachers.

The results and findings show that the teacher's years of experience had no connection to their utilization of CRT strategies. There's only a five-year difference in the teachers' experience. Therefore, one could conclude that teaching experience alone shouldn't be a factor in their use of CRT strategies. In fact, the results and findings demonstrated that there was no significant connection between teaching experience and the utilization of CRT strategies.

In addition to experience, the researcher hypothesized that teachers' level of cultural awareness measured by the self-assessment survey affects their selection of CRT strategies. The data from the study proves that the teachers' level of cultural awareness did play a role in how much of the Gay (2018) framework was displayed in their selection of strategies. The data from the self-assessment survey was used to determine if the teachers are truly culturally aware as it relates to personal biases, values, beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and privileges. Cultural awareness encompasses gaining a momentous appreciation for cultural differences related to personal identities, values, and beliefs (Wachtler & Troein, 2003). When assessing the teachers' level of cultural awareness, both participants displayed differing attitudes towards and approaches to teaching and engaging with CDS which supports the researcher's hypothesis that cultural awareness affects their selection of CRT strategies.

Lastly, the utilization of CRT strategies will be based on the socially constructed composition of the school, neighborhood, level of diversity, and cultural background. The socially constructed framework, specifically student demographics, was one of the biggest factors in the teachers' selection of CRT strategies. Ambition Community School has a higher population of students who come from Latinx backgrounds. According to the Illinois Report



Card (2021), Ambition has a high rate of racial and ethnically diverse students: 82.9% Black, 14.9% Hispanic, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.8% White. As a result, the teacher from this school had to consider more than one culture that was present in the classroom. That is, Mrs. Calcote's teaching strategies needed to give students the opportunity to express and embrace their identity which is supported by the data collected from the observations and interviews.

On the other hand, the Illinois Report Card (2021) reports that Victorious Academy has a high rate of minority students as well. However, 98.8% are Black, 0.4% are Hispanic, and 0.8% are White. The seventh-grade math classroom that the researchers observed consisted of students that were all African-American. Because of this, Mrs. Jones stood firmly in her belief on multiple occasions that an Afrocentric approach to teaching is better fitting for her students. Thus, justifying that the socially constructive framework of the school makes a difference in the utilization of CRT strategies.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

There are some implications of the study for the state of Illinois. The findings provide insight into how the state of Illinois should prepare future teachers. The results present the current utilization of CRT strategies in the classroom. Although this data comes from one school district and two schools within that district, the findings can be used to better equip preservice teachers for teaching CDS especially because the Illinois State Board of Education passed the Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (CRTLS). The purpose of the CRTLS is to establish specific standards that will apply to the issuing of all Illinois professional educator licenses. The standards help future teachers engage and connect with students from all different backgrounds. The results of this study help teacher education programs see that they need to address the issues of preservice teachers' personal biases, experiences, and knowledge of

culture as these factors will influence their teaching practices. The findings suggest that a teacher sharing aspects of cultural identity with students is not an adequate substitution for CRT.

There are some recommendations for educators as well. The results of the study are intended to examine CRT strategies. After reviewing the findings the following recommendations are presented. The first recommendation is that teachers should regularly self-assess their cultural awareness and determine how it is reflected in their teaching strategies. Cultural awareness fosters CRT which is more of a priority now than ever. It demonstrates the importance of teaching children about diversity and accepting multiculturalism as a positive aspect of life as early as possible. Not only are student bodies becoming less homogeneous, as illustrated in chapter two with the changing demographics presented by the U.S. Census Bureau, but also governing systems in school boards are beginning to address issues of race, gender, and class. For that reason, educators need to consistently assess their cultural awareness.

Secondly, it is recommended that administrators give their teachers more opportunities to participate in professional development that covers the topics of working with culturally diverse students and CRT strategies. Administrators must understand that teachers cannot move forward and change their approach to teaching without being trained to. Providing professional development opportunities allows teachers to increase their knowledge. Teachers must build a knowledge base that includes three important things: an understanding of cultural characteristics and contributions to different ethnic groups; detailed information about the cultural idiosyncrasies of specific ethnic groups; and contributions different ethnic groups make to a variety of disciplines and deeper understanding of multicultural education (Gay, 2002).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations to this study. The first and major limitation is the sample of the study. The findings of the study are limited from the perspective of two public school classrooms, one school district, and one grade level. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to various classrooms within the same district, applied to multiple school districts, or other grade levels. A classroom is a setting where many things can be discovered. The researcher specifically analyzed the utilization of CRT, the physical environment, teacher-to-student interactions, and resources. As a result, the findings of the study will be limited to what the researcher is equipped to see. There may have been other notable things taking place that were not beneficial to the purpose of the study and not specifically linked to the observation checklist or interview questions.

The second limitation is that the study does not focus on sensitivity. The study seeks to triangulate data from a survey on the cultural awareness of the teachers with data collected through interviews and observations. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to all public school teachers' levels of cultural awareness. The third and final limitation of the sample is that the teachers are self-reporting their level of cultural awareness on the survey. Consequently, the teachers' own biases may skew the truthfulness of their answers.

### **Future Study**

Future studies that investigate the Gay (2018) framework should examine why it is so difficult for teachers to incorporate the last aspects of the framework (emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical) into their teaching strategies. Future studies should also investigate how the content area affects the level of cultural responsiveness that can happen according to the framework. The researcher found that the selected content area did not promote conversations that are emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical.

Further research into these aspects should dive deeper into how each aspect is defined. For example, according to the theoretical framework, emancipatory means liberating in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing; making knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. For some content areas, it could be difficult for teachers' strategies to be emancipatory because content-specific language can be restrictive. In tangent, further research should examine how those definitions connect to how preservice teachers are learning to teach the content in their future classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

With the state of Illinois implementing the CRTLS, there needs to be some evaluation of what is currently taking place in the classroom. This data from this study can be used to inform the state's decisions on how they need to prepare teachers based on current teaching strategies being used within the schools around the state. Although the data collected in this study only looks at two teachers within one school district, the methodology of this study can be applied to school districts in which any preservice teachers begin teaching after their teacher education programs. Accordingly, this prepares those teachers to teach the demographic of students that are present and those districts; which, in turn, makes their teaching strategies culturally responsive.

There is an extreme need for CRT based on the data collected by the researcher. It was only last year when State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Carmen I Ayala explicitly explained that "Cultural responsiveness is inclusive of all the experiences our educators, students, and families bring to the classroom. Our state produces a 30-point achievement gap between Black and White students and a 22-point achievement gap between Hispanic and White students" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2021, p. 1). This study aligns with previous studies on CRT

by Banks (2010), Gay (2002, 2018), Larson et. al (2018), LaRocque (2007), Moore et. al (2021), and Russell and Russell (2014).

The findings from this study emphasize the need for CRTLS at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Through teacher observations, interviews, and self-assessment surveys in combination with principal questionnaires, the overall findings of this study prove two things: (1) that teachers must have ongoing professional development opportunities (provided by principals) on CRT in order for their teaching strategies to effectively accommodate the changing demographics of their students; (2) teachers need to continuously assess their level of cultural awareness as it plays a role in the utilization of CRT strategies which, in return, will contribute to making progress at closing the achievement gap in the state of Illinois.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Recruitment Email

Good Afternoon,

Here's a little synopsis about what I will be doing in the study.

#### 1. **Data from observations using checklist and field notes**

A minimum of four observations will be conducted for each of the classrooms. Each observation will be last between 55- 60 minutes for each observation for each class. A total of approximately 440-480 minutes of data will be gathered from the observations. Observations will be done at different times and days for each of the observations for each class to get full information about the class and teacher teaching. Observations will be using a detailed checklist and field notes. During the observations, the researcher will act as a non-participatory observer.

#### 2. **Interview using open-ended and some guiding questions.**

The purpose of the interview is to gather data on personal and professional experiences, and their understanding of CRT. Two interviews will be conducted in person, by telephone, or online and it will take approximately 60-90 minutes for each interview. The first interview will be conducted at the beginning of the study to get the baseline data and the second interview will be conducted at the end of the study. Data from the first and second interviews will be compared to find themes. These themes will be triangulated with the data from observations.

#### 3. **Other resources and materials from teaching and modules**

Resources and materials from mathematics will be collected during the study. These resources include hard copy and e-copy such as textbooks, teaching materials, modules, assignments/projects, and test scores. Language arts was selected to the contents of the subject area for diverse learning styles, interests, and abilities.

##### 1. **Self-Assessment Survey**

A total of two surveys will be administered to both teachers. The survey will evaluate the teachers' level of cultural awareness and competence to determine how it influences their teaching approach, strategies, and methods.

<b>School</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Grade Level/Number of Class</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Self-Assessment</b>
Ambition Community School; Victorious Academy (K-8)	TBA	7th	2 (Pre and post)	10	2 (Pre and post)

If this works, **please provide the schedule of your seventh-grade students** as I will use it to create a schedule for my observations and interviews. I am aware of CPS' COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines. Therefore, I am fully vaccinated and can provide proof of vaccination. I am also

willing to get a COVID test prior to beginning the research and on a weekly basis, if necessary. I have also submitted a Level II volunteer application for Ambition and Victorious. CPS requires Level II volunteer status because of how much I will be present in the building.

If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, let me know and I will provide the information you need.

Thank you,

Samantha Phillips

Teaching, Learning, & Foundations | Graduate Assistant 2021

Eastern Illinois University | Class of 2022

Major | Curriculum & Instruction

**Appendix B**

**Observation Checklist**

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Day:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching Strategies**

<b>Gay (2018) Framework</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<p><b>Validating-</b> Acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum; it builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic and abstractions and lived sociocultural realities; it teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages; it incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skill routinely taught in schools.</p>			
<p><b>Comprehensive and Inclusive-</b> Committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire ethnic success.</p>			
<p><b>Multidimensional-</b> Encompasses curriculum content, learning context classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques classroom management, and performance assessments.</p>			
<p><b>Empowering-</b> Translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act. In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning</p>			

tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained.			
<b>Transformative-</b> It is very explicit about respecting the cultures and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian American students, and it uses these as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning; recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process.			
<b>Emancipatory-</b> Liberating in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing; making knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students.			
<b>Humanistic-</b> Concerned with the human welfare, dignity, and respect of the various, individuals and groups who comprise the United States and the world.			
<b>Normative and Ethical-</b> Educational discourse about equity and social justice recommends extending similar rights and opportunities to students from other ethnic groups, especially those discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized (that is, minority groups of color).			

**Physical Environment**

Characteristic	Yes	No	Notes
<b>Arrange Classroom Furniture:</b> Is the classroom organized in a way that allows for flow, collaboration, and active learning?			
<b>Manage Materials:</b> Are your materials stored in an			

easily organized and accessible way?			
<b>Wall Space:</b> Are the posters and signs culturally responsive?			
<b>Environmental Preferences:</b> Lighting, mobility, stations, types of seating			

**Materials**

Is it being used?	Yes	No	Notes
Textbook			
Resources			
Handout			

**Teacher-to-Student Interactions**

Characteristic	Yes	No	Notes
Know your students			

Create a welcoming learning environment			
Set and communicate expectations			
Encourage students to interact positively with one another			
Promotes collaboration			
Provides academic supports/interventions			
Accommodates students learning styles			



## Appendix C

### Initial Interview Questions

1. What is your philosophy of education?
2. Can you talk about what you know about culturally responsive teaching?
3. How do you define CRT in your classroom?
4. What teaching strategies have you found to work best for your students?
5. In what ways do you acknowledge the legitimacies of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups?
6. How do you help students maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities?
7. In what ways are your current teaching strategies multidimensional?
8. How do you empower your students to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained?
9. How do your teaching strategies recognize the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhance them further in the instructional process?
10. In what ways do you make knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students?
11. How do you extend rights and opportunities to students from other ethnic groups, especially those discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized?
12. What are your concerns with CRT?
13. Is CRT an emerging issue within the district?
14. Do you have any more questions, comments, or concerns?

## **Appendix D**

### **Post Interview Questions**

1. How can you incorporate more educational discourse about equity and social justice for students?
2. What teaching strategies would you use to teach students to be concerned with the human welfare, dignity, and respect of individuals and groups in the world?
3. Do you believe that your teaching strategies make knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students? Why or why not?
4. Can you provide reasoning as to why the physical environment of your classroom is organized in the way that it is?
5. What academic supports/interventions do you provide regularly? Are they effective?
6. Would having formal training on CRT help or hinder your choice of teaching strategies? Why?
7. What would you change about your approach to teaching if you had to?
8. Do you have any more questions, comments, or concerns?

## **Appendix E**

### **Principal Questionnaire Instrument**

1. What is your educational background?
2. What professional development opportunities are you providing for your teachers?
3. How often does professional development take place in your school?
4. In what ways can you improve your plan for providing professional development in your school?
5. How are you preparing your faculty and staff for working with culturally diverse students?

**Appendix F**

**Self-Assessment Survey Instrument**

This survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your answers to the questions will remain anonymous and will not be linked to you in any way. Thank you for your participation!

Please use the following scale throughout the survey to determine your answers.

Never – I have not done this at any time not attempted to do so.

Almost Never – I’ve attempted to do this, but only a couple or few times.

Sometimes – I’ve done this on occasion, or partially.

Almost Always – I do/have done this but not consistently.

Always – I do/have done this consistently.

**Cultural Awareness**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Never (1)</b>	<b>Almost Never (2)</b>	<b>Sometimes (3)</b>	<b>Almost Always (4)</b>	<b>Always (5)</b>
1	I am aware of my own biases and how they affect my thinking and teaching.					
2	I view human differences as positive and a cause for celebration.					
3	I have a clear sense of my					

	own ethnic, cultural, and racial identity and how that is viewed by others with whom I differ.					
4	I understand that I'm a product of my upbringing and believe there are valid beliefs other than my own.					
5	I am aware that my cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions affect my utilization of CRT.					
6	I am aware of my weaknesses in the area of cultural diversity and try to improve them.					
7	I am aware and accept that my experiences and background impact how I interact with and trust others.					
8	I am aware that there are policies and practices in place that negatively impact my students outside the majority culture.					
9	I'm aware of the impact of social context on the lives of culturally diverse students, and how power, privilege, and social oppression influence their lives.					
10	I modify my lessons and teaching strategies to ensure					

	that they are culturally responsive.					
11	I am aware that my student's demographics affect the overall success of my classroom.					

Q12. What steps have you taken to ensure your teaching strategies are culturally responsive?

Q13. How has student demographics influenced your teaching strategies? What role does it play in your decision-making?

**Personal Information**

Q14. Indicate your race by selecting the one that applies to you.

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races

Q15. Select the choice that represents your years of teaching experience.

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 20-25
- 26-30
- 30+

Q16. Select your highest level of education.

- Teaching certification/endorsement
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- More than one master's
- Doctorate

Q17. Please list your degrees and certifications.

Q18. Do you have an endorsement in English as a Second Language (ESL)?

- Yes
- No

Q19. Have you had any professional development training in culturally responsive teaching?

- Yes
- No

Q20. If so, how much training have you had any professional development training in culturally responsive teaching?

Q21. How many years of teaching experience have you had with students of various cultural backgrounds?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15

Q22. What are your feelings towards working with culturally diverse students?

**Appendix G****IRB Approval**

August 19, 2022

Samantha Phillips  
Sham'ah Md-Yunus  
Teaching, Learning, and Foundations

Dear Samantha,

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "An Exploration of Middle School Teachers' Utilization of Culturally Responsive Teaching" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has reviewed this research protocol and effective 8/16/2022, has certified this protocol meets the federal regulations exemption criteria for human subjects research. The protocol has been given the IRB number 22-096. You are approved to proceed with your study.

The classification of this protocol as exempt is valid only for the research activities and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any proposed changes to this protocol must be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board  
c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
Telephone: 217-581-8576  
Fax: 217-581-7181  
Email: [eiuirb@eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@eiu.edu)

Thank you for your cooperation, and the best of success with your research.