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# Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on the Challenges of Including Inclusive Literature and Implementing Culturally Informed Teaching Practices

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Walden University
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MA, Hood College, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education



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Abstract

Even though educators are being encouraged to use culturally informed teaching practices in early childhood classrooms with a focus on including culturally inclusive literature, due to homogenous classroom libraries and minimal training, early childhood educators are challenged to follow these practices. The purpose and research questions for this basic qualitative study explored early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges of these practices. Using current research and the conceptual framework of critical race theory in education, research and interview questions were developed. Ten early educators were interviewed using the developed interview protocol. Four themes emerged during open and axial coding that centered on unclear district guidance on provided resources, educators' shallow understanding of marginalized cultures, lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts, and educators wanting more explicit information about culturally informed teaching practices. This study is significant due the current lack of research on the challenges that in service teachers face to include inclusive literature or effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices. The positive social change implication is that data from this study could strengthen the movement for inclusive literature in early childhood classrooms, support culturally informed teaching practices, guide administrators to help better support teachers through more authentic policies and professional support, and ultimately provide students with richer learning that reflects their cultural identities.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family: this accomplishment would not have happened without you. Everett and Teddy, you are my greatest accomplishments and I hope that you both continue your zest for learning as you forge your ways in this world. It is an honor to be your mama. Dave, thank you for your enthusiasm at the start of this and the encouragement to finish what I had started. Mom, none of this could have been possible without you: you showed me that I could do and be anything, and you've been right here every step of the way. Abigail, you are an inspiration, and I am so proud that you are living out your dreams every day. I know that your professional achievements will outshine mine soon, and we will celebrate just as we did on the day that I started this program all those years ago. Michael, you are the reason I am in the profession, and I would not be the educator I am today without being your sister. Berk, thank you for reminding me to be pragmatic and being there to talk through next steps. And to those who blazed a trail before me, especially my grandparents, Jane and Everett, I know that your spirits guided me here.

This work is also dedicated to my students from coast to coast. All of my students have transformed my practice, but especially my 2014-2015 "Gator Tots." You turned teaching upside down for me. You showed me what authentic early education could look like and I carry you into every classroom I walk into, every day.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the help and support of many people who helped me throughout this process. I would like to start by acknowledging my incredible committee members. First, thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Donna Brackin, whose patience and diligent guidance pushed me through to the finish line. I know that I would not have come this far without you as my chair. I would like to thank my second committee member, Dr. Barbara Trube, for her fresh pair of eyes on drafts that needed a little love. I would also like to thank my URR, Dr. Sydney Parent. What a team I had! All of your insightful comments and questions made these pages stronger. I know how lucky I was to have all of you guide me through this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In a suburban school district in a northeast state, district administrators are working toward creating a more inclusive school district. Leaders of the local area district created a diversity, equity, and inclusivity coordinator position, adopted a district-wide goal focused on equity, and started optional professional development opportunities around inclusion. According to an email from the district superintendent, the district's initial focus was on the middle and high school level and has recently started to trickle down to the early elementary level. The district's current initiative for culturally informed teaching practices is to create multicultural classroom libraries, and optional professional development opportunities have included inventorying classroom libraries. These district efforts to become more culturally inclusive are important, yet a gap exists as educators are challenged to include culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

Seminal studies have demonstrated that the movement to increase culturally inclusive literature in classrooms has not resulted in any large-scale changes to classrooms as classroom libraries continue to center on the dominant culture (Bishop, 1997; Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020), and most educators fall short of using culturally informed teaching practices (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019; Myers & Jenkins, 2020). Increasing diverse literature is a straightforward way to create more diverse learning spaces (Khalfaoui et al., 2021; López-Robertson, 2017), yet there are important considerations to make when trying to implement culturally inclusive literature in early education classrooms (Adam et al., 2019). Teachers must create multicultural libraries

authentically (Adam et al., 2017; Wee et al., 2018) and avoid "othering" cultures that are not their own by placing specialized attention on marginalized cultures at dedicated times and, instead, infuse those cultures into the curriculum (Nganga, 2020). Awareness is growing around inclusive literature and culturally sustaining teaching practices, but there is still much to be done to incorporate inclusive classroom libraries and culturally informed teaching practices into early education.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The potential positive social change implication is that the findings from this study could strengthen the movement to create and sustain inclusive literature in classrooms and support culturally informed teaching practices. This study may also guide the local district to help better support educators through more authentic district policies and targeted professional support and ultimately help students by providing richer learning experiences that reflect the students' cultural identities. This chapter includes the background information for this study, including the problem statement, research questions (RQs), conceptual framework, and nature of the study. The chapter also includes the study's assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and potential impact for social change.

## Background

Culturally informed teaching has been shown to benefit students across the school day, from attendance (Dee & Penner, 2017) to learning (Borre et al., 2019; Hilaski,

2020). When educators make a connection between the students' culture and academic learning, students are able to learn more easily (Hilaski, 2020). For example, students whose home language and culture were incorporated in literacy intervention retained academic benefits for up to 1 to 2 years compared to a control group (Borre et al., 2019). However, culturally informed teaching can be challenging to engage in, as teachers need to reflect on their own biases (Samuels, 2018) and understand nuances in the marginalized populations and family dynamics that are present in their classrooms (Reid et al., 2019). These challenges can impact teachers' ability to implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

One way to engage in culturally informed teaching practices is through multicultural inclusive materials, including literature, in the classroom. Culturally inclusive literature can reinforce students' understanding of their value in the classroom (López-Robertson, 2017) as well as show students information about cultures that are different from their own. However, classroom libraries continue to lack diversity (Bishop, 1997; Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020) or the texts are presented without context or critical engagement (Gultekin & May, 2020). It is necessary for educators to build a culturally responsive space (Myers & Jenkins, 2020) and to be able to effectively facilitate conversations on diversity (Bennett et al., 2018). Researchers suggest that the teacher's ability to engage with the culturally relevant materials is more important than the materials (Sanders et al., 2019). The materials must be available, but the teachers must know how to use them effectively.

There is considerable information on the benefits of culturally sustaining teaching and the benefits of culturally inclusive material in the classroom. But there is little information about why teachers choose specific multicultural books for the classroom or how teachers engage with these books (Nguyen, 2021). This gap in research on practice results in inauthentic educational policies that focus on the number of diverse materials, without consideration on the pedagogical support early childhood teachers need to engage students during critical conversations about diversity in the classroom (MacNevin & Berman, 2017). In the local area district, there is emphasis on inclusive literature to support the diverse student population without engaging teachers in understanding the support that the teachers may need to engage with the literature. The gap in practice this study addressed was that despite efforts in the local district to include more culturally inclusive literature and improve culturally informed teaching practices in the early childhood classrooms, teachers are challenged with including culturally inclusive literature and implementing culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. This study could support the district's initiative for more engagement with culturally informed teaching practices by understanding early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

## Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed by this basic qualitative study is that, even though there is a national and local call for educators to use culturally informed teaching

practices in early childhood classrooms with a focus on including culturally inclusive literature, due to homogenous classroom libraries and minimal training, early childhood educators are challenged to include culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. Seeing different cultures in materials is a common practice in early childhood classrooms with an emphasis on passive or simplified learning through literature (McAnuff Gumbs, 2020). This is a simplified understanding of the mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors metaphor (Bishop, 1990) that was introduced over three decades ago in a seminal work on multicultural literature. However, classroom libraries continue to lack diversity (Henderson et al., 2020), and blanket policies to make classroom libraries more diverse have not investigated teacher understandings of diversity for book selection or pedagogical use of the books (Adam et al., 2019). The gap in practice was that, despite efforts in the local district to include more culturally inclusive literature and improve culturally informed teaching practices in the early childhood classrooms, educators are challenged with including culturally inclusive literature and implementing culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. In light of the increasing effort of the local area district's administration to expand culturally informed teaching practices and create inclusive

libraries, I hoped to gain a greater understanding of early childhood educators'
perspectives of the challenges that they face. The central phenomenon that I explored was
culturally inclusive literature in the classroom and culturally informed teaching practice
from early childhood educators' perspectives. Through interviews, I developed a greater
awareness of educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally
inclusive literature and their perspectives of what they need to effectively implement
culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

## Research Questions

RQ 1: What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that
they face including culturally inclusive literature?

RQ 2: What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they need to
effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is critical race theory (CRT) in education
(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT focuses on the concepts of racism and dominant
culture dynamics with minority cultures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For this
research, I focused on three points of CRT in education. These points include
counternarrative, which includes the idea of highlighting the voices of marginalized
groups (Dixson & Anderson, 2018); interest convergence, which focuses on how teacher
education fragments teachings on diversity unless supported by the dominant culture
(Sleeter, 2017); and colorblindness, which looks at the failure of educators to
contextualize marginalized cultures in the larger world and encourages educators to self-

reflect on their pedagogy and role in student success (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). CRT in education looks at disrupting dominant culture for inclusive practices that have more authentic cultural representation. I used the conceptual framework to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. CRT in education was considered in the development of the interview questions, with a focus on counternarrative, convergence, and colorblindness. More information about the framework and the connections to my research can be found in Chapter 2.

## Nature of the Study

Qualitative methodologies are used to study the participants in their naturalistic setting and understand how the participants make sense of the world around them (Burkholder et al., 2016). I employed a basic qualitative study to examine the perspectives of early childhood teachers through interviews (see Merriam, 2002). A basic qualitative study is used when a researcher wants to understand participants' perspectives and centers around participants' understanding of their lived experiences through interviews and observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is why I chose to use a basic qualitative design to answer the RQs and to explore the central phenomena of the early childhood educators' perspectives of culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices in classrooms. The basic qualitative design allowed me to explore educators' perspectives about the challenges that they face implementing

culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms in the interviews.

The sample of this study was 10 early childhood educators who were currently teaching general education kindergarten or first grade in the local district in the northeast. They were selected through purposeful sampling. Criteria to be included in the study included (a) working in the identified local area district, and (b) a currently practicing early childhood educator (kindergarten to first grade) (c) teaching for 3 or more years. The research sample was taken from the first 10 educators who responded to the invitation to participate and attended their interview appointment. The resulting data from the interviews were analyzed using open and axial coding. This analysis identified themes that gave me more information about educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were addressed:

*Culture:* Culture consists of the knowledge that impacts values, beliefs, as well as much of day-to-day living and family structures that is passively spread and passed down to the next generation, creating diversity (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019).

*Diversity:* Diversity is used interchangeably through much of the research in the field, but in their 2017 study, MacNevin and Berman noted that, although there should be a more critical approach to diversity, in the early education field, policies align more with

this colloquial definition: "Things or people that are 'diverse' are non-white" (MacNevin & Berman, 2017, p. 829).

*Dominant culture*: Dominant culture is considered to be the White cultural group that maintains their privilege and perpetrates oppression to marginalized groups through a constructed reality that justifies their power with minimal self-reflection (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

*Early childhood education:* Early learning for all young children, birth through age 8 (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022).

*Ethnicity*: Ethnicity, as conceptualized by Baxley, is the cultural practices of a group that share customs and traditions, such as language, nationality, religion, and dress (as cited in Olinger, 2020).

*Inclusion:* Inclusion is a broad term that encompasses equitable access for children across diverse cultural groups, as cultural is recognized as having a significant influence on development and learning (Division for Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

*Multicultural:* Multicultural materials or situations that demonstrate non-dominant culture (MacNevin & Berman, 2017). The terms *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *multicultural* are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, the original term will be used when presented in a research study, but inclusive is the term that will be focused on for my research purposes.

*Race:* Race, as conceptualized by Baxley, is a social construct that is based on the physical features of a person, including skin, hair, and facial characteristics (as cited in

Olinger, 2020). The concepts of *culture*, *ethnicity*, and *race* are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, the original term will be used when presented in a research study, but *culture* is the term that will be focused on for my research purposes.

*Risky books:* Risky books are books that include topics that educators avoid if they are difficult or awkward to address in class (Leland et al., 2017).

*Support:* Interactions and/or learning experiences between teachers and school and district administrators to improve professional practice, including skills, knowledge, and outlooks of the teachers (Ramey, 2015).

## Assumptions

Assumptions are made in research. In this study, I assumed that the participants in this study participated to further the research around inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices, without outside motivation or pressure to participate. Similarly, I assumed that the participants in my study wanted to provide honest answers to the interview protocol (see Appendix) and fully share their perspectives without hesitancy. This assumption was important due to the sensitive nature of diversity, especially around what Leland et al. (2017) called "risky books" (p. 162), which deal with topics that teachers may avoid if they are uncomfortable. Another assumption was that the participants feel comfortable in discussing topics of race and culture. I also assumed that the participants would be reliable and authentic in their interactions during the study. These assumptions were necessary for the research, as I needed to trust that the participants were truthful in their sharing to increase the validity of the research.

**Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this basic qualitative study focused on early childhood educators'

perspectives of the challenges that they face implementing culturally inclusive literature

and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in

their classrooms in a northeastern state. The participants of this study were in-service

early educators who were currently teaching kindergarten to first grade. I chose to

exclude all educators with whom I had a personal relationship, which excluded the

entirety of district pre-kindergarten educators and those educators in my current building.

I do not hold any supervisory role in the district, so I did not have concerns about

authority relationships for exclusion. Other stakeholders, such as students, families, and

district administrators, were excluded because I wanted to explore educators'

perspectives specifically.

The study was conducted using the conceptual framework of CRT in education,

which centers nondominant races while decentering race. This concept was especially

important to me in a district that serves a majority minority but employs mostly white or

white presenting faculty. The local area, a suburban district in a northeast state, has an

Asian population that is five times the state average (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2019). Table 1 shows the racial/ethnic data

for the local area district in comparison to the county and state.

**Table 1**

*Race and Ethnicity in Local Are, County, and State*

|  | School District | County | State |
|---|---|---|---|
| White | 37.4% | 49.7% | 55.4% |
| Black | 4.3% | 19.9% | 12.7% |
| Native | 0.5% | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| Asian | 52.5% | 11.1% | 9.4% |
| Islander | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Other | 0.4% | 0.1% | 0.4% |
| Two+ | 2.2% | 1.6% | 1.8% |

Other frameworks that were considered were Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which states that social interaction with individuals who are more skilled plays a significant role in human learning (1978). This framework aligns with the idea of implicit learning about society through socialization in education but misses pertinent information about centering race instead of culture. I also considered using the frameworks of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), but rejected them due to the imprecise nature of their colloquial use. The framework of CRT in education was chosen because a key tenet is understanding how the dominant culture narrative is perpetuated as opposed to breaking the cycle of marginalization of other cultures.

The delimitations for this study included that the results of the research have limited transferability to other school districts that vary in student and local demographics, including ethnic makeup and socioeconomic status. The study took place in a northeastern school district that has pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade and includes several Title 1 schools.

**Limitations**

Across all research, researchers identify limitations in their research and this study was no different. Limitations are potential problems that are identified through the research (Creswell, 2012). Researchers identify limitations by considering the quality of the components of the research, including the data source, types of data and the data analysis, to contextualize the integrity of the research methodology (Roberts, 2010). The limitations of my study include that the population of the local area district is disproportionate to other state and national areas and thus the findings may not transfer to areas that are more traditionally populated. Another limitation was the sample size, which, although chosen with consideration to saturation, may represent similar viewpoints of teachers who are interested in participating and miss educators who are more hesitant to share their perspectives. Additionally, it is possible that teachers in the study may have not fully engaged in self-reflection about cultural inclusion to deeply understand their own views on multiculturalism. To address this limitation, I made sure that participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives and understood that it is their experience in which I was interested.

I also have biases that may be considered limitations. Researchers must be aware of their own biases and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My biases include that I work in the district and that I believe that the work to create culturally inclusive classroom libraries is important. I worked hard to ensure that my biases did not impact the data analysis or research results. I avoided recruiting participants with whom I have a personal relationship. I transcribed interviews verbatim (see Avenier & Thomas, 2015). I

used reflective journaling during the interviewing and coding processes (see Greene, 2014; Vicary et al., 2017) as well as had a doctoral level expert in education or related field examine the results to check for bias.

## Significance

Current researchers have found that students who have rich and purposeful opportunities to learn about and learn with members of other cultural groups demonstrate more positive racial attitudes (Jensen & Tisak, 2020; Mandalaywala et al., 2019). However, there is a continued lack of inclusive books in early childhood classroom libraries (Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020). Additionally, even teachers who are able to have critical conversations around equity and social justice using literature fall short of meaningful conversation (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019; Myers & Jenkins, 2020). In this study, I explored early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

This study may contribute to positive social change by providing findings that will strengthen the movement to create and sustain inclusive early childhood classroom libraries, and support culturally informed teaching practices. The findings could inform administrators on how to design authentic programming to improve teacher practice and knowledge about culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices. Understanding what the challenges that early childhood educators face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms will potentially lead to a greater

understanding of what school districts can do to support early childhood teachers to bring more culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices into the classroom. It may also give district administrators concrete professional support ideas beyond simply providing diverse materials to improve teacher practice and knowledge, and ultimately provide students with richer learning experiences that authentically reflect cultural identities.

## Summary

In this study, I explored early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. In this chapter, I gave background information on the central phenomenon of the study and the RQs. The conceptual framework of CRT in education was introduced in addition to defining key terms. I discussed the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study. The chapter concluded with the significance of this study, including the potential contribution this study has to positive social change. In the next chapter, I will identify the search strategies that I used to find primary and secondary sources, detail the conceptual framework, synthesize the research, and conclude with a summary of my findings from the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was addressed by this qualitative study is that, even though there is a national and local call for educators to use culturally informed teaching practices in early childhood classrooms with a focus on including culturally inclusive literature, due to homogenous classroom libraries and minimal training, early childhood educators are challenged to include culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The gap in practice was that, despite efforts in the local district, teachers are challenged with including culturally inclusive literature and implementing culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. This disconnect leaves the teachers less equipped to have purposeful conversations with students about culture in the early childhood classroom. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. My review of current literature indicated that culturally inclusive literature is lacking in early childhood classrooms (Henderson et al., 2020) and culturally informed teaching practices can be challenging for educators (Alaca & Pyle, 2018), although much of the literature on culturally informed teaching practices has focused on preservice teachers (Anderson & Fees, 2018; Iwai, 2019; Macqueen et al., 2020; Myers & Jenkins, 2020; Nganga, 2020; Yoon & Martin, 2019).

In this chapter, I identify the search strategies that I used to find primary and secondary sources on the topics of culturally relevant teaching, culturally relevant

literature, and culturally relevant professional development. Next, I detail the conceptual framework, CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). I then synthesize the research and conclude with a summary of the findings.

## Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was an analysis of early childhood education topics that included culturally informed teaching, culturally inclusive literature, and culturally informed professional support. I used the Walden University Library to access multiple databases, which included Education Source, EBSCO, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX with full text, Taylor and Francis Online, and Walden Library ProQuest. I used Google Scholar for additional resources. I focused on peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters from 2018 to ensure the most recent literature. I tried to include articles that were widely cited over multiple studies and included seminal articles, including research that was pre-2018 but were formative articles to the study. To search, I used the following search terms in combination to ensure a thorough search: *early childhood preschool, kindergarten, cultur\*, inclusi\*, divers\*, sensitivity, represent\*, awareness, critical conversations, litera\*, story time, books, curriculum, in service, teaching, teacher, pedagogy, race,* and *ethnicity.* I also used Boolean search phrases to locate additional research, such as *cultur\* sustain\* pedagog\** or *cultur\* responsive pedagog\** or *culturally responsive pedagogy* and *classroom litera\** or *books* or *curriculum, cultural diversity* or *cultural sensitivity* or *cultural aware* and *literature* or *story time* or *books, early childhood* and *culture.*

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). I used this framework to explore the central phenomena of culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices from early childhood educators' perspectives. This framework was also used in the development of the RQs and interview questions.

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

CRT originally came out of the American field of law and has been attributed to several scholars including Bell (1976) and Freeman (1978). CRT grew out of critical legal studies to include strategies for social change and included the lens of race (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The tenets of CRT include that racism is the norm in America, race is a social construct, racism benefits the oppressor, and the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2018), which states that individuals can be part of several different identity groups at the same time. From this work emerged CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), which was the conceptual framework for this study.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) advanced CRT in the field of education by adapting the tenets to what they saw as racial inequity in education. The three tenets that they included are that racism is deeply embedded into the fabric of America, racial inequities are due to ineffective legal precedence, and that the dominant culture uses social stories to perpetuate oppression of marginalized communities. Ladson-Billings and Tate used the lens of race to understand that the inequities that students from

marginalized cultures experience are due to ubiquitous and cyclical socially constructed oppressions.

Other CRT scholars have focused on the social justice component of CRT in education. One scholar highlighted the social justice component of CRT in his working definition of CRT in education: CRT in education is not just "observing and interpreting, it's about engaging" (Soloranza, 2013, 3:31). CRT in education "examines the role of … educational practices in the construction of racial inequity and the perpetuation of normative whiteness" (Dixson & Anderson, 2018, p. 122). Dixson and Anderson (2018) also noted the most important factors in CRT in education as counternarrative, color blindness, interest convergence, and whiteness as property (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Colorblindness looks at the failure of educators to contextualize marginalized cultures in the larger world and encourages educators to self-reflect on their pedagogy and role in student success (Dixson & Anderson, 2018), and interest convergence focuses on how teacher education fragments teachings on diversity unless supported by the dominant culture (Sleeter, 2017). Using the lens of CRT in education is looking at what is happening in education and what actions can be done to overcome marginalization.

CRT in education has been used in many studies. Most studies focus on discipline in education and disproportionate identification of marginalized groups for strict punishment (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Gregory & Mosely, 2004). CRT in education is also used in studies to understand the role of culturally sustaining pedagogy, specifically to address teacher education and cultivating culturally responsive classroom spaces (Kinloch & Dixon, 2017; MacNevin & Berman, 2017). These studies highlight how

educators' reflective practices are central to dismantling the systemic oppression of marginalized groups. CRT in education is also used as a lens for studies on multicultural literature in classrooms that demonstrate that classroom libraries are used to inefficiently highlight diversity in culturally inauthentic text (McAnuff Gumbs, 2020; Wiseman et al., 2019).

In this study, CRT in education was used to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classroom, specifically centering culture and race. CRT in education was relevant to this study because a key tenet is understanding how the dominant culture narrative is perpetuated as opposed to breaking the cycle of marginalization of other cultures. By neglecting to incorporate authentic culturally inclusive literature and having a shallow understanding of culturally informed teaching practices, educators are allowed to continue with the narrative of the dominant culture, which continues the cycle of oppression. My goal was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of their challenges in implementing culturally informed teaching practices including culturally inclusive literature.

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

## Culturally Informed Teaching

Culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive (Gay, 2002), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) are three pedagogical theories that bring culture to the forefront of student learning. Ladson-Billings's 1995 study was the basis of

the model of culturally relevant pedagogy and one of the first that engaged students' culture as a vital component of teaching. This proposal of culturally relevant teaching for academic success focused on developing students' cultural competence, including affirming the student's own identity, while the students are learning how to identify and critique societal inequities. In culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2002) specified the teacher's role as an agent of change to go beyond the additive approach of culture and instead embed the role of students' home culture into the structure of the class. Paris (2012) took the culturally aware, student-centered concepts of the previous works and added that the goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy was to preserve and support each student's culture and language for student success and social change. As each of these practices shares and builds on each other, most authors use them without regard to the nuances between the three (Kelly et al., 2021). For the purposes of this literature review, understanding that there is this overlap, and that the terms are used interchangeably, the term used in the original study will be used here for continuity, although I will use "culturally informed" as the umbrella term in my synthesis and research.

A teacher using culturally sustaining pedagogy can connect the academic curriculum with the student's experiences (Laman & Henderson, 2018). Educators must know their students well enough to match the literature to their actual culture; it is not enough to assume their students' cultural experiences or expression (Kelly et al., 2021). Using students' culture created a connection between their home life and learning that contributed to the students learning how to read and write more easily (Hilaski, 2020) and potentially long-term positive impacts on a child's academic progress (Borre et al., 2019).

Authentic connections to students' cultures can produce improvements in students' academics.

Understanding students' cultural backgrounds can have an impact across all areas of curriculum. When teachers were asked to look at culturally responsive methods of teaching science, they improved in their self-efficacy to teach science (Yoon & Martin, 2019) as well as math concepts (Smith & Chao, 2018). Culturally relevant teaching has also increased students' attendance, GPA, and total number of credits completed (Dee & Palmer, 2017). Even being aware of children's cultures and having diverse student groups may help the participating children develop empathy skills (Aubert et al., 2017). Cross culturally, using culturally responsive literature in two diverse early childhood settings, one in the United States and one in Palestine, increased student engagement in literacy lessons (Dajani & Meier, 2019). Conversely, students from diverse backgrounds who are not able to meet the dominant culture norms are disproportionally identified for special education services (Brown et al., 2019). Using culturally sustaining practices benefits multilingual children who are often at a disadvantaged in majority culture learning situations (Langeloo et al., 2019). Teachers who engage students' cultural background can also have very specific improvements in curricular pursuits, as well as keeping students in general education.

In-service teachers view culturally responsive teaching as beneficial to many aspects of the classroom, yet teachers have noted the challenges of this pedagogy. These challenges include bringing up controversial topics that the teachers themselves had not lived through and creating more controversy, the discomfort of self-reflection and

confronting bias, not understanding the depth of white privilege and how the teachers might unknowingly contribute to it, not having enough connection with marginalized populations, and not enough time or resources to properly engage (Samuels, 2018). Furthermore, culture is a dynamic concept that early childhood educators are expected to contextualize within their knowledge of policies and development while creating and sustaining relationships with students and their families, including working within families' cultural expectations (Reid et al., 2019). These challenges highlight the complexity of faithfully enacting culturally relevant teaching.

      Despite challenges, there are ways to start being a culturally relevant teacher. Seminal research on critically responsive educators demonstrated that responsive educators can model respectful interactions and embed multicultural experiences throughout the school day (Au, 2011). Another inclusive teaching practice is to name the diversity in the structures of families and individuals that you are supporting (Liang & Cohrssen, 2020). Connecting to students' families is also a way to address inequities that may be present in situations where families who are more connected to school benefit from better services (Liang & Cohressen, 2020). Students who are not a part of the dominant culture can be included with the intentional inclusion of materials that represent the students' culture to reinforce that they are part of the group (Khalfaoui et al., 2021). There are small steps that any teacher can take to begin to demonstrate cultural awareness.

      Multicultural education goes beyond holidays and food (Alaca & Pyle, 2018); only bringing in these elements of culture may stereotype cultures that are different from

the educator's (Nganga, 2020). Classroom teachers are on the front lines to create an equitable, anti-racist community to build meaningful connections in classrooms with children whose cultures are routinely subordinated (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Teachers who identify with the dominant culture can, if the educators are deliberate in their teaching, help students rise above their marginalized identities (Hikida, 2018). In areas such as the local district, where most students are taught by teachers outside of their cultural or racial identity, it is concerning that teachers, without proper support, will continue to unintentionally marginalize their students, even with good intentions.

Educators demonstrate a narrow understanding of the term diversity that is limited to linguistic differences and visually perceived cultural differences, which may be addressed as an addition to lessons instead of embedded in their teaching (Adam et al., 2019). It is not enough to have cultural awareness as educators continue to perpetuate dominant culture ideologies while "othering" nondominant cultures (Adam, 2021). Being a culturally responsive teacher is different than providing students with a multicultural experience (McKoy et al., 2017). It is important that in the local district, the efforts to increase culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices are reflective of a movement towards authentic representation; becoming an authentic culturally informed educator for subordinated cultures requires intentional effort with appropriate support.

**Inclusive Literature**

One way to incorporate culturally informed teaching is to have cultural artifacts, including books, in the classroom. Literature can be used to support many aspects of the

classroom. Teachers can use multicultural literature to create classroom community and belonging (López-Robertson, 2017). Children who identify their own culture in books may be more likely to pick up that particular book: children were more likely to pick a story that featured a main character that shared their race (Hardy et al., 2020).

There is also an opportunity to allow families to contribute to the classroom environment by having families help choose books to add to authenticity (Wee et al., 2018). Allowing students to bring in their own culture materials gives validity to their home culture and shows all students that there is room for all (Machado, 2017). When educators used texts that feature dialects and languages outside of Dominant American English, students made critical connections about identity that affirmed marginalized students (Hartman & Machado, 2019). This inclusivity allows the students to see their home cultures represented in school and gives a voice to the family.

Culturally inclusive literature can also be used to expose children to new cultures in an inclusive way that has long term impacts. Preschool students who were exposed to diverse materials in preschool had a lower racial bias in third grade (Gaias et al., 2018). When provided with critical analysis, multicultural literature allows the teacher to not only include the cultures represented in the classroom, but also can give a larger historical or sociocultural framework to students' experiences (Bennett et al., 2018). Children who were presented with culturally based folktales as a part of the curriculum allowed the children to see themselves in the story while creating a sense of integration with the represented culture (de Bruijn, 2019). Authentic literature may also help children critically read and understand the experience of nondominant cultures (Wee et al., 2018).

Intentional use of inclusive literature benefits students of all cultures, including reduced racial bias and improved perspective taking.

There are some challenges to using multicultural books. The first challenge is that even though classrooms are more diverse, the books that are available to the students are not. Classroom libraries lack across all categories of diversity, including culture, religion, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and gender (Crisp et al., 2016), which has continued even as awareness for inclusive representation has increased (Henderson et al. 2020). Similarly, seminal researchers found that there was limited racial diversity represented in early classrooms and most of the diverse literature that was in the classroom was either neutral in regard to culture (Bishop, 1997) or stereotypical (Adam et al., 2017). Children's book publishing is just beginning to be more culturally inclusive (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2022; Fullerton et al., 2018) which is part of the issue, but even with increasing cultural representation, classroom libraries have not made meaningful improvements in regard to culturally inclusive literature.

Culturally relevant literature must also be authentic, and teachers are cautioned from using books that may tell a singular story of a cultural group (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018) and instead look for books that are truly representative instead of stereotypical (Gultekin & May, 2020). Educators may have shallow understandings of why inclusive texts are important beyond the basic benefits of literature and have classroom texts that are overwhelmingly reflective of the dominant culture (Adam et al., 2019). Teachers need to select their literature carefully to facilitate conversation and understand the story that they are depicting to their students to avoid stereotyping (Ward & Warren, 2020) while

also monitoring for the author's cultural identity as well as the story line's authenticity, accuracy, and engagement (Garces-Bacsal, 2020). Educators must have the time to intentionally include authentic literature.

Researchers found that materials in the classroom could predict play levels in the classroom but found that the relationship changed depending on the cultural majority of students in the room, positing that the teachers' effective use of the artifacts has more to do with the materials than the materials themselves (Sanders et al. (2019). However, in early education classrooms, multicultural literature is often presented without critical engagement with the texts (Thomas & To, 2019). Exposure to critically analyzing multicultural literature led preservice teachers to a greater understanding of social justice, including power structures and white privilege (Nganga, 2020). Teachers need to be intentional about the cultural artifacts that are presented to avoid fostering and exacerbating bias; use critical thinking to expand beyond even multicultural text; enrich their understanding of their community; and provide their students with an inclusive anti-bias education (Rosenberg, 2020). Multicultural literature is a tool that can be used to have critical conversations on cultural identities and inequities in early childhood, provided that the educator is able to create a culturally responsive space (Myers & Jenkins, 2020). Critical engagement at the early childhood level can be modeled through literacy lessons that employ different perspectives and encourage analysis and interpretation of characters' situations (Bennett et al., 2018) However, classroom libraries that are not inclusive of nondominant cultures may hinder teachers' abilities to engage in meaningful conversations about culture (Adam et al., 2017). Intentionally choosing,

engaging with, and reflecting on the use of culturally inclusive literature for the classroom reaps larger benefits for the students and educators.

Teachers' beliefs on culturally responsive education impact their teaching practices, including limiting topics due to the age of the students and remaining with topics that feel safe for the teachers (Alaca & Pyle, 2018). This results in situations where educators both miss opportunities to engage in conversations about diversity (McAnuff Gumbs, 2020) while even teachers who intentionally focus on diversity may "other" cultures by focusing on the group's apparent features that are different from the dominant culture's which means that superficial connections are made that strengthen stereotypes (Adam, 2021). Furthermore, traditional literacy teaching structure where the teacher leads and the students respond to the text, coupled with book selection impact teachers' abilities to engage students in legitimate critical discussions (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020). Early educators do not know how to support conversations about culture and race, but these conversations are important to address the underlying systemic supports that have created classrooms that are white dominant spaces (MacNevin & Berman, 2017).

Even classrooms that have diverse artifacts, but no opportunities for students to discuss race, are problematic if children only play based on things that they already know, especially if they are in a dominant culture-affirming status quo (MacNevin & Berman, 2017). Children are creating their own ideas about race (MacNevin & Berman, 2017) and preschoolers may demonstrate racial and gender bias (Jensen & Tisak, 2020). If preschoolers are enacting play based on their biased world knowledge, which may be

stereotypical and, potentially, harmful, teachers need to critically engage with their students (Millei, 2018).

Teachers may have diverse materials but may highlight tolerance of other groups as opposed to cultivating ways to interact with other culture groups; this may be because they have a lack of understanding of their own feelings about cultural competency as well as how to foster conversations with their students (McAnuff Gumbs, 2020). Educators can be receptive to students' questions, concerns, and game playing about difficult topics at a developmentally appropriate level that respects students' place as citizens in the global community (Kelly-Ware, 2020). However, if teachers are not mandated or encouraged to have these conversations with students, they are more likely to shy away from these topics (Nganga, 2020).

**Professional Support**

A component of educating teachers to create culturally informed classrooms is professional support. There is a large body of work on professional development for educators, including extensive research on the development of preservice teachers to become culturally aware. This breadth of professional development inquiry can inform how in-service teachers can develop into more culturally informed educators.

There is a lack of research on in-service teacher professional development. In-service teachers may negate preservice teachers' equity lessons in classroom practice (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019) or discourage the practice entirely and perpetuate the dominate culture (Vass, 2017). Preservice teachers may demonstrate intercultural competence (Macqueen et al., 2020) but still have misconceptions about anti-bias

education (Nganga, 2020) and run into challenges in the classroom. Preservice teachers noted that one of the challenges of culturally responsive teaching was the mentor teacher, who discouraged the effort spent and perpetuated the dominant culture and the fear of evaluation by the discouraging mentor (Vass, 2017).

Teachers can only bring the equity fight into the classroom in districts where the mission is supported by the district's administration and local community (Ajayi, 2017). Teachers have more success in effectively responding to diverse learners when administration provides support, including ongoing professional development opportunities (Chu, 2021). These opportunities should allow the teachers to engage with anti-bias education directly, as opposed to using an "infusion" or "turn-key" model, where only certain staff representatives receive the training and then are expected to teach the other members of the faculty, especially if the teachers are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with anti-bias education (Alaca & Pyle, 2018; Nganga, 2020). Teachers must directly engage in professional development.

Educators who were given access to more professional development were more emotionally supportive of their students and cultivated more positive relationships in their classrooms (McNally & Slutsky, 2018). Preservice teachers benefitted from explicit teaching about multicultural literature and were able to increase their knowledge and improve their efficacy of culturally responsive teaching (Iwai, 2019). Another strength of strength of a teacher preparation program was the focus on culturally relevant teaching for all children throughout the school day (Ginsberg et al., 2021). Similarly, music teachers who attended a weeklong culturally responsive teacher training improved their

abilities to identify culturally responsive opportunities in their teaching, although the workshop left participants with more questions than answers (McKoy et al., 2017). This is the space of self-reflection.

Educational programming for pre-service and in-service teachers that focuses on cultural competence using active participation and reflection will increase teachers' culture tolerance (Boghian, 2019). Critical reflection is a key component that can create the pedagogical shift for preservice teachers in hand with their cultural experience (Anderson and Fees, 2018). Self-reflection, where the teacher is specifically made to think about their implicit and explicit biases is a necessary first step to understand where the educator is in their own understanding of race (MacNevin & Berman, 2017). Creating spaces for open dialogue around racism, including inquiry and critical reflection as the oppressed and the oppressor, allows for pre-service and in-service teachers to create and sustain anti-racist educators and, in turn, classrooms (Kinloch & Dixon, 2017).

## Summary and Conclusions

I reviewed the literature around culturally informed teaching, culturally inclusive literature, and professional support in early childhood education. Researchers highlight that culturally sustaining teaching can be enhanced by culturally relevant literature, but many teachers lack the training to authentically connect multicultural literature to critical conversations and instead miss the opportunity to use the literature purposefully (Myers & Jenkins, 2020; Thomas & To, 2019). Although culturally relevant literature can be criticized as an additive approach to culturally relevant teaching, it is a starting point (Gaias et al., 2018; Iwai, 2019). Creating classrooms with educators who can successfully

engage in culturally sustaining literacy methods involves implementing a multi-faceted approach, which can be challenging (Kelly et al., 2021).

My review of the literature indicated that there is literature to support that culturally inclusive literature is lacking in early childhood classrooms (Adam et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020). Much of the literature on culturally informed teaching practices focused on preservice teachers and the researchers indicated that educators need direct support in engaging in culturally informed pedagogy (Ajayi, 2017; Anderson & Fees, 2018; Iwai, 2019; Macqueen et al., 2020; Myers & Jenkins, 2020; Nganga, 2020; Yoon & Martin, 2019). The gap in research that I identified was a lack of research for in-service teachers on the literature review topics: culturally informed teaching (Boghian, 2019; Borre et al., 2019; Dajani & Meier, 2019; Dee & Penner, 2017; Gaias et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2021; Machado, 2017; McKoy et al., 2017; Myers & Jenkins, 2020; You et al., 2019), and culturally inclusive literature (Adam, 2021; Adam et al., 2017, 2019; Crisp et al., 2016; Hardy et al., 2020). I designed this research to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. This chapter detailed current literature on the research topic to contextualize my research. In the next chapter, I will justify the basic qualitative study design and rationale for my research. I will detail my role in the research and the methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, and my data analysis plan. I finish the chapter with information on trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classroom. In this chapter, I justify the basic qualitative study design and rationale for my research. I will also detail my role in the research and the methodology used in this study. The chapter also describes my intentions for participant selection, instrumentation, and my data analysis plan. Lastly, I will describe how I will establish trustworthiness and follow ethical procedures.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The RQs that guided this study were "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature?" and "What are early childhood education educators' perspectives of what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?" For the purposes of this study, *support* was defined as any coaching, professional development, tools, or resources that improve teacher efficacy to implement culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. To answer these questions and to explore the central phenomena of culturally inclusive literature and implement culturally informed teaching practices from early childhood educators' perspectives, I chose to use a basic qualitative design. Qualitative methodologies are used to study the participants in their naturalistic setting and understand how the participants make sense of the world around them (see Burkholder et

al., 2016). Qualitative research is used for data collection that is adaptable to the environment that the researcher is studying, allowing for data collection that is not standardized (see Lodico et al., 2010). A basic qualitative design is used to center participants' understanding of their lived experiences through interviews and observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative design allowed me to explore educators' perspectives in the interviews regarding culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices.

I considered other research designs for this study. I did not believe that the numerical data that would result would contribute to a rich understanding about teacher's perspectives, so quantitative research methods were eliminated. Similarly, I chose not to conduct a mixed methods study as the resulting qualitative and quantitative data would not appropriately address the experiences of the teachers, as surveys and questionnaires would not adequately provide data that can be collected better in a narrative form (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative methodology was the most appropriate design for this study.

Of the six common qualitative methodologies (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the basic qualitative design was the most appropriate for this research. A phenomenological design was not chosen, as that design is used to focus on the description and reflective examination of the participants (see Lodico et al., 2010). Ethnography is designed to look at patterns in a culture of a group (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which was also not appropriate. Grounded theory design was not chosen as I was not looking to construct new theory or collect data using a constant comparative method (see Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). The narrative inquiry was also rejected as a research design as it is used to focus on the individual's full story, including a beginning, middle and end (see Lodico et al., 2010). Lastly, as I was not studying a particular bounded system (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a case study research design was not appropriate. I chose basic qualitative research because I was interested in exploring early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms.

## Role of the Researcher

My role in this research was substantial. I decided on the research design and interview protocol (see Appendix). From there, I recruited the participants, interviewed them, and objectively collected the data that represented the experience of all the participants (see Burkholder et al., 2016) through interviews that I conducted where the participants shared their experiences about the RQs. I analyzed the resulting data and compiled the findings. I reported these findings in a summary for participants.

Another significant role of the researcher when conducting qualitative research is to be unbiased and engage in reflexivity to reflect on how the researcher shaped the analysis to add to the integrity of the research (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To that end, as the researcher, I need to explicitly state any conflicts or biases that may be present. First, I am a cisgendered White woman. I am a part of the dominant culture and am currently teaching in a classroom where most of students do not share my culture. Understanding that I am part of the dominant culture that marginalizes other cultures is significant and I need to take into consideration my position of power. Next, I have been

a public school system early childhood educator for 16 years, and for the past 10 years I have worked in the school district where this research was conducted. This means that I am a marginal insider (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to the research that I conducted and that I needed to be aware of how this relationship may have impacted the study participants and my analysis of the research. I have not worked in a supervisory role in my current district and did not have previous relationships with any of the participants in the study. There are four early elementary schools in the district, and I excluded early childhood teachers from my current school. Additionally, I only engaged participants who opted into the study via their own free will. To avoid bias, I interviewed educators who do not work in the same building as I work or anyone who is under the same department that oversees my current position. Instead, I interviewed early educators who were in buildings where I did not work. I conducted interviews using the same interview protocol (see Appendix) and allowed participants to express their perspectives.

To maintain my study's credibility, it was imperative that I avoided any ethical issues and biases that may result from working in the same district. Greene (2014) noted that insider research can be biased and that there are methodological issues that researchers must be aware of to avoid compromising the study. Using Greene as a guide to maintain validity and credibility, I maintained a journal for personal reflection, and maintained regular contact with my dissertation committee. Additionally, I transcribed the interviews myself using participants' exact words to minimize bias. Once the information was summarized, I used member checking to ensure that the themes that emerged accurately represented participants' voices. I had an expert reviewer who holds

a doctoral degree and has expertise in qualitative methodology also check the results of my data analysis for bias. These checks added to my study's credibility.

## Methodology

### Participant Selection

The population for this study was early childhood educators who teach kindergarten to first grade and work in a public school system in the northeast United States. The school district was chosen as it serves an area that has an Asian population that is five times the state average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The participants were adults who work in the school district. I selected participants using purposeful sampling as I had specific criteria (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that I wanted to include in the research.

Sample size is dependent on the research design and sampling procedure. For purposeful sampling, Guest et al. (2006) found that by the sixth interview 94% of the themes were discovered and that 97% were found by the twelfth interview. The themes that resulted in subsequent interviews were variations on previously identified themes (Guest et al., 2006). As I conducted purposeful sampling, I aimed to conduct interviews with 10 to 12 participants to achieve similar saturation. The inclusion criteria for this study included (a) working in the identified local area district, (b) being a practicing early childhood educator (kindergarten to first grade), and (c) teaching for 3 or more years. The school district had teacher webpages that were publicly available to access teachers' email addresses, so I recruited teachers by emailing teachers in the identified grade levels via their publicly available district email addresses. I sent an invitation and consent form

to all potential participants. The invitation detailed the study criteria as well as notification that the participants could drop out at any time. Interested participants who self-identified as meeting the study criteria responded with "I consent" via email if they agreed to be a part of the study, along with their personal email address for further study communication. Eleven people responded via email. I contacted the interested participants via their personal email to confirm that they met the criteria and set up an interview time. Of those, 10 participants kept their interview appointment and completed the interview. One participant scheduled, cancelled, and then did not respond to a follow up email to reschedule.

**Instrumentation**

Using the conceptual framework CRT in education, I developed the RQs and interview protocol (see Appendix). The first section of the interview protocol had information about the interview, including date, time, and an alpha numeric code (i.e., P1) instead of the interviewee's name. The next part of the protocol was the interview questions and probes. The interview questions were developed in advance of the interviews and designed to answer the RQs guided by the CRT in education conceptual framework. All interview questions were reviewed by expert reviewers, including my dissertation committee and the Walden University IRB, as well as peer reviewed for clarity by an early childhood educator in the current district with at least ten years of experience who was not eligible to complete the study to establish the sufficiency to answer the RQs and content validity. The interview protocol allowed for specific information to be asked (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The last section of the interview

protocol concluded the interview and detailed to the participant about the next steps, including information about an email follow-up that would contain the summary of the overall findings for the participant to review and respond regarding any inaccuracies.

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

In the local district, the superintendent and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction needed to approve the research, followed by a review by the Board of Education curriculum committee. Both the superintendent and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction were made aware of my intentions to complete in-district research via email and I met with the curriculum committee on August 23, 2022. I received the letter of approval from the district with approval to complete the research in district on September 7, 2022. The same day, I submitted the appropriate materials to Walden University's IRB. Once I secured the full approval of Walden University's IRB (Approval No. 06-21-22-0485311), I began recruitment.

An informed consent form was included in the initial email sent to potential participants. The informed consent form included information about the study, as well as information about the study being voluntary so the participants knew that they were able to withdraw at any time. I also included the study's participant criteria, information about participant confidentiality, and information about recording the interview. I asked that participant consent be returned via email with the words "I consent" and the participant's personal email. I asked that the participants had access to the emailed informed consent form or to print out the informed consent form prior to our interview. The informed consent form was to be reviewed prior to beginning the interview.

I personally conducted the interviews for this study in a private space. Participants were interviewed individually to support full expression of their perspectives at a location of their choosing where they felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. The interviews were scheduled over the course of three weeks, with the goal of conducting at least 3 interviews a week. Each participant was asked to complete one interview that was to be conducted either on the phone or via the Zoom conferencing app due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. By having both methods of interviewing available, I increased the flexibility and availability of potential interviews. However, all participants chose to use the Zoom conferencing app. I expected the interviews to take 45 to 60 minutes to give the participant time to thoroughly answer the questions. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom conferencing app's audio recording feature.

Before the interview, I checked the audio recording to make sure that the recording was working properly. To start the interview, I used the interview protocol (see Appendix). I reminded the participant that participation was completely voluntary and that they could exit the study at any time. I provided an overview of the study topic, including the purpose of the study. I asked if they had any questions before we began. After any questions were addressed, I started with the interview questions on the protocol. When the interview questions were exhausted, I let the participant know that the interview was over and immediately debriefed the participant. This debriefing included a reminder that the interview was confidential and allowed the participant time to ask questions or add any relevant comments. I responded to each comment and/or question as appropriate. After the interview, I transcribed the interview. Once the data collection and

analysis were completed, I sent each participant a summary of the findings for member checking (see Creswell, 2013) to ensure accuracy. Participants were given 48 hours to respond to the email to clarify any points. None of the participants identified any inaccuracies, so there were no adjustments made. After that 48-hour period, I sent an email that allowed the participants to know that their part of the study was completed and that they would have access to a copy of the study once completed and approved.

**Data Analysis Plan**

After collecting the data and transcribing the data from each interview, I completed data analysis using an open and axial coding. Data analysis is the process of organizing and discriminating the data into patterns of themes (see Bogdan and Biklen (2007). There are six steps to analyzing qualitative data, including organization, reviewing the data, coding, creating descriptions of the data, building themes, and reporting the interpreted data (see Lodico et al., 2010). First, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. For the next step, I printed out the transcripts and listened to the interviews while reading the transcriptions for mistakes and errors. The initial round of open coding took place during the initial transcription of the interview, as data collection and analysis can be concurrent (see Merriam and Tisdell (2016). After the interviews were transcribed to accurately reflect the interview, I began the second round of coding where I took the larger codes and found connections between the codes to cluster like codes together. I coded by hand and used Excel to create a spreadsheet that groups codes into categories. Next, these categories became themes. This round of coding is when I looked in the transcripts for emergent themes and created subcategories (see Blair, 2015). After this

round of coding, I waited 7 days for the third and fourth rounds of coding to mitigate bias (see Saldana, 2016). The third round of coding was axial coding, where I took categories and connected them to subcategories, while the fourth round of coding was selective coding where I looked for central emergent themes to answer the RQs (see Blair, 2015). The last step of coding was to share the themes with a doctoral level expert with a specialization in qualitative research to check for bias due to my insider status. Once the information was shared and feedback was received from the expert, including the bias check, I shared the summary of the findings with the participants for member checking. After the participants confirmed the findings, I shared the information in Chapter 4.

During the data analysis, I looked for discrepant cases. Discrepant cases emerged due to participant factors for which I did not account (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). When I saw any discrepant cases emerge during coding, I reported the discrepant cases and any steps taken to address the discrepancy, such as seeking out the participant for clarification (see Malterud et al., 2016).

## Trustworthiness

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the concept of trustworthiness is based on research studies having internal and external validity as well as reliability. The research should have internal validity, meaning that the findings that are presented are rooted in the reality of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). External validity looks at the transferability of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research findings must also be reliable or consistent, meaning that if the study were replicated that the

findings would be the same or similar (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Together, these concepts establish the trustworthiness of the research.

To establish credibility, I had the participants engage in member checking. Member checking is the process allowing the participants to read the summary of the themes from the interview (Lincoln et al., 1985). This process allowed the participant to review the findings and make any relevant comments, including corrections or clarifications (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I ensured "adequate engagement in data collection" (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). To accomplish this adequacy, I used a doctoral level expert reviewer with expertise in qualitative methodology in the last stage of coding to check the data for recurrent themes to ensure saturation and check for bias. Lastly, I engaged in peer review with a colleague who was in the district but not eligible to participate to confirm that the emerged themes made sense for the district.

To establish transferability, I first established credibility (see Lincoln et al., 1985). Next, I created detailed information about the research process. This detail will allow future researchers to take my information and replicate the study in their own settings. As the study represents one district in a northeastern state, it will be up to the reader to determine transferability to other populations. The data analysis process is key to this pillar of trustworthiness, as creating thick descriptions that accurately reflect the participants' perspectives (see Lodico et al., 2010) can help other researchers understand if the study will transfer to their population.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that dependability in the social sciences can be difficult, as humans can and will change based on the situation. However, there are ways

to increase dependability in qualitative studies. Mostly, dependability can be increased by many of the above stated checks, including member checking and peer review (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another way to establish dependability is an audit trail (see Lincoln et al., 1985). This audit trail was recorded in my research journal to include data collection decisions, the process of the research, and any challenges or ideas that occurred during the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, to increase dependability, I provided examples of codes, categories and themes in Chapter 4 and supported findings with relevant research in Chapter 5.

Confirmability in research is the extent to which the research is not influenced by researcher interest, including bias or motivation (Amankwaa, 2016). Confirmability was also increased through journaling in my research journal. This journal was used during interviews to ensure I did not interject, but instead noted the times when I would have tried to interject. By regularly journaling, I kept my thoughts about the study in one place, as well as my feelings or connections to other research (see Vicary et al., 2017). Additionally, confirmability was increased by the use of member checking and expert review (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as well as providing direct examples of participants' quotes in Chapter 4.

**Ethical Procedures**

To ensure ethical research, I have completed my CITI training as well as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research's training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants." I established ethical procedures in this research by gaining conditional approval from the Walden University IRB for Ethical

Standards in Research. Once I had that approval, I approached the local area school district for authorization from the superintendent, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and board of education curriculum committee, and received district approval. I submitted those materials to the Walden University IRB and received full approval (Approval No. 06-21-22-0485311). After these steps were completed, I began data collection.

There were no ethical concerns related to the recruitment materials or interview process. The materials were reviewed by an expert reviewer, including my dissertation committee and the Walden University IRB, as well as peer reviewed for clarity by an early childhood educator who had at least 10 years of teaching experience. There were also no concerns related to data collection, as the participants' information remains confidential, and all study materials are kept in a secure location in my home to avoid any possibility of a confidentiality breech within the district.

All participants who agreed to be in the study were apprised of their rights to privacy and confidentiality as stated on the consent form and replied to the study's invitation with "I consent" via email. Before starting any interviews, I made it clear that any participation was voluntary, and that the participant could have revoked consent at any time without consequence. Participants' confidentiality was established using a numerical system that had the participants coded with alphanumeric codes related to participants' response to email intervention (1 through 4; L through U). All personal identifiers were replaced with numerical codes, such as numbering the schools, to ensure confidentiality. The alphanumeric code information is in a separate journal which is kept

in a locked box in my home. The research materials are secured in two separate places, a password protected external hard drive and a locked box in my home, until 5 years after the completion of the study, per Walden University's code of ethics. At the appropriate time, all physical information will be destroyed with a shredder and the files on the hard drive will be purged.

Due to my insider status as working in the district, I am aware that there were ethical issues that may have impacted the study. To minimize these issues, I only engaged participants who did not work at the same school or with whom I have a personal relationship. I have not worked in any supervisory or mentoring role with anyone in the district who would be included in this study, nor am I supervised by anyone who supervises any of the eligible participants. These considerations should have acted to ensure ethical procedures despite my insider status.

## Summary

In this chapter, I described my rationale for using a basic qualitative research design. I also described my extensive role as researcher. I detailed the methodology for the research, including participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and data analysis plan. I concluded the chapter by describing how established trustworthiness and ethical procedures for my research. In addition to the ethical procedures to protect human research participants, I also included information about minimizing ethical issues due to my insider status. In Chapter 4, I will describe the study's setting, data collection, data analysis, present the results of the study as well as evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The RQs were: "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature?" and, "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?" The participants were early childhood educators who were currently teaching kindergarten to first grade in a public school system in the northeast United States. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 participants who worked in the identified local area district as early childhood educators (kindergarten to first grade) and had been teaching for 3 or more years. The data collected for the study included participants' responses to an interview protocol accompanied by a reflective journal. In this chapter, I describe the setting, data collection, data analysis, and present the results of the study, as well as evidence of trustworthiness.

**Setting**

This study was conducted in a public school system in the northeast United States. The school district serves an area that has an Asian population that is five times the state average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Participants were early childhood educators who taught either kindergarten or first grade in the identified district and had been teaching for 3 or more years. All participants were recruited via email with interested participants responding to the recruitment email which

included the consent form. From this response, I emailed the participants on the personal email that they had provided and scheduled a Zoom meeting with each participant. Each participant received an email reminder the day of the interview that included the appropriate meeting information. Eleven interviews were scheduled; however, one participant declined after asking to reschedule. All interviews were completed from a private room in my home and participants completed the interview from their preferred location. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants at the time of the study related to the study results.

## Demographics

The participants' demographics, including their cultural identity and years of teaching, were information that was relevant to the study. I intentionally included these two demographic questions to better understand the participants and their potential role in dominant culture norms. During the interview, after reading the introduction script, I asked each participant two demographic questions. The first was about how many years they had been teaching. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 36 years. The second question asked for the participant's cultural identity or ethnicity to establish if the participant identified as a member of the dominant cultural group or a marginalized cultural group. Nine of the 10 participants self-identified as "White" or "Caucasian," with one of the nine including "British," and the last participant self-identified as Asian. Table 2 includes the participants' demographic information.

**Table 2**

*Participant Years of Experience and Cultural/Ethnic Identity*

| Participant | Years of Experience | Cultural/Ethnic Identity |
|---|---|---|
| 1L | 34 | White or Caucasian |
| 3M | 20 | White |
| 3N | 4 | Caucasian |
| 3O | 9 | British, Caucasian |
| 4P | 36 | Caucasian |
| 2Q | 3 | White |
| 2R | 14 | Caucasian |
| 3S | 13 | Caucasian |
| 4T | 19 | Caucasian |
| 2U | 24 | Asian |

## Data Collection

Recruitment and data collection began once I had full approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board in September 2022. I collected data from 10 participants. The only source of data collection was interviews. All interviews were conducted to accommodate the participants' schedules and were completed outside of school hours, including mornings, nights, weekends, and school holidays. The interview process occurred over 3 weeks, and all interviews were conducted via the Zoom conferencing app due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview was recorded using the Zoom recording option with participant video off to create an audio recording of the interview. All participants opted into the recording.

Each interview was conducted using the interview protocol. Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary with every effort made to keep their identity and responses confidential, and then given the opportunity to ask any questions. After reading the introduction script, I asked each

participant two demographic questions, as detailed in the previous section. After the demographic questions, I proceeded with the interview questions. In each interview, I asked the questions in the order presented on the interview protocol. I used the prompts as necessary to get a clearer understanding of the participants' answers. At the end of the interview, I asked if the participant had anything to add about culturally inclusive literature or culturally informed teaching practices. In the post interview, I thanked each participant for their time and let them know that I would be sending them a summary via email to allow each participant to check for accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. During each interview, I took notes on an interview protocol that I had printed out prior to the interview. Each of these protocols was collected together in a research journal following each interview.

There was one significant interruption to the first interview, when the participant's audio stopped working during the first demographic question. I stopped the interview and the recording and restarted the interview, using the same Zoom link. Upon restarting, the participant's audio was consistent. There were no other significant interruptions for any of the other interviews and every interview was clearly recorded. I transcribed each interview immediately following the interview and then listened to the complete audio recording again once the transcript was completed to ensure accuracy. Any differences between the audio recording and typed transcript were fixed before data analysis began. My research journal, printed transcripts, and the hard drive that contains the audio recordings and digital copies of transcripts are stored in a locked box in my home and will be destroyed in 5 years.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was completed using open and axial coding. There are six steps to analyzing data: organization, reviewing the data, coding, creating descriptions of the data, building themes, and reporting the interpreted data (see Lodico et al., 2010). The first step of data analysis was transcribing the data verbatim. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) encouraged that collection and analysis are concurrent, so the initial round of coding took place during the initial transcription of the interviews. Next, I reviewed the data, and I printed out the transcripts and listened to the interviews to check for mistakes and errors in the transcripts. After the interviews were deemed accurate, I coded by hand and used Excel to create a spreadsheet. I took the broader codes and found connections between the codes to cluster like codes together into categories. In the next phase, I took the broader codes and grouped together similar codes based on commonalities to create codes that were broader. I highlighted significant phrases and words and recorded them in an Excel spreadsheet. Table 3 includes a sample of these codes and supporting interview excerpts.

**Table 3**

*Sample of Open Codes*

| Code | Participant | Excerpt |
|------|-------------|---------|
| Unclear/Frustrating | 3M | It was confusing at first, but then they were helpful because we weren't sure exactly what we're looking for; if certain books that we thought might be okay. |
| Flexibility | 3N | It's just knowing where I'm gonna [sic] fit it into my day as well with, on top of everything else that we're teaching |
| Increased resources | 2R | I feel like in the past couple of years, it's become more of a conversation, and they've been providing us more resources. |
| Replacing current library | 4P | That was something that we had to work through last year was, you know, going through our own libraries, deciding what to keep. |
| Specific countries of origin | 2U | [In my class] I have like Asians as far as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, I've done, I've done, like, I've gone out and purchased my own, like, so that if I have students, then I can put books out that they might connect with. But again, I feel like that's really on my own, and I've, I've done all that purchasing. |
| Student reading level | 1L | It's hard to find ones that are an appropriate level for first graders to read on their own. |

Next, these categories became themes. This round of coding is when I looked in

the transcripts for emergent themes and created subcategories (see Blair, 2015). I waited

7 days before starting the next round of code to mitigate bias (see Saldana, 2016). I then

completed axial coding, where I took categories and connected them to subcategories,

while the fourth round of coding was selective coding where I looked for central

emergent themes to answer the RQs (see Blair, 2015). During this phase, I reviewed the

RQs to contextualize the data within the RQs and sort the codes in categories that would

be reflected during data interpretation. This round of selective coding was where I looked

for central emergent themes to answer the RQs (see Blair, 2015). When the coding was complete, I shared the themes with an expert, a doctoral level qualitative methodologist, to check for bias that may be present due to my insider status. The summary of the findings was shared with the participants once the expert reviewed the themes and determined that the themes did not contain researcher bias.

Overall, the participants' responses were consistent. However, there were a few outliers in two specific areas. The first discrepant case occurred in response to the availability of professional development. Whereas most participants detailed few to no opportunities for district professional development, 3S stated that they had attended many different professional learning "offerings, early on," including a summer professional development. The next discrepant case was in the availability of culturally inclusive books and authenticity issues with texts. Most participants said that there was limited availability and made attempts to look at the authenticity of the literature, but 4T said that there was "good availability" and did not "think I really have any challenges with authenticity." These discrepant cases have been included to demonstrate the variance in participants' perspectives. Discrepant cases lead to more trustworthy findings as the discrepant cases motivate researchers to think through codes and categories (see Saldana, 2016).

## Results

This section describes the results after analyzing the data that resulted from 10 interviews with early childhood educators. This research study, which used a basic qualitative design, was designed to answer the RQs. The first three themes answer the

first research question, "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature?" The last theme relates to the second research question, "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?" The themes are listed below as they relate to the research question but are not listed in any order as to denote importance of one theme over another.

**Research Question 1**

The following three themes answer the first research question: What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature? The resulting themes center on unclear district guidance and expectations, educators' shallow understanding of marginalized cultures, and lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts.

***Theme 1: Educators Struggle to Find Authentic Opportunities to Incorporate Provided Inclusive Literature and Feel There is a Lack of Clear Guidance and Expectations from the District Administration on how to use the Materials***

Many of the participants discussed the amount of increased funding for inclusive literature that the district has been providing. The participants all referred to "book bins" throughout the interviews. Participant 3N described the book bins in detail and said that the district provided a "text set of multiple inclusive texts" of approximately 25 books for grades kindergarten and first grade and increased opportunities for ordering more inclusive literature. Participant 3M stated, "our district has been great and really supplying many, many books for us." Participant 1L also discussed the school media

specialist at their school adding to the amount of available inclusive literature: "our school media specialist has purchased a huge amount over the last 2 years, 3 years." Participant 2R said,

> They did get us more books. And it's nice to see in my, like, library for the students the different ethnicities, even in the books they'll be reading in their baskets. So hopefully they'll be able to find a book that they, you know, feel represents them, and hopefully enjoy it while they're doing independent reading.

Participant 4P noted that the purchased books followed the initial conversations about including inclusive texts:

> It wasn't until last year that they made an effort to the purchase us specific books that would be more culturally diverse and cover all different backgrounds. So, prior to last year, when they asked us to complete orders, it was just … a part of this discussion … but then it was never backed up with supplying us with those things that we really needed unless we did it on our own. So, but last year was the first year that they actually made a, an effort then, to really make sure that they there was money allotted for each of us to buy put in orders for, for different texts.

Participant 2U noted that the provided text set was "not a lot, maybe 20 or 30 books, maybe, but enough for me to read aloud to the to the kids as far as in my classroom library" but that the district did give the kindergarten and first grade educators a "huge, huge opportunity" to self-select books for their classrooms. They continued: "I didn't get all 3,000 [I originally picked] but at least you know I had the choice. But I think I … maybe I have like 200, maybe 100, of them now, which I think was nice." The

participants all varied in their descriptions of the number of books, from considering it was an adequate number of books while others reflected that it was still not enough, but all the participants discussed the increased resources that the district has provided in the last 3 years.

Although the books were welcomed resources, the participants reflected on the challenge of adding inclusive literature to the school day. Most of the participants discussed time as a challenge for including inclusive literature in the already packed school day. Participant 3N noted,

> I noticed that there's such great books, and I wanna read all of them, but trying to put them in spaces throughout the day is difficult. Then it's just knowing where I'm gonna fit it into my day as well with, on top of everything else that we're teaching.

This challenge was exacerbated for the half-day kindergarten program. Participant 3M said, "One big thing is just the time [laughs] because we have a half-day program. There's not enough time to get it all in." Participant 2U summed up her challenges for including inclusive literature in their day:

> I think, unfortunately, time is … the issue when it comes to teaching, you know. It's wonderful, I think, that the district provides us with … all these, you know, books and … things, but our time is so tight, especially, like, starting from kindergarten, you know, like every minute of our day is pretty much taken, and I just had this conversation with my administrator, saying, like, that there's not enough time in the day for me to, to squeeze

in something that is as important as that, so, like, I purposefully changed my schedule [laughs] to include a read aloud time, like, although they, they give me that time, it wasn't enough, and it wasn't in the right place of my day. It was, like, in random places. So, I … switched around my schedule so that I could include little things like that. So really, for me, the challenge really is the expectation of teaching math for an hour, for teaching, you know, writing for 40 minutes, and then and then not being able to be flexible. I was in a meeting one time, and, with the with the reading supervisor and they said, "Well, your read aloud does not count as part of your reading class" … I was like, "well, for first graders it's very difficult, because you, you can't expect the kids to literally sit down for maybe 50 minutes after my mini lesson, and a model … 50 minutes, and just read." So, it's like, so read alouds have to be a part of my reading lesson, like, even if it's just, you know, 5 minutes of a reading lesson. So, I feel like time is the biggest issue here. Because of what, what, somebody who is in a leadership position expects and what's reality, in a first grade classroom.

Many of the participants were unable to recall professional learning opportunities that gave specific information on how to authentically incorporate inclusive literature in the classroom. Participants 1L, 3N, 3O, 4P, 2Q and 2U said that there were very few specific district learning opportunities about inclusive literature. Participant 2Q said, "we've had maybe one or 2 [optional morning]

shares about the text that we received." These meetings may have happened over virtual learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, although none of the participants could specifically identify when or what the meeting was. Participant 3M stated, "It was just more of a preview of those books at one time … that might have even been through a Zoom meeting." Participant 3O's response was more indicative of most of the participants as they said,

> I'm pretty sure when we first bought the inclusive texts, I'm pretty sure there, there must, there must have been, maybe I'm wrong, some morning shares or some zooms, it was probably during the pandemic, some zoom shares about the new inclusive texts. Uh, I don't know. Um. Usually, they like, you know, they, they tell you about, about it as they're rolling them out.

Participant 2R was more specific in their feedback about the district professional learning opportunities, "I don't think we've had enough … training in terms of it [inclusive text.]" Each of the participants had a different recollection about the district administration support about inclusive texts or the inclusive text sets with most participants unable to specifically detail the meeting or resulting information.

Participant 3S was the only participant who detailed specific professional development that has been in the district for multiple school years. Participant 3S, who described seeking out professional development opportunities to make their classroom library more representative of their students on their own, could recall specific district learning opportunities over the past 5 school years. However, the professional development opportunities that they described were optional:

Maybe in 2017 or 18, maybe--you know that's when I feel like we started really

focusing on it, it's when I went to the PD … I went to PD, like, and I, I think

[colleague] was part of it, and I'm trying to remember who else like that was

offered over the summer, and [retired specialist] we did a PD and [administrator]

like a whole bunch of, it, not just administrators, but, like the teacher, resource

specialist, offered PD during different, like our … PD days in the summer, and

then also with getting our diverse text sets we had, you know, power hours and

things about those books. So, there are options within the district, and then also,

obviously, you can seek out with outside the district as well.

Many of the participants said that the district's strategic goal about empowering

learners to proactively create a more inclusive world was the bulk of the district's

communication about inclusivity in the classroom. Participant 3N thought that guidance

from district administration has been overarching, but non-specific:

Definitely around, like, our [district] statement and what our school stands for

with our goals that I know what to look for, but other than that I don't feel like

there's … I personally did not feel like I got a lot of guidance on even the text set

that I got, it was just kind of given.

Participant 2R inferred that the purchased books were the district administrators

communicating that:

It's okay to teach about this; it's okay to take a break from, you know something,

if something else comes up, and a child is talking about something, and, you see

teachable moment about their culture, their ethnicity, something like that. So, I

feel like it, it almost gave us a kind of freedom to realize, like, this is okay.

However, they went on to say, "I don't feel like there's been much" in regard to specific

district guidance. Participant 4T was very clear on the lack of direction from the district:

"I think we were given a bin of culturally inclusive text and told to use them." Similarly,

3O stated, "We weren't really given any guidance as to how to use the books, or when to

use the books."

Participants 4P and 3M were the only ones to discuss specific communication

from the district about the type of books that were to be included in classroom libraries,

which they described as "frustrating" and "unclear." Participant 4P stated, "at first it was,

it was, it was a little frustrating at first, because it wasn't as clear as I think they intended

it to be." Participant 3M went into more detail:

> It was confusing at first, but then they were helpful because we weren't sure
>
> exactly what we're looking for; is certain books that we thought might be okay.
>
> They're like, "No, they need to get rid of" and then we had the good
>
> conversations of like, favorite story books, just like classic books that have been
>
> around, and they said they're fine, you know, to do as a read aloud but shouldn't
>
> be like our main teaching point.

Additionally, 2R recalled previous district communication about different holidays and

their current understanding of what the district is supporting:

> I do feel like, for example, the holidays we used to, like, acknowledge all the
>
> holidays, and kind of like teach about all of them. And then there was a time

where that was kind of pushed aside, because they didn't want that to be the focus, like, you know, for example, like Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, you know they kind of wanted us not to. Now I feel like we're able to kind of acknowledge more and, you know, I used to be able to have parents come in and teach about Holi and Diwali, and I feel like, again, there was like kind of a stop on that and now I feel like it's coming back.

***Theme 2: Most Educators Have a Shallow Understanding of Marginalized Cultures That Influences Their Ability and Desire to Include Inclusive Literature in the Classroom***

Three of the participants described their efforts to create more representative libraries before the district approached educators about inclusive literature. When asked about the district's approach to inclusive literature and the impact on their classroom library, 1L said,

I feel like they caught up to my [pause] attempt at including inclusive literature. I think they brought to our attention the need to do it. The requirement to do it. But we didn't have the supplies to do it.

Participant 1L described their attempts to fill their classroom library through a variety of sources, including purchasing books on their own and using the libraries in three different counties. They commented on the district administration starting a conversation about inclusive literature: "yes, good, now fund what I want 'cause I've been asking for this [laughs]." Participant 3O talked about how they had already been aware of including representative books due to their immigration experience and previously teaching an

English as a Second Language classroom. They detailed an experience about being asked to create a professional development for a faculty meeting where "we weren't directly asked to use the inclusive text, that's just something my teacher, my co-teacher and I found, is age appropriate to use the inclusive text to teach critical thinking routines." Participant 3S was the last participant who volunteered that they had already been working on including inclusive literature for their classroom and had used inclusive literature as the focus of their alternative educator evaluation in a previous year. They stated,

> I really felt like my classroom library at the time didn't reflect my
>
> students, and it was very difficult for a lot of them to even grasp the, um,
>
> you know, things going on in the stories we're not relevant to them, and
>
> they didn't understand you know, and couldn't do the retelling, or, or have
>
> conversations about the text when they had no background knowledge so I
>
> initially attended some PD around, you know, seeing yourself in mirrors
>
> and the windows and doors, kind of sliding doors, kind of concept. And
>
> then also did some of my alternate evaluation problems of practice around
>
> that…I guess every year, I just, since I've been paying attention to it as
>
> making sure that I've, the students feel represented.

Participant 4T was the only participant to specifically state that the district had been the first to bring up using literature that was more representative of the students in their classroom. This discrepancy is noted because they were also the only participant who was noted to state that they did not have problems with the availability of inclusive

literature for the classroom, nor did they have issues with authenticity of the available books. They stated, "I don't think I've encountered any trouble choosing them [texts]" and "I don't think I really have any challenges with authenticity." Every other participant included a statement that indicated they had challenges in regard to authenticity of either the author or the represented culture, or with establishing meaningfulness with their students.

Seven of the participants stuck to a food and holiday idea of culture, which is mostly around surface culture (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). Participant 1L noted that they used to have a lot of trouble finding "some holiday ones [books]" but that "it's much easier now." Participant 3M talked about how the information about culture that they were familiar with has been "more information about like, certain holidays and traditions that different cultures celebrate." Participant 3N talked about the new text set "about different holidays or just diverse texts where the characters look like [their students]." Participant 3O talked about books in regard to specific countries of origin of their students, but also mentioned looking for books about unfamiliar holidays. Participant 4P looks "specifically for … books that have Asian characters that would fit the bill so that the kids that are in my classroom would be able to identify more readily with the characters in those fiction stories." Participant 2Q discussed wanting specific lessons about "the holidays, and that the different cultures and ethnicity celebrate." Participant 4T said, "I have quite a few books that … share and talk about different religious … holidays."

Three of the participants spoke more about the specific cultures of their students. Participant 2R noted, "I feel like you can find a book that represents a culture in multiple different ways," while 3S mentioned specific cultures and ethnicities and stated, "making sure also having female and male representation, is also really important. And also, like, you know, generational characters as well." Participant 2U also talked about specific cultures being represented in their classroom library:

> [They are] not culturally represented within the classroom library. I might have, like, a handful of read aloud that I can read that would be culturally diverse, and that they could, you know, connect with. But as far as in my classroom library, not, not well … I've gone out and purchased my own, like, so that if I have students, then I can put books out that they might connect with. But again, I feel like that's really on my own, and I've, I've done all that purchasing.

Participants warned that colleagues may not be receptive to trainings or have an understanding of inclusivity. When asked about why the ideal trainings that they detailed might appeal to their colleagues, 1L stated:

> This is going to sound horrible: I don't know how much it would appeal to all of them. But I think it's important for all of them to see it in participate in it. I think they need to be pushed a bit, to understand that we need to be inclusive in all ways. In our literature, in our activities, in our behavioral expectations. You know, if it's not in the culture of our students that they're used to sitting and being quiet, or they're used to doing this, like we need to embrace it all. And I think there are a lot of my colleagues that still need a push in that direction.

Participant 3O echoed this sentiment, noting that some of their colleagues may have

additional challenges, depending on their awareness:

> If they don't have, like, the ESL community in their classroom, or if they haven't
>
> traveled to a lot of the countries, or something they may not have the background
>
> knowledge or if they're not comfortable bringing it up or it's not like, for me, it's
>
> an everyday conversation in my classroom, like multiple different cultures, like
>
> that's a huge part of my room. And then, like I said, like this year writing it and
>
> making it a part of the social studies curriculum has made it a lot easier but I can
>
> see if you're just given these books, with no word, no guideline … or there's no
>
> students who relate to them right away, maybe it could be a little tricky.

Participant 3S noted that this lack of awareness could influence colleagues' desires to

attend professional learning opportunities: "a lot of it is a choice, so I think some—some

of it probably should be, you know, mandatory … I think they're there for people who

want to focus on it."

### *Theme 3: Educators Experience a Lack of Availability of Inclusive Texts that are Developmentally Appropriate, On Students' Reading Levels, or Inclusive of Students' Cultures for Their Classroom Libraries, as well as a Continued Lack of Funding*

Most participants discussed the developmentally appropriate level of inclusive

texts, both that were district provided and general availability. As read alouds, 3M stated

that many of the inclusive books are too text heavy and have to be considerably modified

for kindergarten: "they have to be broken down, either just like me … like reading a, a

sentence or two, and discussing the picture … my own words, or maybe reading part of

the story, and then coming back to it." Participant 3N noted the same challenges in their kindergarten class and said, "it would be nice to, maybe, have a text set that is on a lower level." Participants 2R and 2U discussed similar challenges in first grade and stated, "I do feel like at times I have to kind of, like, cross-check things and make sure that what I'm sharing is appropriate for … their age group" and "I think sometimes, just some things just aren't, aren't getting understood, I think, from … these first grade minds," respectively. Participant 4P reflected that it is always a consideration for any grade level to find age-appropriate books.

Considering that most students begin to read in kindergarten and first grade, looking for inclusive books that students can read on their own is another challenge. Participant 1L noted that "it's hard to find ones that are an appropriate level for first graders to read on their own." Participant 2Q mentioned, "the teacher has to read those texts, you know, I can't leave them out for the kids to read because I do think that they're at a higher level than first graders are supposed to be reading."

Overall, participants noted that there has been an increase in authentic inclusive literature in the last few years. A few participants detailed the availability of authentic literature by questioning whether it was written by members of the represented culture or if the literature told an authentic story. Participant 1L noted that it was difficult to find literature written by authors from Pakistan or India and that even though "I'm able to find many [pause] different cultures, but not necessarily ones that mirror the students in my classroom all the time" This idea was also expressed by 2Q: "I also feel like, we have a

lot of resources for other ethnicities and cultures, whereas we don't have too, too many books that represent the kids in our district, specifically."

In addition to representing cultures present in the classroom, participants discussed representation of cultures that were not in the classroom. Participant 3S said, "making sure you know I had representation of, you know, some of the other cultures, even if they're not in the classroom it's important" while 4T noted that they would "represent the students in my classroom, but also the students that are not, so that we you know are more well versed and know more about all the different cultures." Participant 2U said that, even with the recent increased availability, they still felt that there still are "just not enough books that are, that have diverse … main characters."

Most participants detailed the challenge of funding before the district increased funding for classroom literature. Participant 4P stated that "the cost was a big thing" and 2U agreed that "finance" was one of their top three considerations for purchasing books. Participant 4T noted that even with increased online availability of book videos, supply chain issues impacted how quickly their book orders were getting to their classroom. They said, "there has been a delay in what, you know, from when you order it, until when it actually gets to you and you can use it." Participants 1L and 2U noted that, even with the increased funding, there were still gaps in their classroom libraries. Participant 1L noted that they were promised larger funding that dwindled, so they then purchased with district funds "as many varied books of different cultures" while 2U still has thousands of books on a wish list.

Participants did note that online resources following the Covid-19 pandemic did help with finding more books. Participant 2U discussed getting books from online videos as well as slide decks that provided several books in one resource, although they were unclear about when they were provided by the district or informally by colleagues. Participant 2R stated:

> Ever since Covid, I feel like I can find more to that I could just do videos if I don't actually have the book and I don't have to go out purchase it. So, I do feel like that's also another good resource.

This online availability eased the participants' consideration for availability and funding.

Participants have found other ways to work within funding challenges. Participant 3O eased the challenge of funding by buying inclusive literature as gifts: "a lot of these books, my friends and I have been purchasing for each other, for each other's birthdays." As stated previously, in addition to buying books on their own, 1L also used the public libraries to flesh out their classroom library. Participant 3S talked about intentionally using their district provided classroom funding: "with our order every year, because we also get some book money, so, making sure that I was very intentional in the types of books that I was purchasing to add to my class library."

**Research Question 2**

Theme 4 answered the second research question: "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?" This theme centered on what educators need from district administration to support culturally informed teaching practices. The

resulting theme dovetailed with the first theme, which centered around the communication from the district. Here, as the participants were interested in specific expectations and clear messaging from the district administration, this last theme highlights that the participants wanted to understand the expectations from district administration and expressed a desire to learn more about culturally informed teaching practices to implement these practices in their classrooms. The theme also includes information about the specific ways that the participants want the information presented.

*Theme 4: Educators want Specific Information Surrounding District Expectations, Culturally Informed Teaching Practices, and Desire More Readily Available Professional Learning Opportunities That Include Takeaway Lessons and Practical Information*

Nearly every participant discussed a lack of explicit district guidance around culturally informed teaching practices. Participant 3S, who was the only participant who had previously detailed district provided professional learning opportunities, agreed and noted that more "PD efforts" would be beneficial to district efforts to support culturally informed teaching practices in the classroom. Most participants had inferred guidance from district strategic goals, the requirement to clear out classroom libraries, and mandated curricular practices.

One of the ways that participants described clear district expectations was in regard to the district direction to remove outdated books in the classrooms. This effort was mentioned by every participant. Two participants (3M and 4P) noted that the rollout of this directive was not as clear as it should have been and 4P criticized that the original

directive was about "get rid of so much of what we already had in our classroom libraries, instead of just adding to what we had." However, most of the participants noted that it was an opportunity to spend time looking at the representation in their classroom libraries. Participant 3M discussed how "looking, cleaning out our books that are really old and outdated, and might not be something that the kids can relate to" and said that they "cleaned out the entire library that weren't related … [or] had bias." Overall, participants thought that the conversation about updating classrooms was "understandable," as noted by 4T and 3O said, "it makes sense to me."

Another way that participants described district support of culturally informed teaching practices was through the revamped social studies curriculum. Participants 1L, 3M, 3N, 3O, 4P, 2Q, 2R, and 3S talked about the recent revision of the social studies curriculum that grade level teachers worked over the summer to create. Participant 4P stated, "this year we are supposed to be implementing a new social studies curriculum that use those texts that we've got." Participant 2R described their experience writing the new social studies curriculum:

> The only thing that I did … find beneficial was doing the social studies curriculum writing, which I didn't even realize we were going to be so focused on including those diverse texts and I feel like I was able to get new insight on … different cultures and nationalities that are represented so I feel like having that this summer helped.

Participant 3N agreed and said, "I did learn a lot when I was writing curriculum over the summer for the social studies. So I was learning off of, like other teachers, of ways to make the community … represent all of our different cultures."

Most participants referred to situations where they had looked for additional professional learning opportunities outside of school or other opportunities that they had found with colleagues to further their knowledge of culturally informed teaching practices. Participants discussed seeking out their own professional learning opportunities. Many participants discussed optional morning teacher shares where a teacher might choose to discuss a topic for colleagues and agreed that these teacher-led morning shares were beneficial. Participants 1L and 4P talked about morning shares from colleagues, specifically with the building media specialist, while 4P added "a couple of the teachers who have spearheaded that, to try to help us all become more aware" during morning shares in their building. Participant 2U also noted the lack of district training and stated: "I'm gonna say there wasn't a training. It's just I, I go to meetings that I choose to go to meetings that a teacher runs and she'll share, she'll share books and ideas with that." Participant 2R wondered about more discussions about culturally informed teaching practices: "sometimes I do feel like when we're talking in our faculty meetings, sometimes there's some stuff that comes up but I don't know if it's like a thing that they're touching on often enough." Participant 3S described the optional book club that their building engaged in and said, "we did have a lot of conversation … about our cultures and upbringings which was also very useful, but … that was not mandatory." Participant 4T noted that they had only been given the opportunity to observe lessons in

another district due to their lead teacher status but noted, "that's really the only hands-on training that I've had."

Participants detailed searching to engage in professional learning opportunities. Participant 1L talked about looking for more representative trainings, outside of the district:

I've gotten more and continue to get more from my own research and

social media and, um, recommendations in that way. I think it's hard

because our teacher trainers and our administration are like us. They

mirror us. We're all a majority Caucasian, and I, you know, I find seeing it

on social media from more culturally literate and diverse people, more,

truer, and more inclusive than us.

Participant 3O noted that they went to colleagues who were familiar with the culture to better understand a book that they were presenting to the class because "not having the background knowledge that has been that is challenging in some cases." Participant 3S talked about going to a colleague: "Our ESL teacher in our building is also really good about sharing out when they [the local colleges] have different courses and … things that you can attend on that topic as well."

Participants noted a lack of take away information provided by the district about inclusive texts or culturally informed teaching practices. They expressed that the district had not given any lesson plans to accompany the inclusive text sets or culturally informed teaching practices. Participant 2U noted that targeted, grade level lesson plans would be helpful. They said they would like:

Specific lesson plans that people use … in a classroom. And when I say, like, lesson plans, or training, a lot of times, I'll go to a training, and it's like, "Oh, this is really for high school kids, but you can use these in first grade classrooms," but, but I always think, like, "well, no, not really." I mean, I can use the book, of course, but I then have to go back, and I will have to do all of the work myself. So, it would be just nice to have some things pre-made, or like a make and take. If I go someplace, you have all these books, like, "here are all the books that you're getting, let's look at them. Let's create quick, simple lesson plans" and then, if I'm working with Pre-K, K, 1, 2 teachers, well, yes, that that is usable.

Additionally, 2Q noted they would like to "engage in the activities that we are giving to the students, too … I would want to make sure that I have a plethora of activities I can choose from to differentiate for my students as well … based on their abilities."

Most of the participants asked for time to go through the district provided literature to increase familiarity with the books to understand where they would fit in with their lessons. Participant 3M noted that they previously had the opportunity last year to put "a few" inclusive books in their lessons but with more familiarity they would be able to "look at them and figure out when would be a good time to fit some of them in." Participant 3N felt similarly and wanted to "know where I could plug them in … throughout our curriculum … the challenges are just not really knowing when it's appropriate to read them … where it's not just to revolve around reading it for holidays or certain months of the year." They went on to ask for "the opportunity to meet with, with the curriculum supervisors and our diversity leaders to include them and ways that we, in

ways that we can, or we're just always reviewing with our goals we have" Similarly, 4T

thought it would be helpful to have "time with the texts and ideas of how to best use

them."

The timing of the information was also important. Participant 2R noted that it

would be helpful to time the professional learning opportunities throughout the school

year:

> Just having that reminder of another training being, like, "hey, remember you had
>
> this," or, "this is why you did this," or, "make sure you're talking and being more
>
> like cognizant about, like, focusing on these authors right now or these
>
> illustrators, and why they're important." I feel like sometimes those kinds of
>
> trainings are really important as, like, right before the month or the time when
>
> we're celebrating so that I can just be reminded before I start planning for that
>
> month [laughs].

Participant 3N stated a similar sentiment and asked for information on including the

books from a training or mentor where they could meet "throughout the year about

different ways we can include it and put it into our curriculum … so each and every day,

there's some type of representation of each child's culture in, in the room throughout the

year."

Participants reflected that information about culture, either presented from the

district or by a community member panel that represented local cultures and ethnicities,

would be of benefit. Participant 2Q wanted to get age-appropriate background knowledge

to have "ways that we can implement in an early childhood setting. I just feel like the

more that we know, the better prepared we can be to make sure that all of our students are seen." Participant 3M asked for a panel made "from experts that this is their culture for them to share it." Participant 3O suggested that "it would be really nice if, you know, they gave us, you know, if they had the author come in of some of these books, and just kind of give…their side, of like the reason they … wrote that book." Participant 3S noted that they had:

> Some parents come in to one of our meetings before Covid … from the ESL
> perspective … they came in and … told us about you know what's important to
> them and their cultures … and that really was helpful. And I think something
> more along those lines and maybe having more different cultures represented
> would be really helpful.

Participants asked for time with the books to read through them. Participant 4P noted, "I still have to become familiar with what I'm actually getting to add to my library" and 2R said, they kind of gave us a box of books and didn't really give us time to explore it or talk about them with, like, our other co-workers or peers." Participant 2U also stated that their ideal training would include:

> A list of books, with a basic summary … having time to go through the books.
> Not so much anybody talking, but maybe after I had, have a chance to, to read
> through the books, then, either having discussions of how these books could be
> utilized.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In Chapter 3, I previously detailed ways that I would achieve trustworthiness. During the research study, I established trustworthiness using a variety of strategies. The concept of trustworthiness is based on research studies having internal and external validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Internal validity means that the presented findings are rooted in the reality of the data, while external validity looks at the transferability of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, the research findings must also be reliable or consistent, meaning that if the study were replicated, that the findings would be the same or similar (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Together, these concepts establish the trustworthiness of the research.

## Credibility

To establish credibility, I used a variety of strategies. These strategies included member checking (see Lincoln et al., 1985), expert review, and peer review. For member checking, I had the participants read the summary of the themes from the interviews to allow for any corrections or comments. All participants agreed to the accuracy of the findings. I also engaged a doctoral level expert reviewer with expertise in qualitative methodologies in the last stage of coding to ensure the themes indicated saturation and checked for bias. The last strategy was peer review, where I engaged with a district colleague who was ineligible to participate in the study to confirm that the themes made sense for the district.

**Transferability**

To establish credibility, I detailed my research process in Chapters 3 and 4. Once credibility was established, it will be up to the reader to determine transferability to other populations due to the specific setting of my study. Additionally, I worked to create thick descriptions and used direct quotations that accurately reflect the participants' perspectives (see Lodico et al., 2010), as data analysis is an important part of transferability and can help future researchers understand if the study will transfer to their population.

**Dependability**

Dependability can be difficult in the social sciences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) but I worked to increase dependability in my basic qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) encourage member checking and peer review, as detailed above. Additionally, I established an audit trail in my research journal (see Lincoln et al., 1985). This audit trail included data collection decisions, the process of the research, and any challenges or ideas that occurred during the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also provided examples of codes, categories, and themes in Chapter 4 as well as supporting findings with relevant research in Chapter 5.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability was increased in this study through journaling and was used during the interviews when I wanted to interject or had additional ideas about the direction of the interview. I also regularly journaled about my feelings in connection to my research as well as any studies that I found during the interview process (see Vicary

et al., 2017). In this way, I tried to ensure that the research was not influenced by researcher interest, including bias or motivation (see Amankwaa, 2016). I have also provided direct examples of participants' quotes in this chapter. Lastly, confirmability was increased by the use of member checking and expert review (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Summary**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The first three themes adequately addressed the first research question: What early childhood educators' perspectives are of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature? These themes dealt with unclear district guidance on provided resources, educators' shallow understanding of marginalized cultures, and a lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts. The second research question asked what educators need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The theme that resulted adequately addressed what educators need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices with concerned educators wanting more explicit information about culturally informed teaching practices with practical takeaways. In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation and discussion of the research findings. I will also address the limitations of the study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. Four themes emerged during data analysis centered on unclear district guidance on provided resources, educators' shallow understanding of marginalized cultures, lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts, and educators wanting more explicit information about culturally informed teaching practices that includes practical takeaways. In this chapter, I will include the findings of the study as they relate to the conceptual framework and current literature, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

The interpretation of the findings was based on the literature review and the conceptual framework of CRT in education. The findings from the study confirm early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. Each of the four themes is described in the following sections, and each is organized by research question. I have contextualized the themes from my data analysis with relevant literature and the conceptual framework. The first three themes addressed RQ1, "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature?" The themes dealt with unclear district guidance on provided resources, educators' shallow understanding of

marginalized cultures, and a lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts. The last

theme addressed RQ 2, "What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they

need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their

classrooms?" The resulting theme centered on educators wanting more explicit

information about culturally informed teaching practices that includes practical

takeaways.

**Theme 1: Educators Struggle to Find Authentic Opportunities to Incorporate**

**Provided Inclusive Literature and Feel There is a Lack of Clear Guidance and**

**Expectations from the District Administration on how to use the Materials**

Most of the current research focuses on situations where educators are struggling

for resources. However, in this study the educators interviewed all acknowledged an

intentional increase in resources provided by the local area district. This finding is an

important contrast to current research, where most classroom libraries lack inclusive

literature (Crisp et al., 2016). The intentionality of providing this literature may help

students in the district who are not part of the dominant culture feel that they are being

included in the classroom group (Khalfaoui et al., 2021). However, even with the

increase, some participants noted that not all their students were represented. This

reflection is supported by researchers who have noted children's book publishing is just

beginning to be more culturally diverse (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2022;

Fullerton et al., 2018).

Most participants noted that they could not recall specific guidance from the

district administration on inclusive literature. Though one participant described some

district provided opportunities, they also clarified that they had been actively seeking professional learning opportunities about inclusive literature elsewhere. Teachers have more success with inclusive practices in the classroom with consistent professional development opportunities centered on high-quality teaching practices (Chu, 2021; McNally & Slutsky, 2018), resulting in more positive relationships and less discipline-related interactions with their students. Except for the two participants who had been actively adding inclusive literature previously, participants described the only explicit message from the district administration about adding inclusive literature to their morning meeting as unrealistic and otherwise unclear and frustrating communication from district administration. Although a starting point, this additive approach is warned against (Gaias et al., 2018; Iwai, 2019). Additional professional development on inclusive literature that sets realistic expectations to authentically use the inclusive literature educators currently have in their classrooms may result in more educators engaging with the district provided inclusive literature and other inclusive books.

The participants described few, if any, district learning opportunities that were specifically about inclusive literature and, of those opportunities, a few were "turn-key" style, where a selected staff member was chosen to attend an experience and then train their colleagues. Researchers like Alaca and Pyle (2018) and Nganga (2020) have warned against this "infusion" model of professional development and noted that teachers must actively engage with anti-bias education, especially if they were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with anti-bias education. The lack of direct engagement that the participants described could impact teaching practices, as researchers found that

educators who had the opportunity to directly engage in explicit professional development with clear expectations improved their knowledge and teaching efficacy (Iwai, 2019; McKoy et al., 2017; McNally & Slutsky, 2018).

Participants' description of their struggle to include the inclusive literature in addition to mandated requirements is aligned with research detailing that how understanding culture and sustaining culturally appropriate family relationships is another thing to do with other teaching responsibilities (Reid et al., 2019). Though most participants described the challenges of adding inclusive literature to their instructional day, they noted that one district curricular requirement that helped educators meaningfully include inclusive literature was the rewrite of the social studies curriculum. Participants who were on the rewrite committee reflected that it gave them new opportunities to understand other cultures. The participants described using the inclusive books that the district provided as a part of their social studies lessons this year, as opposed to previous years when these remained unused. The new social studies curriculum is also a demonstration of interest convergence (Sleeter, 2017), one of the tenets of CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Here, the district as the dominant culture is supporting the teaching of diversity more holistically, as opposed to an additive approach. Though the social studies curriculum was the only example of mandated requirements helping educators embed culturally inclusive literature during the school day, the participants' positive response is evidence that clear guidance should help teachers learn to include culturally inclusive literature throughout the day, which is a strength in teacher preparation programs (Ginsberg et al., 2021).

**Theme 2: Most Educators Have a Shallow Understanding of Marginalized Cultures That Influences Their Ability and Desire to Include Inclusive Literature in the Classroom**

Some participants described their efforts to create more culturally inclusive classroom libraries preceded the district administration's approach to culturally inclusive literature. Most participants who self-identified their efforts to create more representative literature and were seeking materials and professional learning opportunities on their own, described the district administration's efforts increasing to reflect their attempts. These findings suggest that these educators see the benefit in connecting academic learning with culturally inclusive literature (see Laman & Henderson, 2018). One participant explained their overwhelmingly positive experience with connecting student cultures to current academic learning, similar to research that found positive academic gains for students whose home culture was connected to their in-school learning (Borre et al., 2019; Hilaski, 2020).

Most participants focused on holidays and food during the interviews with only one participant noting that they would like to go beyond these two concepts (see Alaca & Pyle, 2018). Although participants detailed attempts to learn more about the holidays celebrated by their students, highlighting only these specialized elements could further marginalize cultures, reducing those students to stereotypes (Nganga, 2020). One participant admitted to not knowing students' cultures and waiting to learn these throughout the year, which impedes the drive to represent student culture in literature (Kelly et al., 2021). Educators in this study described earnest attempts to connect with

their students in these holiday and food conversations. Even with good intentions, educators will fail to contextualize marginalized cultures in the larger world without self-reflection on their pedagogy and role in student success; this is the concept of colorblindness in CRT in education (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

The participants reflected on their use of culturally inclusive literature, including those who were new to creating inclusive classroom libraries, a finding that suggests that this may be the start of critical engagement for some of the district early educators. Educators who are deliberate in their pedagogy and self-reflection can help students rise above their marginalized identities (Anderson & Fees, 2018; Boghian, 2019; Hikida, 2018). Conversely, a few participants also detailed their colleagues' reticence to participate in creating culturally inclusive classroom libraries or participating in professional learning opportunities. Teacher's beliefs impact their teaching practices and may limit what they engage in with students (Alaca & Pyle, 2018).

The findings around educators' lack of understanding of culture touch on the components of CRT in education focused on in this study, specifically counternarrative, colorblindness, and interest convergence. Most participants discussed adding resources to their classroom libraries that highlighted diversity, even if they noted that their particular students were not proportionally represented in the literature. This focus demonstrates the tenet of counternarrative (Dixson & Anderson, 2018), the idea of highlighting the voices of marginalized groups, which not simply focusing on food and holidays.

Colorblindness, where educators must contextualize marginalized cultures in the larger world and self-reflect on their pedagogy and their role in student success (Dixson

& Anderson, 2018), was demonstrated mostly in emerging ways, with most of the participants following the district's lead by using the provided book bin, but not otherwise adding culturally inclusive literature to their classrooms. The two participants who were active in creating inclusive classroom libraries before the district provided literature were also the only two participants who critically self-reflected on their pedagogy in the context of providing their students with culturally inclusive literature. Participants noted differing approaches to this work and emerging instances of self-reflection. No participant noted any district support on self-reflection or cultural contextualization.

Participants described different areas of interest convergence (Sleeter, 2017) where the district administration, here considered the dominant culture, was focused on increasing resources and updating classroom libraries. Participants noted that the district administration's focus on these areas demonstrated support as they were the only areas where participants noted explicit conversation. It is noted that this concept is lacking, as detailed in the participants' description of the messaging from district administration to use the inclusive books as an additive, as opposed to authentically engaging with the texts.

**Theme 3: Educators Experience a Lack of Availability of Inclusive Texts that are Developmentally Appropriate, On Students' Reading Levels, or Inclusive of Students' Cultures for Their Classroom Libraries, as well as a Continued Lack of Funding**

Participants described challenges with reading levels of inclusive texts, especially for students with lower reading abilities, or generally having to modify the text for understanding, which was not found in the current literature about inclusive libraries. Educators in this study reflected on their experiences with having to create these modifications and their focus on finding literature that the children could read independently. This finding may be another educator-centered indicator as to why early childhood classroom libraries lack inclusive literature (Adam et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020).

Most participants detailed difficulty with the availability of culturally inclusive books, especially texts that were representative of their students' cultures. This observation is in line with the availability of culturally inclusive books, which continues to lag behind other published content (Crisp et al., 2016). Few participants noted increased availability or generally good availability of culturally inclusive texts. This increase differs from the current literature, where researchers have found most classroom literature is neutral at best (Bishop, 1997) or otherwise inauthentic or stereotypical (Adam et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2020).

Few participants discussed authenticity in regard to the inclusive literature in the classroom. Authentic literature may help children critically read and understand the

experience of nondominant cultures (Wee et al., 2018). This finding may denote a lack of critical engagement with the literature, including one participant who specifically named a currently embattled fiction book that has been highlighted for the mismatch between the author's cultural identity and the main character's story. To facilitate a greater understanding, teachers need to critically engage with the inclusive literature (Thomas & To, 2019). This finding also relates to the CRT in education concept of counternarrative (Dixson & Anderson, 2018), as the teachers may be highlighting inauthentic, singular stories of marginalized cultures.

**Theme 4: Educators Want Specific Information Surrounding District Expectations, Culturally Informed Teaching Practices, and Desire More Readily Available Professional Learning Opportunities That Include Takeaway Lessons and Practical Information**

Participants described changing and unclear district expectations around discussing culture and engaging culturally informed teaching practices. Participants articulated that the district provided inclusive literature and a district goal were the indicators that the district was supportive but could not articulate specific expectations about culturally informed teaching practices. Researchers have found that educators who were given explicit professional support were more successful in engaging in culturally informed teaching practices (Ajayi, 2017; Chu, 2021; Nganga, 2020) and that educators who are given explicit information on culture and engage in self-reflection are able to improve their knowledge and teaching efficacy (Anderson & Fees, 2018; Boghian, 2019; Iwai, 2019; Kinloch & Dixon, 2017; MacNevin & Berman, 2017). Some participants

were already creating support networks on their own, which is crucial to this work (Alaca and Pyle, 2018). Participants described instances where they relied on colleagues, sought outside professional learning opportunities, or used their platform as teacher educators to embed culturally informed teaching practices.

Having practical, age-appropriate resources such as ready-to-use classroom lessons or activities was also described by participants. Many participants asked specifically for lesson plans. Critical engagement can be modeled through literacy lessons (Bennett et al., 2018). Participants also highlighted district administration's directive to remove outdated literature from their classrooms as a support, noting that giving time to complete this specific task was a practical opportunity that they often did not get the time to do. Many of the participants described wanting more time to connect with the literature, their colleagues, and the curriculum, which is in line with the findings that creating space helps to support anti-racism educators (Kinloch and Dixon, 2017).

The challenges that the participants described in regard to culturally informed teaching practices highlighted how important district administrative support is to creating a culturally informed workforce. The CRT in education tenet of interest convergence (Sleeter, 2017) plays a large role in creating and sustaining these efforts. The district administration, here the dominant culture, must overwhelmingly demonstrate explicit support and create learning experiences to create a culture of authentic inclusivity.

## Limitations of the Study

Researchers identify potential problems in the research, which are limitations (Creswell, 2012). I have identified limitations in this study. The specific geographic

location of this research, which is a single state in the Northeastern United States that includes a disproportionate population of people who identify as Asian, is a limitation. This cultural make up means that the results may not transfer to an area that is more traditionally populated. The sample size is another limitation, which included 10 self-identified female educators who teach kindergarten or first grade. Nine out of 10 of the participants identified as Caucasian. Although the sample size was chosen with consideration to saturation, early childhood voices of different gender identities, educators of other cultural backgrounds, educators who have been teaching less than 3 years, and those who teach in preschool, pre-kindergarten, or second grade classrooms were not included. It is also possible that only teachers who were predisposed to sharing their perspectives about inclusive classrooms responded and people who were more hesitant to share their perspectives on inclusive classroom libraries and culturally informed teaching practices were not represented.

Additionally, as a researcher, I had biases that may be considered limitations. My biases include working in the district where I was conducting the research and being a proponent of inclusive classroom libraries and culturally informed teaching practices. I worked actively to ensure that these biases did not affect the data analysis or research results. I only recruited participants with whom I did not have a personal relationship and transcribed interviews verbatim (see Avenier & Thomas, 2015). I kept a journal during data collection and analysis (see Greene, 2014; Vicary et al., 2017) to record my thoughts during interviews as well as during data analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, I met with a

doctoral level expert during the coding process, who checked my themes for bias to ensure trustworthiness.

## Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. Participants described an emerging culture of inclusivity in the district while highlighting continuing issues around messaging from district administration and support as well as information about their own journeys of cultural understanding. The following recommendations are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study and existing literature.

My first recommendation for future research is to have a different participant pool that includes different participant populations. This study was limited to early childhood educators who taught kindergarten and first grade, so future research could include preschool and second grade educators to improve understanding of the breadth of perspectives across the grade levels. Most of the study's participants were monocultural and female, so educators who identify as members of cultures outside of the dominant culture as well as including male voices may add different perspectives for future research. Another participant pool may include educators who are in varying stages of their understanding of cultural inclusivity to better understand what support may be needed in specific phases of the journey. A different geographical location or a faculty that has a different understanding of inclusive texts and culturally informed teaching

practices would also provide additional information about these topics, as would participants who have different understandings of culture inclusivity.

I recommend that more research be done with educators who are currently in the classroom. Current educators are significantly underrepresented in the research on culturally informed teaching practices with most research focusing on pre-service educators (Ajayi, 2017; Anderson & Fees, 2018; Iwai, 2019; Macqueen et al., 2020; Myers & Jenkins, 2020; Nganga, 2020; Yoon & Martin, 2019). Current research also shows that there is a lack of culturally inclusive literature in the classrooms (Adam, 2021; Adam et al., 2017, 2019; Crisp et al., 2016; Hardy et al., 2020), but little information on why educators have been slow to include this literature in the classroom. Future research should continue the work of this study to better understand perspectives of current educators on engaging in culturally informed teaching practices and including culturally inclusive literature.

## Implications

This study focused on early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. The study has implications for positive social change at the district level. The results of this study could inform district administrators on how to design authentic programming to improve teacher practice and knowledge about culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices. This improved professional support could, in turn, improve the racial attitudes of students who would have more enriching cultural opportunities to

learn about and with members of other cultural groups, as suggested in the research findings of Jensen and Tisak (2020) and Mandalaywala et al. (2019). If the district administrators were able to provide meaningful professional development, educators may also be able to engage in critical conversations around equity and social justice using the district provided literature, instead of the provided books remaining unused. In this way, it could help the district administrators be more intentional in the resources that are provided as well as the support that is offered.

This study may contribute to positive social change on a societal level by providing findings that will strengthen the movement to create and sustain intentional early childhood classroom libraries and support culturally informed teaching practices at the earliest grades. It may help administrators progress from simply providing diverse materials and better understand that the focus should move beyond a certain number of items and toward supporting meaningful use of resources and materials. The findings could inform administrators on how to design authentic programming to improve teacher practice and knowledge about culturally inclusive literature and culturally informed teaching practices. Understanding what the challenges that early childhood educators face including culturally inclusive literature will potentially lead school administration to more intentionally provide inclusive literature. Similarly, understanding the perspectives of what educators need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms, will potentially lead to more meaningful support from school administration for early childhood educators to engage in this practice. It may also give district administrators concrete professional support ideas beyond simply providing

diverse materials to improve teacher practice and knowledge, and ultimately provide students with richer learning experiences that authentically reflect cultural identities.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature and what they need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms. There is limited research on current educators' perspectives on culturally informed teaching practices and culturally inclusive literature. I interviewed 10 kindergarten and first grade educators who readily answered interview questions about their perspectives of culturally informed teaching practices and culturally inclusive literature in their classrooms.

Three themes emerged from the data analysis about the challenges the educators face including culturally inclusive literature, which dealt with unclear district guidance on provided resources, educators' shallow understanding of marginalized cultures, and lack of availability of appropriate inclusive texts. The last theme addressed what educators need to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms: more explicit information about culturally informed teaching practices from the district with more practical takeaways. These findings fill the gap in practice by adding to the current understanding that current educators need pointed support and resources to meaningfully engage in culturally informed teaching practices and include culturally inclusive literature in their classrooms.

This study added new knowledge about the perspectives of current early childhood educators on culturally informed teaching practices and culturally inclusive literature. The findings can be used to strengthen the movement to create and sustain inclusive early childhood classroom libraries and support culturally informed teaching practices to move beyond diverse material quotas. It may also be used to improve the professional support and resources that district administrators provide educators to better sustain the initiatives to create inclusive classrooms. The results of this study can help administration create authentic programming to improve teacher practice and knowledge and ultimately provide students with richer learning experiences that reflect the students' cultural identities. Early childhood educators are ready to represent and meaningfully engage with their students to be more inclusive in today's ever diversifying world.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant #: _____Date: _____Time:_____

**Pre-Interview**

Welcome and thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for my research study. As you know, my name is Victoria Locane and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study about perspectives of early childhood educators about including culturally inclusive literature and effectively implementing culturally informed teaching practices in classrooms. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

As stated in the consent form, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. Any information that you share with me will be kept in confidence and your identity will not be revealed. You may decline answering any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. I will be taking notes during the interview and audio recording this interview to ensure the notes that I am taking are accurate. These recordings will not be shared with anyone in the district and will be kept securely in my home until the study's completion. All recordings and any information about your identity will be destroyed in five years, per university policy.

If, during the interview, you need to take a break, stop, would like to return to a question, or have a question reread, please let me know. Do you have any questions about the consent form or the interview? (If yes, answer questions. If not, proceed to interview questions)

**Interview**

*Demographic questions:*

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What is the cultural identity or ethnicity that you most closely identify with?

*Research Question 1: What are early childhood educators' perspectives of the challenges that they face including culturally inclusive literature in your classroom?*

1. How has the school district communicated with you about having inclusive literature in your classroom? (CRT: Counternarrative)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - What action, if any, did you take?

   - How did you feel about this conversation?

2. What have been your challenges with inclusive texts in your classroom? (CRT: Colorblindness)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - Say more about your experience with inclusive texts in your classroom

   - Please give me an example of a time where you used inclusive literature.

   - Please elaborate on your approach to using inclusive books.

3. Have you had any challenges in getting inclusive literature in your classroom? (CRT: Counternarrative, Colorblindness)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - What inclusive literature do you currently have in the classroom?

- Please elaborate on how cultures that have been or are currently in your classroom are appropriately represented in your classroom library?

- What cultures are represented in the inclusive literature?

- What inclusive literature was provided to you by the district?

- Have you gained inclusive literature provided through any other means?

4. What are the challenges you see to including inclusive books in your classroom? CRT: Colorblindness)

Prompts, if needed:

- Give me an example of an instance when you needed inclusive literature and it wasn't available.

- Please elaborate on your experience.

- Please elaborate on any challenges that you've already overcome to get inclusive literature in your classroom.

5. Tell me about any lessons that you wanted to implement about inclusive literature that you felt like you weren't able to complete due to anticipated challenges or unforeseen challenges once you started. (CRT: Colorblindness)

Prompts, if needed:

- How did you overcome the challenge?

- Please give me an example ….

6. Tell me about any challenges you have around choosing inclusive literature in your classroom? (CRT: Color blindness)

Prompts, if needed:

- Please elaborate on how the district's approach impacted the choices you have made to include inclusive literature in your classroom.

- To what extent do the challenges that you face impact your choices?

- What specific considerations do you keep in mind when making your choices?

7. What challenges do you consider in regard to the authenticity of the inclusive literature for your classroom? (CRT: Colorblindness)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - Tell me about any authenticity issues or challenges with the books in your current library.

   - How have you been approached about authenticity for your classroom literature?

8. Does the cultural make up of your class add any challenges to how you make your choices for inclusive classroom literature? (CRT: Colorblindness)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - Are there any cultural aspects that guide your considerations?

   - Are these challenges any different from year to year?

Follow up or clarifying probes or questions may be included as needed. These include:

1. Tell me more about…

2. What do you mean when you say…?

3.  Please clarify…

4. Is there anything that you would like to add about challenges you face including inclusive literature in the classroom?

***Research Question 2: What are early childhood educators' perspectives of what they need to implement culturally informed teaching practices in their classrooms?***

1. Tell me about any training or resources you have been provided that was specifically about inclusive literature. (CRT: Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - Please elaborate on any training or resources that particularly stood out.

   - Tell me about any training or resources that were not helpful.

2. Tell me about training or resources or parts of a training or resource that you were provided that improved your culturally informed teaching practice to include inclusive literature. (CRT: Colorblindness, Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - What aspects do you believe helped to improve your practice?

   - Why do you think the particular aspects were helpful?

3. Tell me about your ideal training or resources that you would like to have to improve your culturally informed teaching practice to include inclusive literature. (CRT: Colorblindness, Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - Why do you believe the trainings you envision would be helpful?

   - Tell me why you believe that the trainings might appeal to your early childhood colleagues.

4. What has the district guidance been on culturally informed teaching practices for your classroom? (CRT: Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - How has this guidance been given?

   - Is there any part of the guidance that you don't understand?

   - What would improve your understanding of the guidance you've been provided?

   - How does the guidance support your decisions in the classroom?

5. How do you approach culturally controversial topics in your classroom? (CRT: Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - What considerations do you take?

   - Are there culturally controversial topics that have come up that you were not prepared to teach?

   - Have topics come up from student conversations that you were not prepared for?

   - What do you need to help you when topics come up from student conversations for which you were not prepared?

6. How is the district currently supporting culturally informed teaching practices in your classroom? (CRT: Interest Convergence)

   Prompts, if needed:

   - How is this support represented in your classroom?

- What part of your culturally informed teaching practice feels most supported?

7. What do you think you would need to feel supported to effectively implement culturally informed teaching practices in your classroom? (CRT: Colorblindness) Prompts, if needed:

- Where do you need more support for your culturally informed teaching practices in your classroom?

- What part of your culturally informed teaching practice could be better supported?

Follow up or clarifying probes or questions may be included as needed. These include:

- Tell me more about…

- What do you mean when you say…?

- Can you clarify…

- Is there anything you would like to add about what you need to implement culturally informed teaching practices in your classrooms?

### *Conclusion*

Is there anything you would like to share about the challenges that you face including culturally inclusive literature in your classroom or what you need to implement culturally informed teaching practices in your classrooms that you haven't shared?

### **Post-Interview**

Thank you for your time today. This concludes the interview. Please remember that your information and what you revealed today will remain confidential. This is the

only interview that I will be conducting with you for this study. I will be emailing you a

summary of the findings that have arisen from these interviews for you to look over. At

that time, if you would read the summary for accuracy and let me know if you see any

inaccuracies or discrepancies, I will correct any inaccuracies or discrepancies that you

find.