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Secondary Educators' Perspectives on Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Quiana Brooks-Curry
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Quiana Brooks-Curry

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Secondary Educators' Perspectives on Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching
Practices

by

Quiana Brooks-Curry

MS, Towson University, 2016

BS, Towson University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Organizational Leadership and Development

Walden University

August 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed in this study was the struggle that U.S. secondary teachers experience when implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) strategies. Guided by the culturally responsive education model as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Data were collected via semistructured interviews with 10 participants who (a) taught in Grades 6–12, (b) had a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience, and (c) had knowledge of and experience using CRT strategies. Data analysis involved a priori and open coding to identify codes, categories, and themes. The emergent themes were (a) successful, intentional implementation of CRT strategies and professional growth; (b) positive student experiences; (c) school and parent connections and collaborations; (d) limitations of curricula and materials; (e) lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures; (f) student resistance; (g) recommendations for staff improvements; (h) need for access to culturally responsive resources, and (i) improved community education and engagement. The findings may contribute to positive social change by informing stakeholders regarding essential practices with diverse populations to ensure that students are academically successful and feel a strong sense of belonging in the classroom environment with peers and teachers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to all the up-and-coming educators who have a passion to change young people's lives, and to those educators who look at the vast array of cultures in their classrooms and connect with their students, their cultures, and their families.

I dedicate this study to my great-grandmother, Lucille, who constantly shared her life experiences and reminded her progeny that education is the most important thing. I hope that you are beaming with pride from the clouds.

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To my daughter, Samantha Grace, you are an inspiration to me daily. Thank you for the quiet Saturday mornings and your patience while I worked through this process. To Dr. Michele Williams, you blazed this doctoral trail long before me, but you inspired, encouraged, and prayed for me every step of the way. To my family and family, thank you for being my cheerleaders. You asked questions about my study even though you knew that my answers would be long and elaborate. You will never know how much your support means to me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices have been found to foster a sense of belonging and support student achievement in classrooms. However, secondary teachers throughout the United States struggle with implementing CRT strategies. Researchers have found that when teachers do not use CRT strategies, the student's sense of belonging declines, and their social and academic performance wanes (Berryman & Eley, 2019). Davis (2021) argued that schools are responsible for ensuring that students have meaningful, rigorous, and equitable experiences. Transitioning from elementary to secondary grades presents students with many emotional, social, and academic demands (Bowen et al., 2022). The students' need to feel that they belong and be validated increases when they begin middle school (Shockley & Ellis, 2023). There is also an ongoing cultural mismatch between teachers and students as the student population grows more diverse each year (Ramsay-Jordan, 2022). Harbatkin (2021) found that the cultural mismatch can result in lower expectations and low achievement for culturally diverse students. The relationship between teacher and student can address the potential for declines in engagement and academic achievement (Romero & O'Malley, 2020; Scales et al., 2020). Johnson-Smith (2020) argued that implementing CRT strategies can decrease the adverse effects of the mismatch. I conducted a study to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.

In this chapter, I provide background information on the topic of study from research literature related to the problem of educators' challenges with implementing

CRT strategies. The problem statement includes the context of the research, and the purpose statement highlights the focus of the study on exploring secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. This chapter also contains the nature of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study.

Background

The student population in schools in the United States is growing more diverse each year, but the educator workforce in K–12 schools is diversifying incrementally. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023b), 47% of the student population was composed of students of color in 2020. In 2021, students of color accounted for 54% of the population. The National Center for Education Statistics (2023b) predicted that 57% of the population will be students of color by 2031. In contrast, the educator population was 80% White in 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). These data indicate a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, which makes many educators reluctant to use CRT strategies in their classrooms (Ramsay-Jordan, 2022). Harbatkin (2021) found that grades for students of color who experience cultural mismatches are negatively impacted by teachers' unconscious biases and low expectations.

Researchers indicated that students in middle school grades experience a time of self-identification, conflicts among their peers, and reduced feelings of motivation and engagement (Romero & O'Malley, 2020). These tumultuous years can decrease students'

academic achievement when their academic path is established (Durand, 2020). Although data exist regarding educators' use of CRT strategies, much of the data indicate that implementation is challenging for many educators. The current study addressed the gap in knowledge related to secondary teachers' successes, challenges, and supports needed in implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. As the student population grows more diverse, secondary educators are tasked with implementing CRT strategies to meet the students' needs.

Problem Statement

U.S. secondary teachers struggle with implementing CRT strategies (Chikkatur, 2024; Idrus & Sohid, 2023). Researchers have found that students' sense of belonging is diminished without CRT, and they suffer academically and socially (Berryman & Eley, 2019). Historically, researchers have addressed CRT strategies with a focus on elementary school teachers and students. However, little was known about the experiences and perceptions of secondary educators related to their implementation of CRT strategies.

As the student population continues to grow more diverse, some teacher preparation programs are attempting to prepare preservice educators for diverse classrooms but fall short in providing appropriate field experiences that will teach the application of the CRT strategies (Navarro et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2022). Clark and Andreasen (2021) reported that educators' self-efficacy in using CRT strategies in their classrooms decreased after becoming in-service teachers. Chu and Garcia (2021) found that most of the teachers in their study wanted to create inclusive environments for their

students. B. A. Brown et al. (2019) found that many of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers in their study struggled to transition the theory of CRT into teaching practices. Yoon and Martin (2019) argued that middle school teachers' ability to address and respond appropriately to their students' cultural and linguistic needs can affect academic success. Kruse (2020) argued that some White teachers rely heavily on their students to inform their curriculum. These findings show that most educators have varying levels of knowledge about CRT, and some use the strategies with different levels of fidelity. The current study addressed this gap in practice related to the successes, challenges, and ongoing supports needed to implement CRT strategies to foster a sense of belonging and support student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Many studies explored teachers' experiences implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms (Bajaj, 2022; Barnes & McCallops, 2019; DeSantis & Christopher, 2021; Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). Of those studies, few addressed how implementing the strategies contributes to the students' sense of belonging and achievement.

Research Questions

For this study, I developed three research questions (RQs) to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging:

RQ1: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ2: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their challenges in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ3: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of support needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

Conceptual Framework

I chose the culturally responsive education model (CREM) framework for this study, which posits that teachers must begin with self-reflection, consideration of their cultural competence, and awareness of how their practices influence the students' feelings of belonging (Manns, 2021). The framework includes Banks's (1993) five tenets of multicultural education and Hammond's (2015) exploration of the neurological impact on CRT. These tenets are content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and school empowerment. Manns's framework was inspired by Gay's (2002) theory of CRT.

As early as 1970, multicultural education was considered to address the needs of students from various cultural backgrounds. By the 1990s, several leaders in the field began to construct roadmaps for educators and school leaders to go beyond acknowledgment of the different cultures in their classrooms to embrace and incorporate

the cultures. Ladson-Billings (1995a) coined culturally relevant pedagogy to address African American students' educational experiences. Culturally relevant pedagogy included practices of using culture as a tool for students to understand their cultural significance and that of their peers. When teachers used culturally relevant pedagogy, students experienced academic success, developed and maintained competency about their culture, and began to challenge the existing structures (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). As the field of experts grew, Gay revived CRT and expanded upon Ladson-Billings's theory.

CRT emerged when Cazden and Leggett (1976) observed a classroom with a White teacher and White and Mexican American students. Cazden and Leggett observed that the students' cultural differences produced different classroom behaviors. As a result, the teachers made inaccurate assessments of the Mexican American students' abilities. Cazden and Leggett argued that cultural responsiveness should be applied when hiring teachers, providing professional development, and considering methods for students to demonstrate learning. In 1987, Erickson argued that cultural responsiveness reduces conflict and miscommunication caused by a cultural mismatch and fosters a sense of trust. By the early 2000s, Gay had established the components for CRT, which addresses teachers' cultural knowledge, relationships and community building, content delivery and curricular modifications, and communication with students. Gay's seminal work laid the foundation for the CREM framework.

As CRT became more prominent in education, the theory was expanded. Culturally sustaining pedagogy and culturally inclusive teaching theories have emerged as additional considerations for educators to implement. The CREM framework includes

a combination of principles from many cultural education experts in the field. The framework incorporates Banks's (1993) spokes of multicultural education and Hammond's (2015) study of the cognitive contribution to culturally responsive education. Banks's spokes of effective multicultural education are content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture, and equity pedagogy. Content integration addresses teacher preparation and standards for teaching with an intergroup mindset. Knowledge construction involves changing the curriculum to allow students to consider cultural issues and themes while empowering them to decide how the issues should be addressed. Prejudice reduction includes providing collaborative opportunities for students to identify as equals to improve their attitudes and academic abilities. Empowering school culture, Banks argued, is how systemic norms and practices change to allow educators to implement the other spokes of multicultural education. Finally, equity pedagogy considers that students' home and school cultures may differ and that despite socioeconomic challenges, all students and their cultures deserve respect. Manns (2021) considered the neuroscience behind cultural responsiveness from Hammond's (2015) study and highlighted the need for self-reflection.

Hammond (2015) conducted a study to explore how the brain plays a significant role in an educator's implementation of CRT strategies. Hammond found that racialization paired with implicit biases can create a deficit mindset in teachers. Hammond also found that neurologically, people may resist embracing cultural responsiveness because the practices require them to venture beyond their lived experiences. According to Hammond, educators must counter these neurological

responses by building solid relationships with their students and becoming warm demanders with high expectations who push students toward academic success with care and compassion.

In the CREM framework, Manns (2021) incorporated self-reflection, which asks educators to consider Hammond's (2015) position on how the brain can either challenge or support the implementation of culturally responsive practices. By self-reflecting on each of Banks's (1993) spokes, teachers can evaluate their level of culturally responsive effectiveness in each area with the constant consideration of their success in fostering a sense of belonging in their students. One argument in the framework is that CRT is effective when educators' self-awareness of factors that influence their teaching is paired with a commitment to creating safe classroom environments that provide rigorous academic work and high expectations.

The current study explored secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. A basic qualitative design was suitable for this study because participants could provide an understanding of implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms (see Burkholder et al., 2020). I designed the interview protocol using concepts from the CREM framework and aligned the RQs with the interview questions. I sought to explore participants' perceptions and experiences, including successes, challenges, and further needs related to participants' experiences as secondary educators implementing CRT strategies to foster a sense of belonging and student achievement.

I used Yin's (2018) five-step method to analyze the data. I used a priori coding, with codes related to the RQs and conceptual framework, and open coding, an inductive method, to analyze the data. I also used content analysis with latent analysis to identify hidden meaning within the texts to establish meaning units for each theme or category. The data were coded using spreadsheets with built-in pivot tables to identify the frequency of terms within the data and categorize and note the relationships between the data. The findings from this basic qualitative study filled a gap in the literature related to secondary educators' successes, challenges, and ongoing supports needed when implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The findings may contribute to improving instructional practices by identifying educators' needs to implement CRT strategies. Another benefit of this study may be that school leaders may be informed about educators' professional development needs based on those expressed by participants (see Cavendish et al., 2021).

Nature of the Study

I explored the experiences of secondary educators who implement CRT strategies in their classrooms, what educators perceived to be successes and challenges of implementing the strategies that supported student achievement and fostered a sense of belonging, and what educators needed to implement the CRT strategies effectively. The current study was a basic qualitative inquiry addressing secondary educators using CRT strategies in their classrooms. The study design was interpretive, and I used an interview protocol developed using the conceptual framework about participant experiences and perceptions. The focus of this study was on participants' experiences and how they

perceived their strategies supported student achievement and fostered a sense of belonging (see Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I identified nine themes based on participant responses and filled the gap in the scholarly literature on CRT strategies that support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.

Upon approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I posted invitations on social media and professional hubs such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Participants were recruited throughout the United States. I recruited 10 self-selected participants who met the participant inclusion criteria. After recruiting the participants, I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions followed by probes asking for additional comments or recommendations about supporting academic achievement and fostering a sense of belonging for students using CRT strategies.

After the interviews, I hand-coded the transcripts to identify codes, categories, and themes that addressed the RQs. I also used content analysis to analyze the transcripts related to the secondary educators' experiences using CRT strategies to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. According to Bengtsson (2016), qualitative content analysis involves moving back and forth between inductive and deductive coding. I identified codes, categories, and themes to decontextualize the data (see Bengtsson, 2016). I also used an Excel spreadsheet with built-in pivot tables to analyze and identify deeper meaning from the data. Using the pivot tables facilitated my ability to make connections between deductive and inductive coding to categorize and compile the data to identify emerging themes (see Bengtsson, 2016).

Definitions

Academic achievement: A student's educational success and how well their academic goals are met (Flair, 2023).

Belonging: "A sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (e.g., teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual" (Goodenow, 1993, p. 25).

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT): "Using the characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of the cultures of ethnically diverse students as the channel for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

Secondary teachers: Educators who teach students in "middle (sixth through eighth grade) and high (ninth through 12th grades) schools" (Lane et al., 2021, p. 234).

Assumptions

Assumptions in research are claims considered true without confirmation and include a critical condition, a basis for the assumption, and a procedure outside of the researcher's control (Burkholder et al., 2020). My first assumption for this study was that secondary teachers throughout the United States use CRT strategies in their classrooms. One assumption about the participants was that their experience working with students from various cultural backgrounds influenced how they provided instruction and increased their knowledge of CRT strategies. The cultural diversity of U.S. students is increasing, which may result in teachers who have sought to implement CRT strategies to

meet the students' needs. Another assumption was that participants would be truthful in their responses and share their perceptions based on their experiences. The findings of this study may have implications for ways to improve the implementation of CRT strategies, the preparation programs for preservice teachers, and in-service professional development opportunities for secondary teachers.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are purposeful boundaries about what will and will not be researched in a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The delimitations support the development of a priori codes used for data analysis (Coker, 2022). To narrow the scope of perspectives to that of current classroom teachers, I excluded support staff, paraprofessionals, and school administrators from this study. The sample size is a delimitation of a basic qualitative study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The current study included 10 participants, which is considered a small sample size according to Creswell and Guetterman (2019). Teachers had varied resources, teacher preparation training, and access to professional development. Each candidate met the selection criteria of (a) teaching in Grades 6–12, (b) having a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience, and (c) having knowledge of and experience using CRT strategies. By choosing a basic qualitative design, I explored the perceptions of secondary teachers' successes, challenges, and support needs in implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students. Another delimitation in the current study was the secondary grade criteria for potential participants, which excluded perceptions of teachers and staff members in other grade levels who may be

knowledgeable about the topic. This study was designed to explore educators' experiences to fill the gap in the literature regarding the implementation of CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging for secondary students during a critical time in their development (see Durand, 2020).

Limitations

According to Burkholder et al. (2020), limitations are the weaknesses in the methods or design of a study that must be addressed. Limitations to the study included the sample size and my bias as the sole researcher. To overcome these limitations, I used purposeful sampling and semistructured interviews with questions and probes to obtain rich, thick descriptions from the participants regarding their perceptions of the successes, challenges, and support needed in implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. I mitigated the limitation of the sample size by ensuring that I reached saturation during the data collection process. I concluded that I had reached saturation when ongoing analysis revealed no new information and there were no unexplained phenomena (see Burkholder et al., 2020). The sample size of this study was delimited to 10 participants who met the participation criteria.

The final limitation was my bias and experiences with teaching culturally diverse students. As a former classroom teacher and current administrator, I had beliefs about what teachers may need to ensure that students succeed academically and feel that they belong. To overcome this limitation, I used member checking to allow the participants to review a summary of the findings to confirm the accuracy of the data collected from the interviews (see Janesick, 2016). I also used field notes and reflexivity to bracket my

biases and preconceptions throughout the research process (see Ahern, 1999). Reflexivity with bracketing is used to eliminate preconceived notions the researcher may have that may taint the data (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Before collecting data, I reflected on my experiences as a classroom teacher and administrator of culturally diverse students. I recorded my preconceptions and biases to ensure that the interview process focused only on the participants' experiences (see Ahern, 1999). I used reflexivity with bracketing during the data collection process to confirm that no assumptions, alterations, or eliminations were made to participants' experiences by eliminating any preconceptions or biases (see Ahern, 1999). As I analyzed the data, I continued to use reflexivity with bracketing to revisit my preconceptions and ensured that they did not influence my interpretation of the data (see Ahern, 1999). During the data collection process, I wrote field notes after each interview to reflect on the participants' responses and my performance as the researcher (see Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). I also used field notes during data analysis to identify patterns and themes that emerged as I made sense of the data.

Significance

Through this study, I filled in a gap in the literature on secondary teachers' success, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT strategies to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. It was important to consider educators' experiences and perceptions to continue providing evidence for the necessity of CRT strategies, especially for secondary students. Researchers have indicated that U.S. classrooms are more diverse than ever (DeSantis & Christopher, 2021). However, the

National Center for Education Statistics (2023a) reported that the educator workforce remains nearly 80% White. Some educators have reported a lack of confidence and self-efficacy to implement CRT strategies. I provided firsthand accounts of the successes of implementing CRT strategies from fellow educators that may motivate reluctant educators to make small steps toward applying the strategies. Learning educators' professional needs directly from them could offer school leaders guidance regarding the CRT professional development needed for secondary educators to implement the strategies successfully (see Cavendish et al., 2021). Finally, exploring the supports that in-service teachers need may provide teacher preparation programs with information on how they structure their programs and field study opportunities.

Secondary students' mental health and well-being are nationwide concerns (Bowen et al., 2022). The secondary school experience is a pivotal time in a child's life, and the trajectory of their academic careers is set in secondary school (Durand, 2020). Romero and O'Malley (2020) found that academic achievement and engagement decrease during the secondary years. Scales et al. (2020) have also indicated that student-teacher relationships are critical when working with middle and high school students. Kumar et al. (2019) found that middle school students' sense of belonging is significantly lower among racial minority students. Based on the findings of these studies, the need for CRT strategies in U.S. classrooms that foster a sense of belonging was apparent. With this study, I also filled a gap in practice to provide educators and school leaders with findings that may contribute to increased implementation of CRT strategies in secondary classrooms. The findings from this study may provide school districts with insight from

in-service educators to inform their professional development plans, curriculum designs, and practices that could impact the students in their districts.

Summary

More than 50% of the student population in the United States is students from various racial and cultural backgrounds, while the teacher workforce remains predominantly White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a; Rafa & Roberts, 2020). There have been limited opportunities in teacher preparation programs to ensure that future educators are prepared to implement CRT strategies in their classrooms. Many educators reported decreased self-efficacy after their first year of teaching (Clark & Andreasen, 2021). Teachers may struggle to implement CRT strategies due to lacking training or experience (Chikkatur, 2024). Teachers who understand and implement CRT strategies may provide insight for those who may want to use CRT in their classrooms and for school district leaders or stakeholders who recognize the need for CRT and want to consider districtwide initiatives. As more teachers implement CRT strategies, their students will experience more academic success and feel they belong to their school and classroom communities.

In this chapter, I introduced the study, explored the background of the problem, and discussed the problem and the gap in practice and literature. I provided the purpose of the study and included the three RQs that I used to investigate the perceptions of secondary teachers' successes, challenges, and supports needed in implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students. This chapter also included the conceptual framework and nature of the study, definitions

of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this basic qualitative study.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the contributing factors to teachers' and students' experiences. I discuss the conceptual framework of CREM (see Manns, 2021), critically analyze the teacher and student populations, and explore how CRT can contribute to belonging and student achievement. I also review the literature on how teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development opportunities contribute to teachers' self-efficacy for implementing CRT strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I review the literature on the problem addressed in this study: U.S. secondary teachers struggle with implementing CRT strategies. To understand the participants' perspectives, it was necessary to consider the existing literature surrounding the contributing factors to teachers' and students' experiences. The literature review is structured in the following subsections: the conceptual framework and the literature review addressing the broader problem. The review of the broader problem is divided further into the following sections: student population in U.S. public schools, secondary school experience, educator workforce population in the United States, student-teacher cultural mismatch, schools' responses to changes in the student population, belonging, CRT and belonging, CRT and academic achievement, shortcomings of teacher preparation programs for CRT, teacher bias, teacher self-efficacy, and in-service teacher professional development.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023b), the student population is growing more diverse each year, and currently, the Black, Asian, and Hispanic population combined is nearly 50%. The educator workforce was composed of nearly 80% White teachers (Rafa & Roberts, 2020). Wilcoxon et al. (2021) found that preservice educators have few opportunities to learn about and use CRT strategies in their field experiences, which has resulted in the need for more professional development. Researchers have shown that the transformational student experiences during secondary school, paired with the cultural mismatch between teachers and students, can diminish a student's sense of belonging and academic achievements (Harbatkin, 2021; Romero &

O'Malley, 2020; R. Thomas et al., 2023). The findings from my literature review indicated a gap regarding qualitative studies that explored secondary teachers' perceptions of their experiences implementing CRT strategies to support the achievement and inclusion of students in the classroom. This chapter analyzes seminal and empirical literature and concepts from various disciplines. I also describe the conceptual framework of CRT. Gay (2002) established CRT as a framework to provide a clear roadmap for educators who teach diverse student populations.

Literature Search Strategy

The Walden Library was used to access peer-reviewed journals to review recent literature published from 2019 to 2024. Sage Journals, ProQuest, Education Source, EBSCOhost, ERIC, and ScienceDirect databases were used to search for peer-reviewed research. The terms used to search were *culturally responsive teaching*, *teacher preparation programs*, *sense of belonging*, *middle and high school students*, *student populations in secondary schools in the United States*, *academic achievement*, *teacher perspectives*, *culturally responsive preparedness*, *professional development*, *student perceptions*, *in-service teachers*, and *preservice teachers*. During the search, 92 articles were found. Most of the articles were from the last 5 years. Goodenow (1993) provided the most comprehensive definition of *belonging* related to the student experience. Seminal works from Gay (2002, 2010, 2013, 2015) and Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995a, 1995b) provided foundational literature for the framework of the current study.

Conceptual Framework

The CREM is a conceptual framework that expanded on the principles from CRT which was developed to address the inequities in education for students from various races and cultures (Manns, 2021). Manns (2021) created the CREM framework to introduce the five spokes to ensure teachers and school leaders applied CRT practices in their schools. To fully grasp the purpose of the CREM framework, one must first understand CRT.

Educational anthropologists used several terms in the 1980s to address teachers' pedagogical practices that connected to students' lived experiences: cultural congruence, cultural appropriateness, cultural compatibility, cultural responsiveness, and mitigating cultural discontinuity. Osborne (1991) took issue with each of the terms used to discuss educational practices for multicultural students except cultural responsiveness but noted that an accurate definition of the concept did not exist. As the crisis of education continued, Ladson-Billings (1992) argued that African American students were less likely to receive a quality education than their White peers. Ladson-Billings addressed this educational disservice by using the term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to refer to practices that use students' culture to understand themselves and others, conceptualize knowledge, and create a structure for social interactions. CRP addresses three fundamental criteria: Students must experience academic success, cultural competency must be developed and maintained, and students must develop a critical consciousness that results in challenging the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) argued that culturally relevant pedagogy was "good teaching" that should be

used in all classrooms but found that when used with African American students, the results were significant (p. 159). While studying eight teachers with large African American student populations, Ladson-Billings (1995a) observed one teacher who allowed students to use their home language in class and compared the language to standard English and found that students could code-switch and use both languages easily over time. Another teacher in the study allowed students to perform rap lyrics in class and used the text to teach literal and figurative language and the elements of poetry (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995b) set the tone for educators to use culture to improve student experiences and students' social awareness and encouraged researchers and scholars to continue identifying ways to build upon CRP.

CRT was introduced by Cazden and Leggett (1976) during their observations in a classroom of White and Mexican American students and a White teacher. Cazden and Leggett found that cultural differences influenced the students' interactional styles in the classroom, such as participating more in group settings than when called on individually. As a result, teachers favored the White students and made inaccurate assessments of students' learning based on participation. Cazden and Leggett recommended that cultural responsiveness be used for staff selection for hiring and promoting practices and training for in-service staff and that teachers should consider how students' culture influences their participation style in the classroom and make provisions for demonstration of learning in more culturally aligned styles. Gay (2002) expanded on the works of Cazden and Leggett, Erickson, and Ladson-Billings to revisit CRT related to African American students.

The terms CRT and culturally relevant pedagogy are sometimes used interchangeably, but the two have minor differences. The tenets of CRP are academic success, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Gay (2002) incorporated the criteria of CRP and introduced an expanded framework for instructional practices. In 1987, Erickson defined CRT as “one kind of special effort by the school that can reduce miscommunication by teachers and students, foster trust, and prevent the genesis of conflict that moves rapidly between some students and their teachers” (p. 355). Gay (2002) revisited Erickson’s definition and introduced the five essential elements of CRT as “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106). Gay (2010) added that educators should bridge the gap between home and school practices, identify and leverage students’ strengths, seek to educate the whole child, and critically question normative schooling practices, curriculum, and assessments.

When implementing CRT, educators identify ways to use their students’ cultural experiences as a learning enhancement to address educational inequities and promote cultural competence (Gay, 2013). In 2015, Gay noted a significant difference between multicultural education and CRT. Multicultural education focuses on the content, ideology, materials, assessments, and policy. Multicultural education is present when students learn about various cultures. The core principle of CRT is educating students by using their cultures’ heritages, perspectives, and experiences. Educators using CRT

provide information and learning opportunities for students regarding their cultures in the class or school setting (Pannell, 2022). Pannell argued that multicultural students are not deficient and do not need remediation. Teachers must use CRT strategies to intellectually empower students by using cultural references that speak to their lived experiences (Pannell, 2022). Culturally responsive frameworks have expanded to address all students of color. Now, the primary focus of CRT is ethnic and racial minority groups or groups of color (Gay, 2015). Mahari de Silva et al. (2018) studied Ladson-Billings's experience as a student who felt invisible to her educators inspired her to explore pedagogy for students of color. Mahari de Silva et al. found that Ladson-Billings's contribution to education through critical literacy and CRT is a way to give every child an opportunity to learn, not only African American students.

Bridging the gap between school and home practices provides safety for students in both environments. When knowledge is acquired using CRT practices, the students are empowered because the new learning is accessible and applicable to their lives beyond the school setting (Gay, 2010). Gay (2010) argued that educators must know the cultural demographics of their student populations. First, educators need to know the characteristics and dynamics of their students' cultures. Then, teachers should learn details about their students' cultures to make the schooling experience more engaging. To activate students' cultural knowledge, educators need to know the histories, heritages, contributions, perspectives, and experiences of the students' cultures (Gay, 2010).

Mainstream secondary curricula may address cultures only for historical purposes, but educators using CRT are tasked with infusing students' cultures throughout the

curricula. Gay (2002) noted that the curricular materials must incorporate cultural understanding to be accessible and interesting to the students. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teachers can analyze the formal and symbolic curriculum to identify the designs' cultural strengths and weaknesses. Gay (2010) cited several studies that found that teacher education programs included cultural diversity in the course content through stand-alone courses and integrated curricular content. Gay (2010) argued that teacher preparation programs should provide guided practice in analyzing preservice educators' attitudes and beliefs about culture and the cultural responsiveness of curricular materials. With these skills, educators can empower their students to challenge the status quo of the instructional materials. Gay (2010) provided evidence to support the notion that educators must create a classroom climate conducive to learning for an ethnically diverse population.

Communication is a component of CRT that requires educators to understand the communication styles of the cultures represented in their classrooms. Roessingh (2020) found that English language learners (ELLs) acquire conversational language through daily interactions, which may mask their inability to connect with academic language. When using CRT, educators must incorporate cultural artifacts into their instruction to allow young learners to make meaning and connections to the language, which makes the teacher a learner with CRT (Roessingh, 2020). When educators implement CRT practices, they incorporate students' cultures to make linguistic and experiential connections for the students.

Another element of CRT is that students can contribute to the curriculum and observe elements of their cultures infused with it (Stevens, 2019). Educators who adopt CRT strategies encourage their students to maintain their culture as a critical part of their identity. In addition to CRT, arguments have been made that educational curricula should be decolonized (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). However, decolonization requires purposeful efforts and entails acknowledging and appreciating the perspectives of marginalized groups (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). During a study of a social justice Montessori school, Bajaj (2022) found that educators were constantly modifying the curriculum to ensure that the elements were culturally sensitive and celebratory. The school's leader noted that the decolonial approach included adjusting the curriculum and developing teachers to implement CRT and celebrate the students and their ancestors. Teachers from racially diverse backgrounds may be better equipped to create culturally sensitive lessons (Riley & Mensah, 2023). Students reported that learning was more likely to be encouraged and achieved when teachers knew of their cultures (Berryman & Eley, 2019).

Culturally responsive practices stem from multicultural education theorists such as Banks (1993), who sought to address the following instructional practices: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture, and equity pedagogy. Banks's seminal work explored the research and contributions to each element of multicultural education. Content integration focused on the intergroup education movement founded in the late 1970s by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which mandated that teacher preparation programs implement multicultural education learning for preservice teachers. Content integration was found to

evolve from single-group integration to intergroup integration. According to Banks, knowledge construction comprises four practices: contribution, additive, transformative, and social action. The contribution practice focuses on the notable people, holidays, and discrete elements from a specific culture. The additive approach incorporates ethnic elements, themes, and perspectives without changing the existing curricular structure. Transformative and social action approaches work in tandem to change the existing curriculum and allow students to explore concepts, current events, issues, and themes through various cultural and ethnic lenses while empowering students to make decisions to solve social problems.

Prejudice reduction focuses on racial attitudes that children have about themselves. Banks (1993) found that young children are aware of racial differences and have attitudes about races that are different from their own. Banks also found that to remedy negative racial attitudes and improve academic achievement; teachers should provide cooperative learning opportunities to prepare students for equal-status interactions. Equity pedagogy focuses on the cultural deprivation paradigm and the cultural difference theory. The cultural deprivation paradigm assumes that low-income students experience a cultural deficit due to their home lives (Banks, 1993). Banks argued that the cultural difference theory counters the paradigm and that multicultural students have rich cultures, but challenges arise when the home cultures differ from the school culture. Banks (1993) addressed empowering school cultures and argued that to implement the other elements effectively, schools must shift the norms and practices holistically. School culture can be changed only when leaders make decisions through a

multicultural approach and teachers change their curriculum and teaching methods to address the needs of their multicultural learners. Nearly 20 years later, Manns (2021) used Banks's elements to guide the CREM framework.

Manns's (2021) CREM framework modernized Banks's (1993) five categories of multicultural education and emphasized self-reflection and creating a culture of belonging. I selected this theory as the conceptual framework for my study because it aligns with the phenomenon being studied about how secondary teachers describe and reflect on their successes, challenges, and ongoing needs to implement culturally responsive practices that promote academic achievement and a sense of belonging for their students. The CREM framework included Hammond's (2015) theory that teachers should practice self-reflection. According to Hammond, teachers should consider their implicit biases, strive to be warm demanders, and accept that their lived experiences may make cultural responsiveness difficult. Manns argued that self-awareness is paramount when interacting with people from differing cultural backgrounds. The CREM framework was designed as a tool for educators to become "cultural constructivists" and build knowledge about various cultures by engaging with students and parents in the school community, watching TED talks about the various cultures represented in the classroom, reading scholarly materials, and cross-referencing newfound information to confirm the patterns that are identified in the process (Manns, 2021, p.13).

According to Manns (2021), when new understanding of a culture is constructed, the educator must make cultural shifts in the curriculum, establish culturally responsive communication practices, and adapt classroom management practices with culturally

responsive criteria for the students. Manns used self-reflecting questions in the framework to address each of Banks's multicultural education categories in a culturally responsive way. Manns established the CREM framework to improve student achievement and increase the sense of belonging by noting that CRT strategies must be ongoing, authentic, and student-centered with the support of the school community and stakeholders. When applied consistently, the CREM framework supports educators in promoting belonging and achievement among students (Manns, 2021).

The tenets of the CREM framework relate to the phenomenon of this current study to explore secondary teachers' experiences using CRT strategies to promote academic achievement and a sense of belonging for their students. Another goal of this study is to contribute to the scholarly discussion of the CREM framework from the perspective of teachers in the secondary education setting while addressing the needs identified by participants as they reflected on their experiences.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Student Population in U.S. Public Schools

Student populations throughout the United States are ever-changing (Wyant et al., 2019). Davis (2021) argued that student populations throughout the country include various nationalities, religions, ethnicities, and cultures. According to Nicola (2021), the international student population has increased by 60%. Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) represent the largest growing population in the United States (Jang, 2023). Schools are a small-scale representation of the greater society, and as the diversity in the national population changes, schools will follow that trend (Wyant et al., 2019).

Student diversity has increased in schools due to disasters that require migration, resulting in poor peer relationships (Leath et al., 2021). According to Fuller et al. (2019), the Latinx student population has experienced modern-day segregation because of the steady increase in the population. Fuller et al. found that as Latinx communities became more settled, Latinx student enrollment increased, but the exposure of Latinx students to their White peers decreased. Students of different ethnic backgrounds benefit from being taught by those of the same ethnicity, yet the teacher workforce is still nearly 80% White (Nishina et al., 2019; Rafa & Roberts, 2020).

Raubagh and Purmensky (2021) found that the ELL population is increasing faster than others. Those students are learning the same material as their peers but are challenged by learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. DeSantis and Christopher (2021) found that the vast array of cultures and racial backgrounds in U.S. classrooms is the highest in history. DeSantis and Christopher noted that in 2016, 51% of the student population in the United States were people of color. Racial misalignment between students and their teachers can present as resegregation in schools because White teachers are inherently separated from their students of color (DeSantis & Christopher, 2021). This “bureaucratic misrepresentation” has several consequences, such as a lack of role models for the students and educators acting on their biases (DeSantis & Christopher, 2021, p. 142). Davis (2021) argued that each school should ensure that every student has educational experiences that are meaningful, equitable, and rigorous.

Secondary School Experience

Secondary school begins in middle school and continues through high school. As students enter secondary schools, they develop cognitively and emotionally as they form their identities (Fredricks et al., 2019). Mental health conditions during adolescence are a nationwide concern (Bowen et al., 2022). Middle school years are fraught with peer conflicts and dissension, and some students suffer from decreases in motivation, engagement, and achievement (Romero & O'Malley, 2020). A student's academic path is established in middle school (Durand, 2020). Positive perceptions of the ethnic-racial environment in middle and high school have been related to better behavioral and academic performance for students of color (Durand, 2020).

Educator Workforce Population in the United States

The educator workforce in the United States is changing incrementally compared to the rapid changes in the student population (Wyant et al., 2019). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023a), White teachers represent the largest racial group in the educator workforce. With a diverse student population, educators frequently find themselves teaching students outside of their race. As student populations in schools evolve, educators must adjust to the day-to-day curriculum to provide culturally relevant learning experiences (Ramlackhan & Catania, 2022). Educators see the student population diversify and find that their cultural experiences differ from their students' (Ramlackhan & Catania, 2022).

Student–Teacher Cultural Mismatch

Most classrooms in the United States experience some cultural mismatch because diversity in the educator workforce has not increased as rapidly as the student population. (Ramsay-Jordan (2022) found that cultural misalignment made teachers hesitant to employ CRT strategies. They defaulted to textbook implementation and test preparation practices. Harbatkin (2021) conducted a study of teachers for fifth through 10th grade students to explain the effect that teacher-student race match and students' races have on students' grades. The White population in Harbatkin's study could be race-matched 90% of the time, while teachers of color could only be race-matched up to one-third of the time. In high-performing, low-racial minority schools, White students and teachers were more likely to be race-matched, and African American students and teachers were more likely to be race-matched in low-performing, high-racial minority schools (Harbatkin, 2021). The findings also indicated that White teachers gave lower grades to African American students. Harbatkin concluded that race-matching varies based on the performance level and majority student population; race-matched students had slightly better grades than their peers without a race match; African American students benefitted the most from race-matching; some evidence suggested that Hispanic students received higher grades when race matched; and Asian students were rarely race-matched, but do receive higher grades when they are the consequences of the racial mismatch necessitated changes in schools' practices of teaching diverse students.

Schools' Responses to the Changes in the Student Population

There are discrepancies in how schools in the United States have responded to the changes in their student populations. The influx in the enrollment of diverse students requires schools to consider the teacher's cultural competence and commitment to CRT (Fuller et al., 2019). Fredricks et al. (2019) found that ethnically diverse students who attended urban schools were more likely to be disengaged when they did not feel respected by their teachers or if the curriculum and lessons were irrelevant to their lived experiences. Raubaugh and Purmensky (2021) explored the policies for CRT practices for ELLs in southern school districts. They found that the districts had very few provisions that mandated schools to include CRT practices in their staff development content. The findings were that CRT strategies were absent from schools' plans for ELLs within many of the districts (Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). Marshall et al. (2022) found that charter schools with cultural immersion programs were more prevalent than non-rural charter schools to meet the needs of the local and indigenous populations in rural areas of the United States. Catalano et al. (2020) argued that many factors, such as globalization, have contributed to the diversity of U.S. classrooms.

Researchers have sought to identify strategies and methods for educators to use students' cultures and lived experiences as resources in the classroom. Nine multilingual, non-ELL students participated in a study of their school experiences, and many of them reported that school staff subconsciously marked them based on their initial observations (Catalano et al., 2020). Even when teachers believed they were embracing students' cultural and linguistic diversity, they were amplifying their differences, which led to

embarrassment and discomfort for the students (Catalano et al., 2020). Students who were proficient in English were overlooked academically because they were not identified as ELLs. These students received less support and fewer resources that may have been academically beneficial despite their language proficiency (Catalano et al., 2020). Findings also indicated that students were being indoctrinated to believe that ignoring their cultures is the “fair” way to address diversity rather than making anyone feel different (Catalano et al., 2020, p. 189)). Berryman and Eley (2019) argued that the policies, actions, and decisions that adults and school leaders make about student engagement determine the school’s level of inclusion. Rather than ignoring differences, researchers have highlighted that CRT practices incorporate students’ cultural and linguistic diversity which decreases feelings of isolation and makes students feel that they belong.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is necessary for students’ success in school. In the seminal study, Goodenow (1993) defined belonging as

a sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (e.g., teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual. (p. 25).

Berryman and Eley (2019) added to this definition and noted that belonging is internalized and a direct response to students’ school experiences. Keyes (2019)

interviewed 10th graders who reported that their sense of belonging increased when teachers took time to get to know their students, showed respect, made the students feel valued, and made class engaging by connecting to their lives. The students reported that their sense of belonging decreased when lessons were irrelevant to their lives, teachers prohibited discussions or collaboration, and the classroom was not a trusting environment where students felt valued and motivated to participate. As communities change through immigration and gentrification, students' sense of belonging is diminished (Freidus, 2020). Students who feel liked and accepted by their peers are more likely to be engaged (Sedláček & Šed'ova, 2020).

Kumar et al. (2019) found that students in racial minority groups were less likely to feel welcomed in their classroom environment. However, their sense of belonging improved when they participated in extracurricular activities. Some students in the Latinx community reported a decrease in their sense of belonging after transitioning from elementary to middle school (R. Thomas et al., 2023). AAPI students were found to have varying senses of belonging based on gender and socioeconomic status, with girls experiencing a lower sense of belonging than their male peers (Jang, 2023). In a study of middle school social justice educators, Shockley and Ellis (2023) found that participants agreed that belonging and validation were crucial to students' success at this stage of their academic careers. In another quantitative study, C. L. Williams et al. (2020) sought to identify the changes in academic outcomes for minoritized students who were a part of a social belonging intervention. C. L. Williams et al. found that by increasing the students' sense of belonging, the number of failed classes decreased, disciplinary reports

decreased, and grade point averages increased. Berryman and Eley (2019) concluded that when students feel no sense of belonging, they languish and find it difficult to reach their full potential. The remedy to this challenge is to employ a responsive, relational pedagogy that uses students' cultural experiences to form interdependent relationships and enhance the learning experience (Berryman & Eley, 2019).

CRT and Belonging

The caring elements of CRT can contribute to students' sense of belonging. In inclusive classrooms, students feel a sense of belonging and ownership (Nganga et al., 2021). Keyes (2019) found that building relationships with and among the students and implementing teaching methods that encouraged students to participate improved students' sense of belonging. DeNicolo (2019) argued that belonging is created through various linguistic and cultural practices and experiences in student-teacher and peer interactions. When CRT practices are paired with Social Emotional Learning (SEL), students' sense of belonging increases (Bennouna et al., 2021).

In a qualitative study of middle school students, de Jong et al. (2023) explored the impact of a two-way bilingual education program on students' sense of belonging related to the themes of relationships with teachers and peers, attachment to place from familiarity, and inclusion of students by valuing and embracing cultural identities. De Jong et al. found that students' sense of belonging increased when teachers cared for and supported them, peer relationships were maintained through repeated matriculation, and translanguaging practices were used to create inclusive classrooms. According to Kumar et al. (2019), implementing culturally inclusive and responsive curricular learning

environment practices that emphasize positive intergroup relationships in the classroom improves students' sense of belonging. Teachers must implement the CRT practice of knowing the cultural makeup of each of their students to establish a sense of belonging in the classroom (Lau & Gritter, 2022). Embedding students' cultures and communities into the curriculum and lessons makes them feel valued (Jones Roberson, 2023). Students flourish when their cultural backgrounds are appreciated and incorporated but lack motivation when they detect racist behaviors or microaggressions from their teachers (Berryman & Eley, 2019). Several secondary students reported that their teachers' stereotypes about their cultures resulted in placement in low-performing classes with low expectations and detracted from their sense of belonging (Berryman & Eley, 2019).

Another tenet of CRT is to bridge the gap between home and school practices (Gay, 2010). Strong connections between families, educators, and administrators promote a sense of belonging for students and their families (Bennouna et al., 2021). A mixed-method study introduced the Equity-Explicit-Establish-Maintain-Restore intervention, which incorporated elements of CRT and explored whether ninth-grade students demonstrated improvements in academics, relationships, belongingness, motivation, and behavior (Gaias et al., 2020). The findings indicated that the sense of belonging, motivation, behavior, and grade point averages improved for students of color.

CRT and Academic Achievement

One tenets of CRT is for educators to have high expectations for all students. Researchers have shown that students benefit academically when their teachers implement CRT. Johnson-Smith (2020) argued that students' academic achievements are

determined less by their teacher's ethnicity and more by the teachers' willingness to use CRT strategies. Hoytt et al. (2022) argued that there is a strong correlation between student engagement and student achievement. Gay (2015) argued that CRT improves student engagement by embedding their cultures in the curriculum and lessons; therefore, student achievement will improve as teachers implement CRT strategies effectively. Idrus and Sohid (2023) conducted a study of four teachers who implemented CRT and found that students were more engaged socially and emotionally because of their collaborative and supportive environment. Tanase (2020) studied mathematics and science secondary teachers who adopted students' languages, embedded community examples in lessons, used relevant media tools, incorporated hands-on activities and games, and had students collaborate and work in groups. These CRT practices activated students' cultural and ethnic potential, increased accountability and engagement, and, over time, could close the achievement gap and maximize learning (Tanase, 2020). Several teachers shared that students improved academically, and their engagement increased when their science class projects used the Engineering Design Process and CRT strategies (Manuel et al., 2022).

Yu (2022) created a program that developed teachers' pedagogical skills in CRT and STEM at the beginning of a summer enrichment program for students. Yu concluded that the culturally responsive methods used in the program improved students' attitudes about STEM and post-test scores after the program improved. In a quantitative study, Cherfas et al. (2021) explored the relationship between test results on the state Regents of students who had previously failed after participating in a culturally responsive program,

Fresh Prep. Researchers found that incorporating hip-hop culture in instruction as the vehicle for instruction resulted in pass rates increasing by nearly 30% in Global History, 46% in English, and almost 40% in U.S. History. Students performed better on standardized reading assessments when teachers used culturally responsive lesson plans and created culturally conscious classrooms (Cantrell et al., 2023). Using CRT in classrooms allows students to consider multiple perspectives and solutions to problems affecting their home lives and communities (Cantrell et al., 2023). Student engagement increases, and academic success improves when educators create culturally responsive environments with high student expectations (McFarland et al., 2019). As the student population in the United States continues to grow and diversify, and the teacher workforce remains predominantly White, the methods and curriculum used to train teachers to meet their students' cultural and academic needs become more significant.

Shortcomings of Teacher Preparation Programs for CRT

Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) have been increasing their efforts to address CRT over the last 30 years. However, many programs still need to provide rich experiences for teachers to implement the strategies confidently. Doran (2020) found that new teachers reflected that their TPPs did not prepare them for teaching a diverse population. Educators who lacked preparation through TPPs found using CRT strategies to teach diverse student populations difficult (Choi & Lee, 2020). Some TPPs have required readings and offer optional, foundational-level courses on CRT but need to do more to prepare educators to implement CRT strategies (Navarro et al., 2022). Scott et al. (2022) found that preservice teachers need to have field experiences, discussions, and

literary interactions that expose them to the topics of race and equity. Still, only some TPPs offer opportunities to work with a socioeconomically, culturally, and racially diverse population. According to Alvarez-Romero et al. (2021), preservice educators need more time and experience to succeed in a diverse environment and would benefit from courses focused on diversity. Doran (2020) argued that new teachers are more likely to begin their teaching careers in diverse schools with many challenges, including high teacher turnover.

In another study, Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) focused on a mentoring program for novice teachers to increase their pedagogical knowledge of employing CRT practices with ELLs. In the study, Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel followed one mentor and 15 preservice teachers as they were coached on how to use CRT with their ELLs. None of the mentees in the study were pursuing the English as a second language endorsement the university was offering. Although the teachers did not have targeted ELL training, the students in the study were all ELLs. In the study, the mentor worked with the educators to help them identify moments when they were being culturally sensitive and reinforced the need to create an environment that respected the ethnic differences among the students. The study's findings were that novice teachers could make connections between reflection, analysis, and adaptation of their methods. Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel found that the small number of ELL teachers makes it necessary to support all novice teachers in CRT and equity methods to prepare them for the culturally diverse populations they may experience as educational professionals.

Some TPPs offer courses that focus on diversity and inclusion, but they are not a requirement for program completion, indicating that universities and preservice programs do not prioritize CRT (J. Williams & Starker Glass, 2019). Trilokekar and El Masri (2020) found that the culture gap between students and teachers and the lack of internationalization in TPPs raises the question of how educators can appreciate and respect their students' diversities and advocate for the students in the face of inequities. Moore et al. (2021) concluded that TPPs should reevaluate their curriculum and the field experiences provided to develop CRT practices for preservice teachers. Wilcoxon et al. (2021) found that pre-service teachers' field experiences prompted them to address their biases and beliefs about different cultures.

Teacher Bias

Some biased educators can have lower expectations for their students, which may diminish students' efforts to achieve. Teachers' experiences and negative stereotypes form their attitudes about racial minorities and diverse cultures (Glock et al., 2019). In-service and preservice teachers were found to have negative implicit attitudes about racial minorities and diverse cultures and only improved by having frequent, positive interactions with various cultures (Glock et al., 2019). In a mixed-method study of six teacher educators' analysis of course syllabi and instruction, the findings indicated that teachers rarely had the opportunity to address their own biases and confront negative stereotypes of diverse cultures as part of their teacher preparation (Ciampa et al., 2022). Educators generalize students' needs based on cultural assumptions and use students' racial and linguistic identities to affect and inform how the students are viewed (Catalano

et al., 2020). Teachers of color may share their students' cultural backgrounds and are less likely to hold negative implicit biases about their diverse student population (Billingsley et al., 2019). Implicit biases must be actively addressed to ensure educators maintain high student expectations.

Warm Demanders

The term warm demander has been used for nearly 50 years to identify educators who relentlessly push their students to success while maintaining care and compassion. Kleinfeld (1975) coined the term during a study of teachers working with Athabaskan Indian and Eskimo first-year high school students in Alaska. Theorists applied the term to teachers who successfully cared for their African American students in poorly funded schools, resulting in academic achievement (Vasquez, 1989; Fraser & Irvine, 1998). Bondy and Ross (2008) defined a warm demander as an educator who has a genuine interest in building relationships with students, learns about students' cultures and learning styles and makes teaching adjustments as a result, communicates a clear expectation for students to achieve, support positive behaviors and believes that students can improve, and communicates high expectations. Warm demanders must convince their students of two things: they care about the students and will never give up on them (Bondy & Ross, 2008). Warm demanders have culturally responsive characteristics, such as understanding that their cultural backgrounds guide their lives and reflecting on how their biases can show up in student interactions as a lack of caring (Bondy & Ross, 2008).

Przybysz (2021), a White high school English teacher, learned the importance of being a warm demander from the students. After developing authentic relationships with

four African American students in class, Przybysz grew more eager to incorporate African American authors in the lessons, encouraged more classroom discussions between the students, and empowered students to make decisions about their curriculum. Przybysz noticed a change in the classroom experience once the students felt cared for and that their lived experiences mattered.

In a study of teachers providing online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, Miller (2021) found one warm demander who made weekly phone calls with a three-fold purpose: to personalize caring behaviors, to provide individual support to struggling students, and to enforce expectations. This educator wanted to express care and support for each student and communicate the expectations for success.

Teacher Perceptions and Self-Efficacy

It is crucial to understand educators' perceptions of their CRT self-efficacy and ability to apply the strategies. Many educators believe their content, especially math and science, cannot be culturally relevant (Gay, 2002). According to Roose et al. (2019), there are three belief types for educators: a diversity mindset about students' differences and the acceptance and appreciation of the differences from an educational perspective; a growth mindset of the expectations that educators should have for all students; and beliefs about considering the students' needs when making curricular adjustments. Bandura (1993) argued that there is a direct correlation between a teacher's self-efficacy and their classroom environment. Teachers with high self-efficacy can effectively promote their students' interests and academic growth (Bandura, 1993).

In a quantitative study, Chu and Garcia (2021) explored 344 teachers' collective efficacy and culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. The teachers reported feeling most confident in creating an inclusive environment for their student population but least confident in their ability to evaluate the cultural responsiveness of their curriculum (Chu & Garcia, 2021). Educators who reported a strong sense of self-efficacy with CRT view their students' cultural backgrounds and experiences as an enhancement to the classroom learning experience (Chu & Garcia, 2021). Dillard (2019) addressed the racial disparity evident in schools throughout the United States and the "covenants" or agreements that have been accepted over the years that do a disservice to students of color (p.121). According to Dillard, the current covenants perpetuate a lack of diversity among educators, and a new set of agreements related to CRT must be established to ensure equity and diversity in teacher education. An implication from the study is that educators need to consider their syllabi and their acknowledgment of other cultures regarding their teaching practices and beliefs about their students. According to Stevens (2019), educators' disconnection from different cultures, lack of cross-cultural skills, and fear of exploring other cultures create barriers to successfully implementing CRT strategies. When considering educators' perceptions about CRT, Stevens encouraged them to ask themselves where they are, who they are, and what they believe. While studying teachers' perceptions of competence and confidence, Stevens found that the participants corroborated the argument that effective working relationships make CRT feasible. The participants perceived that limited access to cultural expertise, cultural isolation, and their

current beliefs make CRT implementation difficult (Stevens, 2019). Although some preservice teachers were aware of CRT, the field study experiences in their TPPs should have provided culturally realistic experiences that could mirror their future classrooms (Scott et al., 2022). Clark and Andreasen (2021) found that teachers' self-efficacy decreased as they transitioned from preservice to in-service experiences.

While exploring teachers' perceptions of a cohort model program with a pathway to ELL certification, Murphy et al. (2019) gained insight into what was most effective and lacking in the program. During the participant interviews, researchers asked the participants to consider the program's limitations and recommendations to strengthen the program. The participants shared that limited field trips within the cohort prevented them from having shared experiences and opportunities to reflect on them with one another (Murphy et al., 2019).

Self-reflection is a critical component of professional practice for educators. By reflecting, educators can address their biases, and their strengths and weaknesses related to CRT. Civitillo et al. (2019) explored teachers' perspectives in working with students from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Research findings indicated that the two types of educators were either color-evasive and avoided any emphasis on cultural differences or were multicultural and embraced cultural diversity within their classes. Multicultural educators were likelier to employ CRT practices (Civitillo et al., 2019). B.A. Brown et al. (2019) found that implementation of CRT strategies was challenging for STEM teachers. The science teacher in the study strongly believed that cultural diversity was only appropriate for specific settings. Upon reflection,

the teacher realized that their belief made using CRT practices difficult during lessons and instructional time. B.A. Brown et al. observed that the teacher who believed in accepting diversity, promoting different practices and perspectives, and accepting diversity-related challenges was interested in students' cultures and used current issues during the lesson. A lack of diversity inspired the teacher's interests during their formative experiences. Teachers' beliefs influence their behavior in classroom settings and require reflection on their practices and ongoing professional development to utilize CRT strategies effectively (Roose et al., 2019).

In-service Teacher Professional Development

As many teachers report low levels of self-efficacy and readiness to apply CRT in their classrooms, professional development becomes essential. TPPs have inconsistently provided preservice teachers with opportunities and the skills necessary to apply CRT (Choi & Lee, 2020). In a population that is growing more diverse each year, educators must become more culturally responsive and use CRT to address their class heterogeneity (Smets & Struyven, 2020). School districts should include equity and CRT in their onboarding and continue to provide professional development to provide teachers with the skills necessary to create classroom environments that allow students to thrive while maintaining their cultural identities (Ellis-Robinson & Wayde-Coles, 2021). In a qualitative study of what teachers knew about CRT and how they implemented the strategies in their classrooms, B. A. Brown et al. (2019) found that STEM teachers had a minimal understanding of CRT and struggled to transition from understanding CRT as a theory to an application. In the study, participants were involved in four stages of

professional development. After the four stages, those same teachers could apply CRT strategies with less difficulty (B. A. Brown et al., 2019). Another study found that veteran teachers made marked shifts in their beliefs about embracing cultures after a series of professional development sessions and made observable changes to their classroom practices (Trumbull et al., 2020). Some school districts have established programs like the Equity and Inclusion Institute in Kentucky to provide educators with opportunities to learn about the various elements of CRT and best practices for implementation (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Trumbull et al. (2020) found that district professional development was ineffective because of a shortage of resources for ongoing professional development sessions, a limited focus on existing practices rather than new practices, and a lack of collaboration among the participants.

Kohli (2019) found that TPPs and in-service teacher professional development lacked a variety of perspectives and opportunities for sense-making that would allow educators to address their students' cultural experiences. A disconnected environment due to the lack of participant input is another barrier to successful professional development (Martin et al., 2019). Professional development could have an adverse effect if there is a misalignment between the educators' growth needs and the activities presented during the sessions (Martin et al., 2019).

For CRT professional development to be effective, several components must be included. Most importantly, CRT professional development must be continuous (Cavendish et al., 2021). Lu et al. (2022) found that because student cultures and educator duties consistently changed, professional development should begin in TPPs and continue

throughout an educator's career. In-service teachers need access to and training on using culturally responsive and relevant materials (Yoon & Martin, 2019). Several studies have explored year-long professional development programs and found the time frame sufficient to see educators' practices change (C. Brown et al., 2021; Song & Coppersmith, 2020). School districts would benefit from consulting staff about their professional development needs to prepare for ongoing training that could be offered throughout the school year.

Professional development programs are most effective when participants are vested in the topics presented. Another component of CRT professional development is incorporating input from the educator participants and allowing them to contribute to the curriculum (Cavendish et al., 2021). Several studies have incorporated participant surveys to allow educators to identify their professional development needs. In a study of paraprofessionals, Wiggs et al. (2021) included a survey that asked participants to reflect on the professional development they received and the further training they needed. Gonzalez (2021) asked educators to rank the significance level of additional professional development opportunities. The results indicated that hands-on experiences, observing model teachers, and coaching and feedback cycles were the top three opportunities. While exploring urban educators' professional development experiences, Cavendish et al. (2021) concluded that a lack of professional development for CRT persists. School standardization has increased, including more scripted curriculum and rigid pacing guides, which presents difficulties for teachers who understand the need to implement CRT strategies (Cavendish et al., 2021). Cantrell et al. (2023) studied teachers'

implementation of CRT strategies before and after professional development. There was a significant increase in observed CRT behaviors for the teachers with the professional development. The teachers without professional development showed fractional improvement in their CRT behaviors (Cantrell et al., 2023).

Parkhouse et al. (2019) conducted a literature review of multicultural professional development programs. They found that CRT strategies are less likely to be included in the programs because of other district initiatives that overshadow the importance of CRT. According to Wachira and Mburu (2019), less than one-third of the majority White teaching workforce have had experience with culturally diverse populations. As a result of the lack of exposure and lack of training, these educators need additional professional development to translate the theory of CRT into practice (Wachira & Mburu, 2019). C. Brown et al. (2021) suggested that professional development addresses inequities and encourages educators to reflect on their stances on becoming more responsive to their students' cultural and instructional needs. Gay (2015) argued that educators' cultural biases present themselves in various ways in the classroom. With effective professional development, teachers can become effective across cultures, races, ethnicities, social statuses, and languages (Gay, 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, peer-reviewed research and journal articles were used to highlight how TPPs prepare educators to utilize CRT strategies in their in-service experiences. The evidence in this chapter included a detailed analysis of CRT and the shift from relevant pedagogy to responsive teaching. This chapter included a review of scholarly articles and

texts that aided in identifying the most salient issues related to this study's problem and purpose. Key themes identified in this chapter were the demographics of the teacher workforce and student population in the United States, the lack of training in both preservice and in-service environments, teachers' perspectives of their ability and confidence to use CRT effectively, and the effects of inconsistent use of CRT strategies on the student experience.

The peer-reviewed texts researched highlighted the mismatch between a majority White educator workforce and the increasingly diverse student population. The findings explored in this chapter revealed that some teachers need more confidence in their abilities to implement CRT strategies consistently and meaningfully. It was argued that decreased student achievement and lack of a sense of belonging are the consequences of the mismatch and educators' low self-efficacy. In the following chapter, I explain and detail the proposed methods for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and support needed in implementing CRT to support achievement and foster a sense of belonging in students. In Chapter 3, I describe the rationale for the research design. The methodology section includes information on participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and the data analysis plan. I also discuss trustworthiness and ethical procedures and summarize the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The most suitable methodology to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging was qualitative. Qualitative research explores people's sense-making of the world and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is exploratory by nature and allows a researcher to understand a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). According to Burkholder et al. (2020), qualitative research is conducted in natural settings and weaves the participants' voices into the discovery and understanding of the phenomenon they have experienced. A basic qualitative design was suitable for exploring secondary educators' experiences with CRT and perspectives about what is needed to improve the implementation of CRT practices. Information gleaned from this basic qualitative study may improve instructional practices by identifying educators' needs to use CRT practices. This approach allowed the participants to provide firsthand insight into the barriers they face in CRT and the

practical ways to mediate them. Another benefit of this study may be that school leaders may be informed about professional development opportunities to provide teachers based on their expressed needs (see Cavendish et al., 2021).

The research questions for this study were the following:

RQ1: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ2: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their challenges in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ3: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of support needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to design, collect, analyze, and report the results of the research (Geddis-Regan et al., 2022). My role as the researcher was to conduct interviews, analyze the data, and make recommendations to improve teachers' application of CRT strategies. I have been in education for 19 years and have held several roles in the school district as a classroom teacher, grade-level team leader, and instructional lead teacher. I was as an assistant principal at the time of the study. I was responsible for creating a comfortable environment for the participants to prevent any potential harm their anxieties may cause. I recruited a nationwide sample of participants using online

applications and social media platforms to ensure that my supervisory role would not harm my colleagues or exert any power over the participants.

I could have had biases related to the new educator experience because I had very little preservice training that addressed CRT. These biases were addressed using my research journal and reflective field notes. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) recommended that field notes be used to critically reflect after each interview to assess the researcher's performance, biases, and feelings. Although complete objectivity is impossible among qualitative researchers, Ahern (1999) argued that bracketing is necessary during data collection. I used bracketing to prevent my assumptions and understanding from influencing the data collection and analysis. Member checking can also help the researcher control bias in the data collection and analysis process (Burkholder et al., 2020). Member checks occur when the researcher shares draft findings and patterns with the participants to solicit feedback about the accuracy of what has been found (Burkholder et al., 2020). I reflected throughout the study and maintained ethical best practices while conducting the interviews and analyzing the data.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling to select educators who met the inclusion criteria. Burkholder et al. (2020) noted that purposive sampling is most useful in qualitative studies to ensure that participants have insight into the phenomenon. One purposeful sampling design is criterion sampling. In criterion sampling, participants are identified and chosen if they meet the study's predetermined criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). In the

current study, participants who met the participant criteria provided thick, rich descriptions of their experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Selection Criteria

The inclusion criteria for the study included secondary teachers who (a) taught in Grades 6–12, (b) had a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience, and (c) had knowledge of and experience using CRT strategies. Seyri and Nazari (2023) found that educators' self-identities grow by the second year of teaching from their initial teacher identity established from their preservice experiences. Seyri and Nazari also found that during the second year of teaching, educators realize the disconnect between their theoretical knowledge of teaching and the daily implementation of teaching practices. Based on these findings, I assumed that participants with a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience had enough time in the classroom to evaluate and reflect on their experiences. The criterion for participant selection that the educator must have knowledge of and experience with implementing CRT strategies was also central to the study because the focus of the study was on middle and high school educators' perspectives of their experiences using CRT strategies in their classrooms to promote a sense of belonging and academic achievement. To provide rich descriptions of their experiences, participants needed a basic understanding of CRT and have used the strategies in their classrooms. The rationale for this criterion was that participants with a basic understanding of and experience using CRT would be better able to reflect on and share their successes, challenges, and needs for additional support (see Shockley & Krakaur, 2021). According to Shockley and Krakaur (2021), most K–12 educators have

some understanding of the need for cultural competency and culturally responsive practices. Quality results can be found from smaller sample sizes when the participants meet these selection criteria and describe similar experiences (Young & Casey, 2019).

Sample Size and Saturation

Qualitative research aims to extract thick, rich data that includes participants' intentionality and insights (Bearman, 2019). To achieve this goal, researchers must ensure a sample size that is large enough to achieve data saturation so that the RQs can be answered. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), data saturation is achieved when two criteria are met: ongoing analysis reveals no new information, and no unexplained phenomena have emerged. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found that for most saturation assessments for in-depth interviews, the sample size should be between nine and 17. Using criterion sampling during the recruitment process and data saturation, I determined that the sample size for this study was 10 participants.

Instrumentation

In a basic qualitative study, interviews are the ideal data collection tool (Burkholder et al., 2020). The three interview formats for qualitative research are structured, semistructured, and unstructured. Structured interviews would not have been appropriate for the current study because they are designed to precisely compare each participant's response (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Unstructured interviews involve questions based on the participant's response to the previous question and would not have been appropriate for the current study (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Semistructured interviews were appropriate for my study because the questions related to the RQs and

probes were used to better understand the participants' responses (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Semistructured interviews can flow like natural conversations (Duranti, 1997). I conducted semistructured interviews with probes using a self-designed interview protocol. Each interview was conducted via Zoom. Each interview followed a prescribed list of questions with additional preplanned probes as necessary. The duration of each interview was not to exceed 60 minutes unless the participant provided verbal consent to go beyond that time frame. Babbie (2017) recommended that probes be neutral and the same for all participants to maintain continuity throughout the interviews. The interview questions elicited participants' descriptions of their experiences rather than their opinions. Bearman (2019) argued that opinions are helpful for practical questions or issues, but participants' experiential descriptions provide a deeper level of their lived experiences.

I used a self-designed interview protocol aligned with the RQs and conceptual framework. I also used probes in the interview protocol. Although Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that all probes cannot be planned, Burkholder et al. (2020) argued that some probes can be anticipated in the interview protocol to seek further explanation or gather more details. Figures 1 through 3 reflect the correlation between the interview questions, RQs, and elements of the conceptual framework to substantiate the content validity of the questions.

Figure 1

Correlation Between RQ1, Interview Questions, and Conceptual Framework

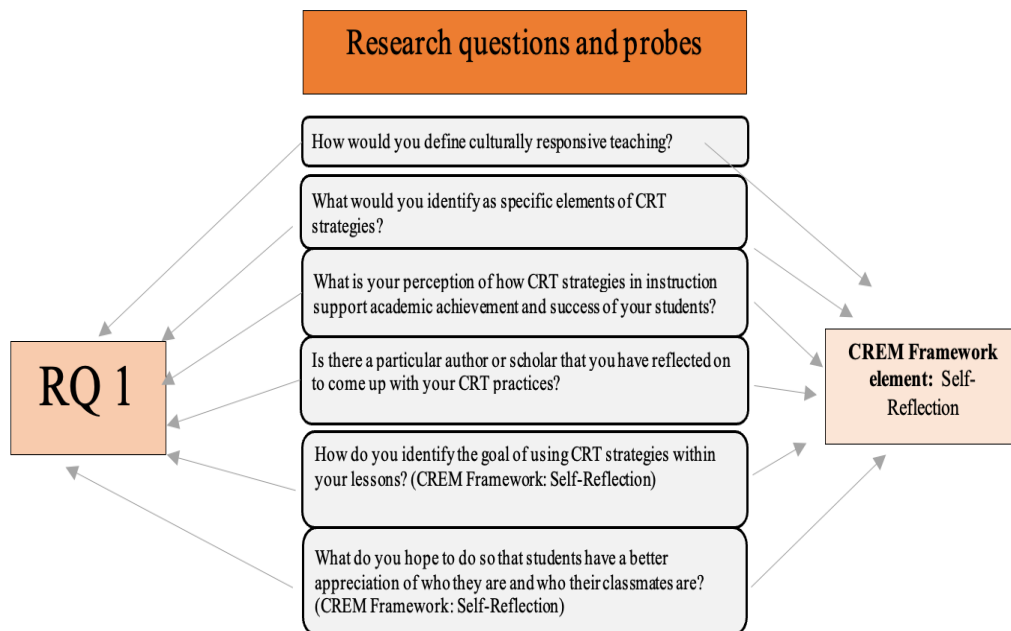


Figure 2

Correlation Between RQ1 and RQ2, Interview Questions, and Conceptual Framework

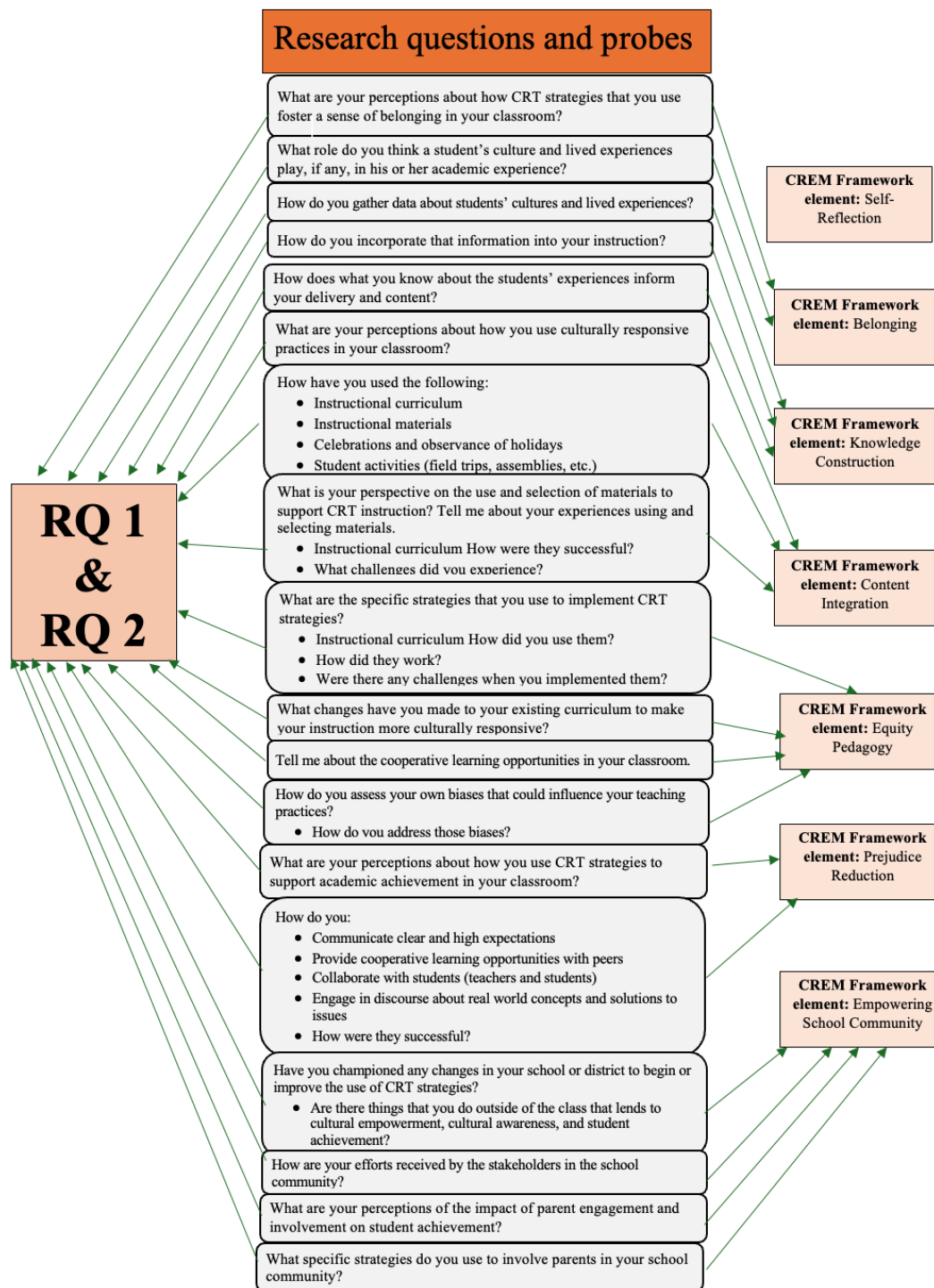
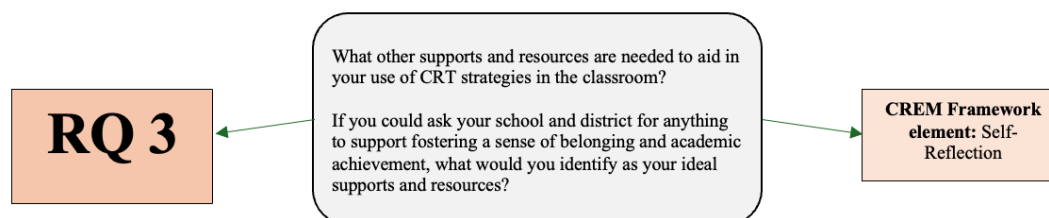


Figure 3

Correlation Between RQ3, Interview Questions, and Conceptual Framework



I used the following preinterview protocols: build rapport, remind participants of the purpose of the study and that their participation is voluntary, remind participants that I would be audio recording and confirm their permission to do so, explain that participants' confidentiality would be protected and that I would use numeric pseudonyms, and remind participants that I would be taking notes during the interview. The postinterview process included thanking the participants for their participation, sending each participant a \$25 gift card, and informing them that I would send the draft findings for member checking. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) stressed the importance of using field notes after an interview to reflect on the participants, setting, interview, and researcher. To support alignment and content validity, I asked my committee members and a panel of experts to review the draft interview protocol (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The panel members were knowledgeable about this study's focus area. One member is an English language development teacher with 18 years in education and a postgraduate

certificate in equity and excellence in education. Another panel member is an equity coach with 15 years of teaching experience and a postgraduate certificate in equity and diversity from Cornell University. This member began teaching with Teach for America and uses Hammond's Ready for Rigor principles to support educators in becoming culturally responsive in a large school district. The third review panel member is an English language development department supervisor with 21 years of experience. I incorporated feedback from the expert panel and my committee when designing the interview protocol. I also consulted with Dr. Manns, the creator of the CREM framework, to obtain feedback about the correlation between the framework and each interview question. I also conducted practice interviews with colleagues to gain experience using the technology and the interview questions before conducting actual interviews with the participants.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon approval from the Walden IRB (# 12-27-23-1088710), I began recruiting participants via the Walden participant pool, social media, and professional hubs such as Facebook and LinkedIn. I invited willing participants to join the study by posting the electronic invitation from the Walden University expedited manual on various platforms. Participants self-selected into the study and contacted me via my Walden University email to express their interest. I asked grand tour questions to confirm that each participant met the inclusion criteria and allowed participants to share what they deemed significant about CRT strategy use (see Linden & Palmieri, 2021). Each interested participant received the consent form via email and was asked to reply to the email with "I consent"

upon review. Once I received the email with consent, I arranged a time and date to complete the interview. As interviews were being conducted, I only recorded the audio portion of the meeting. I used an additional iPad as a backup device to ensure that all interviews were captured.

Data Analysis Plan

Once all interviews had been completed and transcribed, I used Yin's (2018) five-step method to analyze the data. The five steps are compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. The compiling phase began with the interviews and collecting data, including a preliminary informal analysis and reviewing field notes. The second step of the data analysis process is disassembling. The coding process begins during this phase and can be repeated as often as necessary (Yin, 2018). The reassembling phase is when a researcher begins to identify themes by arranging items and pieces of data into various combinations and groupings. After the data had been reassembled, the interpreting phase began. During this phase, new patterns may emerge by interpreting the tables and graphs and continuing to disassemble or reassemble (Yin, 2018). Concluding is when the researcher synthesizes the findings from the analysis process. The conclusions are drawn from the interpretations made in the previous phase. I used both deductive and inductive methods to analyze the data. The inductive content analysis method involves drawing conclusions and merging the data into themes. The deductive process involves looking for preestablished subjects in the data.

After all interviews were recorded and transcribed, I used a priori coding, a deductive method, and open descriptive coding, an inductive method, to analyze the data.

A priori coding uses predetermined codes based on the concepts, themes, or categories that emerged based on the conceptual framework, the literature review, and the research questions (Burkholder et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021). Open descriptive coding allows a researcher to be deeply reflective and open to all possibilities of results from the data (Saldaña, 2021). These coding processes served as the other's checks and balances. While Saldaña (2021) cautioned that using a priori coding can influence the researcher's interpretation of what is observed, open descriptive coding mandates that a researcher is receptive to any themes that may emerge.

The inductive process for this study was content analysis. Downe-Wamboldt (1992) described content analysis as making valid inferences from the data to describe a phenomenon. Bengtsson (2016) describes the following steps in the data analysis process: decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation. Decontextualization is the process by which researchers familiarize themselves with the data by reading through the transcripts to find the big picture before making smaller meaning units (Bengtsson, 2016). Recontextualization occurs when the researcher rereads the data and determines if any unmarked text answers the research questions and thus should be included in the analysis (Bengtsson, 2016). The categorization process begins with condensing the meaning units and identifying categories (Bengtsson, 2016). The final step in the process, compilation, includes using the categories to use either manifest or latent analysis. Manifest analysis is a surface-level analysis that uses what has been said (Bengtsson, 2016). Latent analysis uses what has been said and considers what was intended to be said (Bengtsson, 2016). For this study, I used latent analysis to search for

hidden meaning within the texts and used quotations to select meaning units for each theme or category (see Bengtsson, 2016). The data were coded using spreadsheets with built-in pivot tables to identify the frequency of terms within the data and categorize and note the relationships between the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is paramount in qualitative research. During the recruitment process, trustworthiness was established and maintained by clearly explaining the study's purpose, protecting the participant's confidentiality, providing documentation outlining the process to ensure confidentiality and protect the participants' privacy, and allowing participants the opportunity to preview the interview questions. At the onset of each interview, I informed the participants that the interview would be transcribed verbatim and that the coding process would be done manually to ensure trustworthiness in the data collection and coding processes.

Each participant was asked the same questions in the semistructured interview protocol with preplanned probes during the interview process. The interviews only occurred once consent was provided from each participant. Only the audio of the interview was recorded and analyzed using verbatim transcription.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research establishes internal validity and addresses how believable the findings are based on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used member checking and reflexivity with bracketing through field notes throughout the collection and analysis processes to establish credibility. Member checking involves seeking a draft

summary of the findings from participants and requesting feedback (Burkholder et al., 2020). Based on the responses received from participants, the findings accurately captured what they shared, and there were no corrections or feedback to apply.

Reflexivity is an internal process that requires researchers to document any biases and responses to the research process using field notes, memos, or journals (Burkholder et al., 2020). In addition to self-reflection, reflexivity includes noting any adjustments made to the study through perpetual analysis. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), field notes can be used multiple times during the interview process to record the interview setting, describe any noteworthy characteristics about the participants, and note the participants' nonverbal behaviors and responses to the interview. The final step in recording field notes is the researcher's self-reflection about the interview and the performance as a participant in the process and as the interviewer. Bracketing occurs when researchers strive to prevent their assumptions from influencing the data collection and remove their constructed beliefs and understandings from the data (Ahern, 1999). I used descriptive bracketing to isolate my biases and thoughts from the data collection and analysis.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research applies to the external validity of the findings as generalizable to the population focused on in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). For findings to be transferable, the researcher must provide thick descriptions and maximum variation to ensure readers can apply the study's findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define thick descriptions as descriptions about the setting and participants,

detailed explanations of the findings with sufficient evidence from participant quotes, field notes, and other supporting documents. Maximum variation addresses the broad range used for sampling to document the diversity and commonalities across the diversity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As this study was nationwide, I recruited a wide range of participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences in education.

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency in the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes (Burkholder et al., 2020). According to Burkholder et al., any changes made in the methodology must be documented and explained to meet the standard for dependability in a qualitative study. I used inquiry audits from the field notes to detail the data collection methods, analysis, and decision-making process throughout the study. Ravitch and Carl (2019) recommended that each participant be provided a summary of the findings. I asked each participant to read the draft summary of the findings and email me with any changes, questions, or concerns within seven days of receiving the draft findings. Based on the responses to the draft summary, the findings accurately captured the participants' responses. This process was used to ensure trustworthiness and prevent misinterpretations of the participants' responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Confirmability

Confirmability is met in qualitative research if other qualified researchers would draw the same conclusions if they examined the same data collected (Burkholder et al., 2020). The coding process connected the research's findings to the research questions to ensure confirmability. An audit trail was used to detail the methodology and the data

analysis (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity includes researcher notetaking; continuously evaluating participants' responses; and consulting with mentors, committee members, and advisors during the data analysis (Janesick, 2016). I bracketed any personal influences that arose during data collection. I also noted any potentially biased participant comments during the interview to bracket them during data analysis (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Ethical Procedures

To conduct this study, I sought approval from the Walden University IRB. Using the consent form from the IRB manual, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the procedures that would be used. Consent forms are the most common way to inform potential participants of their involvement in a research study (Burkholder et al., 2020). The consent form included information about their rights and protections as participants in this study. Using the recruitment flier from the Walden University IRB manual, potential participants were informed that their names would not be collected or stored. When potential participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study, they were emailed the consent form and asked to reply "I consent" to confirm their willingness to participate. Participants were informed of their rights and that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the process. Each participant was assigned a numeric pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Upon receiving consent for participation, I scheduled a suitable date and time for each participant to conduct the interview. I did not have any prior or current relationships with the participants. The data will be maintained for five years per the Walden University IRB manual. I was the sole

researcher for this study. I will maintain all records on my password-protected, secured laptop and share them only with Walden University IRB members upon request.

Summary

Chapter 3 included my rationale for choosing the qualitative research method, my interview protocol development process, and my use of Walden University's pre-approved materials to obtain permission from the IRB. I described how I recruited participants, conducted interviews, and transcribed and analyzed the data. I also described how I used ethical procedures and addressed the trustworthiness issues. Each participant was asked to respond to the same 25 interview questions with probes to describe their perspectives and experiences using CRT strategies in their classrooms to promote a sense of belonging and academic achievement. In Chapter 4, I describe the data analysis process and findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The middle and high school years are pivotal in students' lives. Using CRT strategies in the classroom can contribute to students having positive experiences and outlooks about their education. The problem I explored was that secondary teachers struggle when implementing CRT strategies. When teachers have difficulties implementing CRT strategies, their students may experience a decreased sense of belonging and lower levels of academic achievement (Cavendish et al., 2021). To improve educators' implementation of CRT strategies, they must be able to contribute to and make decisions about how they grow professionally (Cavendish et al., 2021).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. To support teachers in sharing their experiences and needs related to implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms, I sought to answer three RQs:

RQ1: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ2: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their challenges in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

RQ3: What are U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of support needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

Gay's seminal works informed the RQs on CRT and CREM as the conceptual framework. Manns's (2021) CREM framework informed the design for the interview protocol. I consulted with Dr. Manns, who provided feedback on the protocol to ensure that each framework element was addressed. The CREM framework was also used during data analysis to identify the components discussed during each interview. The CREM framework focuses on self-reflection and belonging as the core purpose of CRT. Manns argued that with self-reflection and belonging as entry points, teachers can begin to focus on the other elements of the framework, which are content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. In the current study, findings related to how participants perceived their experiences using CRT strategies and described what educators need to implement them. In Chapter 4, I describe the setting, participant demographics, data collection process, and data analysis methods. I also discuss the study's results and evidence of trustworthiness and provide a summary.

Setting

I recruited participants nationwide via the Walden participant pool, LinkedIn, and Facebook groups targeted to CRT. Participants voluntarily self-selected to participate in the study by sending an email expressing interest. I asked grand tour questions, which allowed each potential participant to show what was significant to them about CRT

strategies and to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria of having knowledge and use of CRT strategies (see Linden & Palmieri, 2021). Once the participants were found to meet the inclusion criteria, they were sent the consent form. Upon receiving the participants' consent and preferred times for interviews, I sent a calendar invitation to schedule their interview appointment time and date. Because teachers were recruited throughout the United States, the interviews were conducted using Zoom audioconferencing software. I conducted semistructured interviews using the self-designed interview protocol that included open-ended questions with probes aligned to the conceptual framework and RQs. All 10 participants provided verbal consent for the interview to be recorded and completed the interview by answering each question from the interview protocol. The interviews were scheduled for 1 hour. Three of the 10 interviews went beyond 60 minutes.

Demographics

The 10 participants in this study had at least 2 years of teaching experience, with the fewest being 3 years and the most being 25 years. Each participant was working in either a middle or high school. There were nine female participants and one male participant. The participants taught a variety of subjects. Table 1 shows the numeric pseudonyms for each participant, their years of experience, the grade levels they served, and their content area.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Experience (years)	Grade level	Content area
P1	22	6–8	Mathematics
P2	6	6–8	Science
P3	21	10	English
P4	25	9–12	English
P5	19	6–8	Gifted and talented
P6	3	6–8	English
P7	7	9–12	English
P8	14	6–8	Gifted and talented
P9	20	9–12	Exceptional students
P10	11	6–12	Special education

Data Collection

As the sole interviewer and researcher for this study, I was the primary tool for data collection. I collected data using semistructured interviews with probes to encourage participants to share their perceptions about the successes, challenges, and needs of implementing CRT strategies. A semistructured interview aims to elicit specific information from the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I created a self-designed interview protocol to gather data from each participant. The CREM framework and the RQs informed the development of the interview questions and protocol. The interview questions were reviewed by Manns, three of my educational peers with knowledge and experience using CRT, and my committee members. I used the feedback from each reviewer to improve the interview protocol. The final interview protocol included 25 questions with probes.

I began the data collection process after Walden IRB approved the study. I shared my recruitment flyer on Facebook, LinkedIn, and the Walden participant pool. The recruitment process spanned over three months, and 10 participants self-selected into the study and met the participant criteria. I conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant and recorded each interview via the Zoom platform. I used an iPad to ensure the interview data were saved in a second location if something happened to the original audio recording. Seven of the 10 interviews were completed in 60 minutes or less. Three of the interviews exceeded an hour by less than 10 minutes. Two participants asked to continue beyond the hour to share more information. The third participant provided verbal consent. Table 2 provides the interview length for each participant.

Table 2

Length of Interview by Participant

Participant	Length of interview
P1	52.43 minutes
P2	68.00 minutes
P3	60.00 minutes
P4	38.15 minutes
P5	58.48 minutes
P6	44.02 minutes
P7	57.40 minutes
P8	32.31 minutes
P9	63.41 minutes
P10	47.43 minutes

At the beginning of each interview, I established rapport with each participant, reminded them of the purpose of the study, and thanked them for their willingness to participate. I informed each participant that I would only use the interview audio recording and obtained their verbal consent. I reminded each participant that I would

protect their confidentiality using numeric pseudonyms. I used the interview protocol and probes to gain thick and rich data from the participants. Using probes, I stimulated the participant to provide a more detailed response that expanded their original response (see Yin, 2018). After each interview, I explained that through the member-checking process, I would share the draft findings with them later, and they could confirm that I had accurately captured what they intended to share (see Burkholder et al., 2020). I thanked each participant again for their participation and informed them that I would be sending an electronic gift card to their email. Following each interview, I sent the \$25 gift card and reviewed the transcription and any notes from my field journal by day's end. The field notes assessed my performance and reflected on any biases and feelings presented during the interview (see Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Each audio recording and participant information from the interviews were saved on my password-protected personal computer. Per Walden policy, all files will be maintained securely and deleted after 5 years.

Data Analysis

In this study, I used qualitative content analysis to analyze the data. Krippendorff (2019) described content analysis as using a body of text, a research question, and context for sense-making to make inferences that answer the RQ and validate evidence to support the inferences. Content analysis supported the current study's reliability, validity, and replicability (see Krippendorff, 2019). According to Yin (2018), the qualitative content analysis process includes five phases: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. I used content and latent analysis to identify the underlying

meaning of the participants' responses (see Bengtsson, 2016). In the disassembling phase, I used the four analysis steps: decontextualizing, recontextualizing, categorizing, and compiling. Each phase was implemented to analyze the data collected for this study.

Coding Process

I employed Saldaña's (2021) qualitative data analysis coding strategy and included deductive and inductive coding methods. After the data were compiled, I used the deductive process to analyze excerpts from the transcripts and labeled them with a priori codes from Manns's (2021) CREM framework. After identifying the deductive codes based on the conceptual framework, I used the inductive process of open descriptive coding. This process included making sense of the raw data without the conceptual framework as a filter (see Billups, 2021). The pairing of the deductive and inductive approaches strengthened the credibility of the study's findings because the data were triangulated from the a priori and open descriptive codes (see Billups, 2021).

Yin's (2018) five-phase model for qualitative analysis begins with compiling, disassembling, and reassembling the data and ends with interpreting and concluding. In this process, the data are decomposed, assigned codes, reassembled, interpreted, and concluded with themes that address the RQs. In the current study, each phase of the qualitative data analysis process was used to determine the results.

Compiling

During the compiling phase, the raw data were collected and organized (see Yin, 2018). First, all transcribed audio recordings were converted to Word documents. I listened to the audio recordings and used my notes to ensure that each participant's words

were captured correctly and that the transcripts accurately captured the participants' interviews (see Kekeya, 2016). I also sanitized the transcripts to remove any filler or nonsense words that the participants used. After converting each transcript, I added it to a folder that included each interview's audio and text versions. I compiled all notes from my field journal, including reflective bracketing notes, and added them to a folder on my laptop. Next, I disassembled the data by examining each participant's responses in the transcripts.

Disassembling

Yin (2018) described the disassembling phase as breaking the compiled data into smaller fragments. I used deductive coding to disassemble the data into smaller units or codes that assigned a salient attribute to the interview transcripts (see Saldaña, 2021). After completing deductive coding, I conducted two rounds of open descriptive coding to make meaning of the participants' responses to the interview questions. By using both inductive and deductive coding, I obtained a thorough understanding of the responses (see Blackstone, 2012).

I used deductive coding by using the components of the CREM framework to analyze the data with a priori codes (see Saldaña, 2021). I reread the conceptual framework and considered the elements of the framework that were most essential to the phenomenon. The CREM framework contained five central spokes and included self-reflection and the culture of belonging as central elements. With that understanding, I identified the following a priori codes: belonging, empowering school culture, equity

pedagogy, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and self-reflection. Table 3 shows the scholarly definitions for each a priori code.

Table 3*A priori Code Definitions*

A priori code	Definition
Belonging	A sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (e.g., teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual (Goodenow, 1993)
Content integration	Expanding the curriculum and programming to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of diverse groups (Manns, 2021)
Empowering school culture	Making choices that create a culture of belonging within the school community (Manns, 2021)
Equity pedagogy	Acknowledging diverse learning styles and intentionally identifying strategies that lead to higher achievement for students in diverse groups (Manns, 2021)
Knowledge construction	Helping students understand how people create beliefs based on their diverse biographies while validating students' funds of knowledge (Manns, 2021)
Prejudice reduction	Helping students develop more positive attitudes about people from diverse groups and empowering them to identify and address injustices (Manns, 2021)
Self-reflection	understanding and becoming aware of one's cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and judgments (Manns, 2021)

I went through each transcript and selected text, assigned an a priori code to the text selected, and then pasted the text into the spreadsheet with the corresponding a priori deductive code. For a priori coding, I used the spreadsheet to create pivot tables and charts. Table 4 outlines the a priori codes disassembled from the data and includes the a priori code and the number of pieces of textual evidence coded to each deductive code using the CREM framework.

Table 4

Amount of Textual Evidence for A priori Codes

A priori code	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Belonging	53
Content integration	92
Empowering school culture	196
Equity pedagogy	188
Knowledge construction	76
Prejudice reduction	93
Self-reflection	81
Total	779

Descriptive coding is used to summarize a passage of data using a word or a short phrase (Saldaña, 2021). After I completed the a priori coding, I used the inductive coding process of latent content analysis to analyze the data outside of the context of the conceptual framework. I decontextualized the text from the responses and searched for a big picture (see Bengtsson, 2016). Next, I recontextualized the text by rereading each line and identifying whether the text answered the RQs and indicated successes, challenges, or suggestions. I used open coding to identify descriptive codes from the responses. To begin this process, I reviewed my problem statement, RQs, and Literature Review to

maintain the focus of the open descriptive codes on the phenomenon. Then, I searched for key words frequently used by participants during the interview process (see Bengtsson, 2016). I reviewed each line of text in the Excel spreadsheet and conducted Round 1 of the open descriptive coding. There was a total of 45 open code descriptors for Round 1. After Round 1, I placed the open descriptive codes into a separate Excel spreadsheet and color-coded related codes. I then grouped the codes by color and identified a summary phrase that would capture the meaning of each grouping. I reread the raw data, reflected on the content of what the participants were saying in their responses, and determined that some of the lines needed to be recoded. With the recoded data, I identified 27 new Round 1 codes. Table 5 shows the Round 1 codes with the count of text excerpts by code.

Table 5*Round 1 Open Descriptive Coding*

Round 1 open descriptive code	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Challenge/curriculum and materials	34
Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	21
Challenge/leadership limitations	3
Challenge/student resistance	34
Challenge/time	1
Success/activating student interest	41
Success/addressing and managing biases	52
Success/clear expectations	41
Success/educator professional growth	21
Success/encouraging student growth	56
Success/Exposure to real world issues	20
Success/Learning about and making connections to students' culture and experience	82
Success/Learning experiences beyond the classroom	10
Success/Mirroring	29
Success/parent engagement and input	52
Success/schoolwide celebrations and observances	24
Success/student belonging	20
Success/student-to-student interactions	31
Success/teacher pedagogy/practices	66
Success/teacher-student connection	39
Suggestion/community connections	8
Suggestion/curriculum and material improvements	25
Suggestion/educating the community	19
Suggestion/influential scholars/authors/books	8
Suggestion/professional development	32
Suggestion/staffing	9
Suggestion/time	1
Total	779

After Round 1 of open descriptive coding, I considered how each code shared similar constructs and related to the Literature Review and RQs. I used the summary phrases from the recoding analysis to identify Round 2 open descriptive codes. I collapsed the Round 1 codes into nine open descriptive codes. I created pivot tables from the data to gain a deeper understanding of the data from Round 1 to Round 2. Table 6 shows the Round 2 codes with the count of text excerpts by code.

Table 6

Round 2 Open Descriptive Coding

Round 2 open descriptive code	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Access to culturally responsive resources	26
Challenge/curriculum and materials	38
Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	21
Challenge/student resistance	34
Community engagement and education	27
Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	359
Positive student experiences	149
School and parent connections and collaborations	76
Staff improvements and development	49
Total	779

Once the Round 2 codes were determined, I revisited the RQs and reviewed the pivot tables. During this process, it was evident that the Round 2 codes were organized into three groups of successes, challenges, and suggestions and that within those groups, there were three subgroups. Those three subgroups would inform the analysis. Yin (2018) describes the reassembling phase as a time to rearrange and recombine the data. During

this content analysis phase, I used the pivot tables in the spreadsheet to examine the codes from Round 1 that were in Round 2 during the reassembling phase.

Reassembling

Table 7 shows the Round 1 codes and how I combined them to create each Round 2 code. I have also included the count of interview raw data text excerpts that correspond to each Round 2 code.

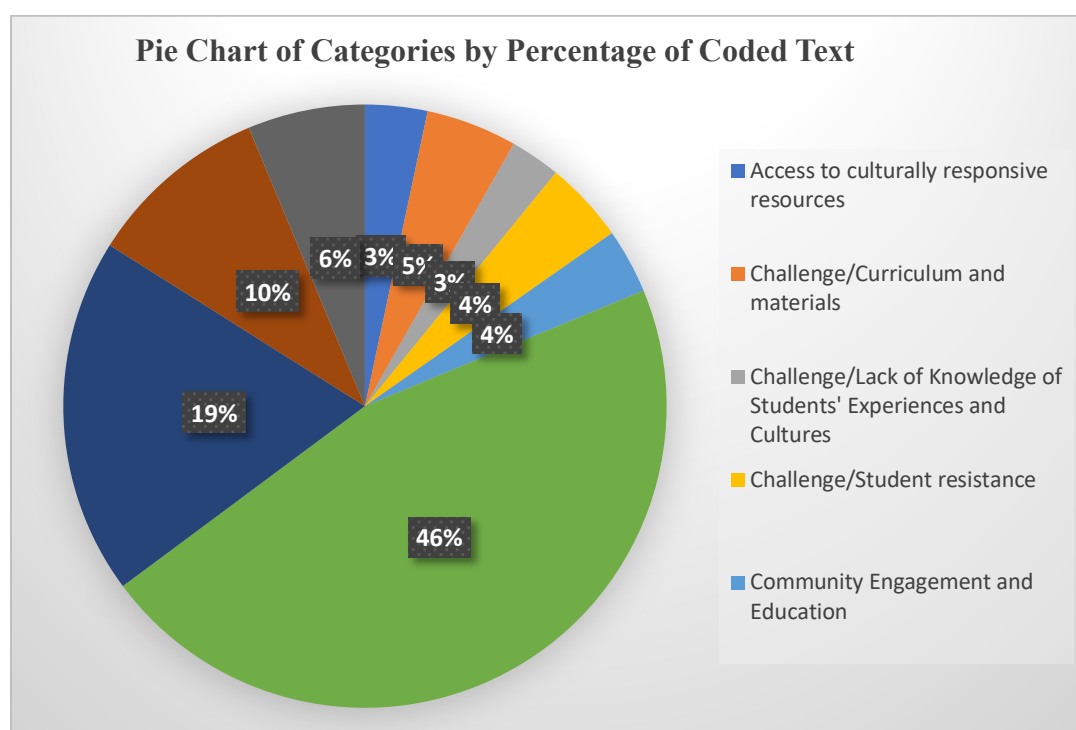
Table 7*Round 1 to Round 2 Open Descriptive Codes and Number of Excerpts*

Round	Round 1 to Round 2 open descriptive code	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
2	Access to culturally responsive resources	26
1	Suggestion/curriculum and material improvements	25
1	Suggestion/time	1
2	Challenge/curriculum and materials	38
1	Challenge/curriculum and materials	34
1	Challenge/leadership limitations	3
1	Challenge/time	1
2	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	21
1	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	21
2	Challenge/student resistance	34
1	Challenge/student resistance	34
2	Community engagement and education	27
1	Suggestion/community connections	8
1	Suggestion/educating the community	19
2	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	359
1	Success/activating student interest	41
1	Success/addressing and managing biases	52
1	Success/clear expectations	41
1	Success/educator professional growth	21
1	Success/encouraging student growth	56
1	Success/learning about and making connections to students' culture and experience	82
1	Success/teacher pedagogy/practices	66
2	Positive student experiences	149
1	Success/exposure to real world issues	20
1	Success/learning experiences beyond the classroom	10
1	Success/mirroring	29
1	Success/student belonging	20
1	Success/student-to-student interactions	31
1	Success/teacher–student connection	39
2	School and parent connections and collaborations	76
1	Success/parent engagement and input	52
1	Success/schoolwide celebrations and observances	24
2	Staff improvements and development	49
1	Suggestion/influential scholars/authors/books	8
1	Suggestion/professional development	32
1	Suggestion/staffing	9
	Total	779

To complete the categorizing step of Bengtsson's (2016) content analysis, I reviewed the nine codes from Round 2 and condensed the meaning of the data into categories. I created pivot tables from the data within the spreadsheet to review the number of participants who had lines of text in each of the Round 2 codes and categories. Figure 4 shows the categories and the percentage of the coded text within each category.

Figure 4

Categories by Percentage of Coded Text



I reread the CREM Framework and created a crosswalk of the a priori codes and categories. I wanted to make sense of and understand how each category related and aligned with the framework's elements. Table 8 shows the categories that relate to each of the a priori codes from Manns's CREM Framework and the count of text excerpts by code.

Table 8

Crosswalk of A priori Codes and Categories With Number of Coded Text by A priori

Code and Category

Category or a priori code	Categories a priori using CREM conceptual framework	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Category	Belonging	53
A priori	Access to culturally responsive resources	1
A priori	Challenge/student resistance	8
A priori	Community engagement and education	1
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	13
A priori	Positive student experiences	28
A priori	Staff improvements and development	2
Category	Content integration	92
A priori	Access to culturally responsive resources	12
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	12
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	2
A priori	Community engagement and education	1
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	36
A priori	Positive student experiences	21
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	6
A priori	Staff improvements and development	2
Category	Empowering school culture	196
A priori	Access to culturally responsive resources	3
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	6
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	5
A priori	Challenge/student resistance	4
A priori	Community engagement and education	15
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	46
A priori	Positive student experiences	23
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	62
A priori	Staff improvements and development	32
Category	Equity pedagogy	188
A priori	Access to culturally responsive resources	9
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	11
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	1
A priori	Challenge/student resistance	12
A priori	Community engagement and education	1
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	123
A priori	Positive student experiences	26
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	2
A priori	Staff improvements and development	3
Category	Knowledge construction	76
A priori	Access to culturally responsive resources	1
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	3
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	8
A priori	Challenge/student resistance	2
A priori	Community engagement and education	3
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	44
A priori	Positive student experiences	14
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	1
Category	Prejudice reduction	93
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	5
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	3
A priori	Challenge/student resistance	6
A priori	Community engagement and education	6
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	35
A priori	Positive student experiences	33
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	4
A priori	Staff improvements and development	1

Category or a priori code	Categories a priori using CREM conceptual framework	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Category	Self-reflection	81
A priori	Challenge/curriculum and materials	1
A priori	Challenge/lack of knowledge of students' experiences and cultures	2
A priori	Challenge/Student resistance	2
A priori	Educators' intentional strategy implementation and growth	62
A priori	Positive student experiences	4
A priori	School and parent connections and collaborations	1
A priori	Staff improvements and development	9
Total		779

In the compiling step of Bengtsson's (2016) content analysis, I used latent analysis to identify any meaning that may have been hidden in the texts. I used the RQs, the CREM Framework, and the literature to collapse the categories into nine themes. The themes that emerged based on my sense-making of the categories and explicit responses to the RQs are shown in Table 9, along with the count of text excerpts.

Table 9*Theme and Number of Interview Raw Data Text Excerpts by Theme*

Theme	Number of interview raw data text excerpts
Teachers perceived intentionally using CRT strategies and growing professionally as successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	359
Teachers perceive positive student experiences as a success in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	149
Teachers perceive school and parent connections and collaborations as successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	76
Teachers perceive their curriculum and materials as challenges in implementing CRT to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	38
Teachers perceive their lack of knowledge of student experiences and cultures as a challenge to supporting student achievement and fostering a sense of belonging.	21
Teachers perceive student resistance as a challenge in implementing CRT to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	34
Teachers perceive staff improvements and developments as supports needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	49
Teachers perceive access to culturally responsive resources as a needed support in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	26
Teachers perceive community engagement and education as supports needed for implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging.	27

To further compile the data, I reread the excerpts and identified which participants made statements directly related to each theme. Table 10 shows which participants had text excerpts in each theme and which participants (if any) did not have text excerpts in a specific theme.

Table 10*Participant Perceptions Evidenced by Text Excerpt by Theme*

Theme	List of participants with text excerpts in the theme	List of participants without text excerpts in the theme
1	All	None
2	All	None
3	All	None
4	1–9	10
5	1–7, 9,10	8
6	All	None
7	All	None
8	1, 3, 4, 6–10	2, 5
9	1–4, 7, 9, 10	5, 6, 8

Themes 1 through 3 were centered around successes reported by all participants in implementing CRT strategies. These themes were used to answer RQ 1: What are US secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students? Themes 4 through 6 focused on the difficulties that teachers perceived and experienced while implementing CRT strategies. These themes were used to answer RQ2: What are US secondary teachers' perceptions of their challenges in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students? Themes 7 through 9 included the recommendations and suggestions of what the teachers perceived that they still need to implement CRT strategies. These themes were used to answer RQ3: What are US secondary teachers' perceptions of the supports needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for students?

Interpreting

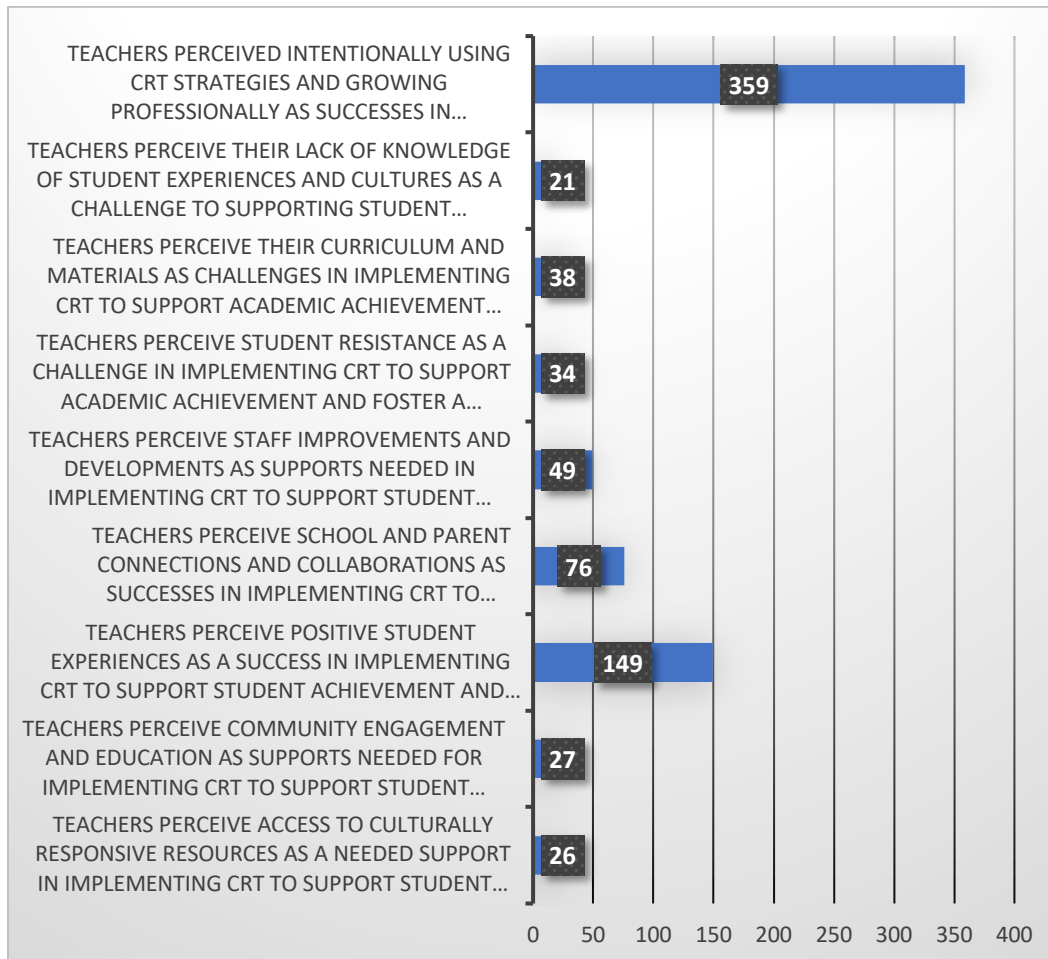
Using the pivot tables and visual graphics to reassemble and analyze the data, I experienced what Yin described as the “kinder” transition from reassembling to interpreting. There was a clear direction on how to move forward with the data. During this phase, a researcher gives meaning to the findings, which requires a great deal of interpretation (Yin, 2018). During this phase, I reviewed the pivot tables from the Excel workbook and used the codes and categories from the tables to understand and describe the findings. I determined that the interpretation of the data was complete, fair, empirically accurate, added value to the phenomenon, and credible (see Yin, 2018). Themes 7 through 9 are descriptive with calls to action as they outline what educators need to implement CRT in their classrooms. After interpreting the data, I used tables and graphs to display the findings and explored how the themes provided three responses to each of the RQs.

Concluding

Yin’s (2018) final phase in content analysis is concluding. During this phase, conclusions are drawn for the entire study. I used the pivot tables to examine how the a priori and open descriptive codes from Rounds 1 and 2 related to the CREM Framework and the RQs. Figure 5 displays the themes and counts of coded text excerpts by theme.

Figure 5

Theme and Number of Interview Raw Data Text Excerpts by Theme



In this section, I discussed the findings that aligned with the purpose and RQs of this study. The codes, categories, and themes discovered through the data analysis are explained in the Results section of the chapter.

Results

Theme 1

Theme 1 was that teachers perceived intentionally using CRT strategies and growing professionally as successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Theme 1 emerged from the participants' perceptions of how they implemented CRT strategies and sought opportunities to improve their pedagogy. These behaviors resulted in increased student achievement, and many participants reported evidence of students' improved sense of belonging. All participants described their efforts to engage with students to learn about their cultures and an intentionality to make curricular connections to the cultures. Participants shared their self-reflective practices to address and manage their biases and implement CRT strategies. All participants shared their pedagogical practices that are used to maintain culturally responsive classrooms while providing clear expectations and encouraging student growth.

Learning About and Making Connections to Students' Cultures and Lived Experiences

All participants shared that learning about and making connections to students' cultures and experiences is an ongoing part of the CRT implementation. Participants viewed this practice as essential to supporting academic achievement and fostering a sense of belonging. Participants explained how they learn about students' cultures and lived experiences, and the connections made positively affect the classroom environment and students' performance.

The participants use a variety of strategies to collect information about their students. P9 and P10 shared that they learn about their students' cultures and experiences by actively participating in the outside community. Seeing families at the post office, retail stores, restaurants, and other community establishments provides information about the students' lives beyond the school setting. P4 and P6 reported using specific activities designed to learn about the students. P8 uses students' records for information about their academic experiences.

All participants shared that learning about students' cultures and experiences begins early in the school year. Many of the participants shared learning about their students' cultures and experiences through informal conversations. P1 reported having morning chats with students as they entered the classroom and during recess. P5 conveyed using the first two weeks of school to have frequent conversations with students, beginning with "easy" topics and allowing the students' comfort level to determine the depth of the conversation topics. Similarly, P8 has "getting-to-know-you" conversations with their students. Participants noted that it can be challenging to get to know each student, especially when the group is large, but maintained the importance of knowing things about the students and where they come from. P2 shared that small group and individual conversations are effective ways to learn about each student. P10 shared that their school's culture emphasizes learning about students for an extended period. This educator shared,

I spend a significant amount of time just having conversations. It's built into our school culture, therefore, it's something I was doing previously but it's now

something that is not just suggested, it is something that is something that we all have to do. It is it is the standard and the expectation. We spend roughly the first, not two weeks, we're not talking about Harry Wong's first, you know, week of kindergarten, we spend intentionally 1 or 2 months of the school year building relationships, talking to parents. There's not a lot of instruction going on during this time.

Another way that participants learn about their students is by sending an informational survey home for students and their families to complete. P3 and P5 shared that they used surveys to learn about their students' personalities, aspirations, and families. Rather than directing students to ask their parents to complete the survey, P5 reported using their background knowledge that every family does not look the same and chooses more inclusive language by directing students to have their "families" work on the survey together. This is one of the many ways this educator fosters a sense of belonging early in the school year.

Some participants learn about students by offering opportunities for them to share information about themselves and their experiences with the whole class. P1, P2, and P5 shared that many students enjoy sharing who they are with their peers. P7 conveyed that they allow students to have taste tests of family recipes in class to share their home lives with their peers and for the class to learn about food from other cultures. Similarly, P1 reflected on the importance of learning about culture and allowing students to share their cultures and experiences with the class. They acknowledged that this practice could take away from instructional time, but the benefit of allowing students to share something

significant about themselves outweighs the cost. P1 noted, “True attention to the beauty of a child wanting to share a part of their life with everybody also helps them bring the beauty of their culture in and brings the whole class together as one.”

Activating Students’ Interests

When educators use CRT strategies to activate interest, they are, as P1 stated, “using things that respond to the child as they are.” P5 shared that CRT is important because it engages the learner and can increase academic achievement. The participants shared how they activate students’ interests by connecting to students’ experiences, adjusting the curriculum, providing choices, and creating an engaging environment.

Most participants shared that they infused that information into the instructional program as they learned about the students’ cultures and experiences. Most participants highlighted current events, school-related experiences, and language as ways to connect to the students’ experiences. P5 recognized that their students are more active and less engaged on Mondays. With that knowledge, P5 introduced mindful Mondays, when students are given a few moments to settle their minds in a quiet, calming environment to “get their brains ready for learning.” P5 also used riddles as warmups to “entice them into the classroom.” This participant also used knowledge of the students’ interests when making instructional groups.

P6 looked for relatability to students’ experiences in the required materials. This educator learned about the students who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community and shared that inclusivity in the classroom and allowing students to make connections between themselves and the character’s internal conflict in a text was “bridging a gap

between the classroom and the real world.” P6 also found that the classroom environment and artifacts on display can activate students’ interests. P6, P7, and P10 noted that classroom discussions can activate students’ interests when the topics are relevant to the students’ cultures and experiences. Social media, current school events or conflicts, and happenings in the community are all topics educators use to engage in discussions with the students and make text-to-real world connections. The students are intrigued by these topics and more willing to engage in dialogue. P10 found that relating to students’ current lives and experiences activates interest because of the relatability of the content. Their curriculum is designed to address the cultural norms and practices within the community. There are intentional mentions of significant community leaders, the use of community language throughout the materials, and a pairing of Western educational content with community activities and lifestyles.

P8 found that when they initiated a research project on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), not only were the students’ interests activated, but many families also became involved in the project at home. Over time, the project evolved into a multi-discipline, multi-grade project that has become significant to the whole school and community. P8 explained the importance of knowing when students need additional support to activate their interest and engagement. P8 perceived that educators must be “able to identify when a student is distracted, disinterested or just not encouraged enough to share.” While these educators find many ways to make connections between what may interest the students and the curriculum, there are instances where changes to the curriculum are necessary.

Many participants have had to adjust components of the existing curriculum to activate students' interests. Some participants make marked changes to the curriculum, while others have elected to adapt and supplement their existing curriculum with more culturally responsive materials. The participants shared that curricular changes require reflection and intentionality from the educators. P6 shared that intentional CRT implementation includes taking every opportunity to relate the text or themes from the text to their students' cultures, home lives, or the real world. Similarly, P4, P7, and P10 reported seeking student input on the materials, instruction, activities, and classroom environment and making changes that reflect the feedback from the students. P7 described that they knew they had piqued the students' interest when they tried to stop reading aloud to the class, and the students insisted that they continue reading until the bell rang. This participant credits their intentionality for moments that grab the students' attention and activate their academic thinking. P10 described how they have students create the soundtrack for the class. The students in this class are also part of schoolwide committees that weigh in on school decisions.

The participants shared that another practice that activates students' interests is allowing student choice. The participants indicated that they allowed students to make decisions about scheduling, materials, and content. P3 allowed students to weigh in on the order of instruction. They strive to make the necessary adjustments to honor the students' requests, even if it means adjusting pacing times. P4 and P5 stressed the importance of choice and connection to students' preferred topics. They shared that students are more likely to connect to the curriculum with various choices. While

working on a short film project, P4 found that the topics that students selected ranged from serious to silly, but many of them touched on topics that were salient to the students' lives and experiences. P4 reported that this project and others gave students the creative license to explore topics that interested them.

P5's students were completing a research assignment and were allowed to select a topic that interested them. This educator noted that the students felt more comfortable when their choices were implemented. P5 used the current curriculum and incorporated various presentation methods. P5 noted that this allowed students to decide how to demonstrate their learning. The educator reported learning about the students' preferred styles for demonstrating learning and allowed those methods in the concluding evaluation activity. P7 was surprised when they asked students to give input on literature for their class. P7 acknowledged their bias and noted that their assumptions were wrong about students' preference to have print books, rather than e-books, with relatable characters who have similar life experiences.

Each participant noted that student input and choice activated their interest by giving students an active role in their educational experiences. While each participant shared their methods of getting students engaged, they noted that more work is necessary to maintain that engagement to promote academic achievement and continue to foster a sense of belonging. All participants shared their perceptions of the importance of establishing and communicating clear expectations to their students.

Providing Clear Expectations and Encouraging Student Growth Clear Expectations

A critical element of CRT is having clear expectations for students (Bondy & Ross, 2008). All participants perceived that student growth is for more than just the schoolhouse. All participants noted that their efforts to provide clear expectations were intended to prepare students for the real world. All participants reported that they perceived students' clarity and comprehension of the expectations directly supported student growth. P2 noted that a teacher's expectations should be clear, high, and consistent for all students. They argued that educators must meet students where they are and determine the most effective way to help them [students] grow.

Three participants noted the importance of timing when establishing routines and expectations. P1 established "ground rules" early in the school year. Politeness and respect are required for all students. P1 encouraged the students to understand how learning happens and explained that learning itself is a process that requires effort. P3 mirrored P1's insistence that expectations should be established early on. P10 established expectations with their students early. P10 capitalized on students' competitive natures and eagerness to please their elders and community. P10 reported meeting regularly with students to revisit and revise goals. P10 conveyed that it is necessary to support and encourage the students' aspirations and encourage students to take pride in their achievements.

According to P3, establishing a community mindset sets the tone for success for all students. This educator suggested that the first step to having clear expectations is ensuring that the students understand those expectations and any consequences of not

meeting them. P3, P5, and P6 stressed the importance of students understanding the expectations. They shared that students can only be held accountable to clearly established expectations. This participant shared that students should “know the why” of what they are asked to do and accomplish. They also noted that they learn about the students’ future aspirations and work to shift their mindset about things that may have previously had negative associations. With this shift, P3 reported using daily affirmations to validate the students’ goals and explained that their growth in school will prepare them for the real world and support their goals beyond school. Like P3, P5 was purposeful in ensuring that students understood the expectations and felt comfortable asking questions while receiving constructive feedback. They walked around the classroom, facilitated discussions around expectations, and modeled desired behaviors. This educator showed their students that they believed in them. P5 established a safe environment for their students by encouraging collaboration and providing support. P6 has students rewrite expectations in their own words to demonstrate understanding.

Two participants shared how they increased students’ understanding of expectations by using rubrics. P3 and P4 shared that rubrics establish clear, finite expectations. P3 explained that rubrics can eliminate bias and allow teachers to give meaningful feedback. P4 reported enjoying using rubrics to give students more choices in demonstrating understanding. They shared that using rubrics communicates high expectations and, paired with student choice, promotes more synthesis and critical thinking among the students. P7 found that having clear expectations that included reciprocal respect and honesty improved classroom management. This educator identified

as a champion for their students who have found that modeling the desired behaviors and expectations allows students to see the behaviors in action.

Student Growth

The participants described student growth as academic achievement and personal growth to be prepared for life beyond secondary school. Eight of the 10 participants reflected on how they target growth with their students. The participants shared several methods used to support student achievement, but each participant acknowledged that growth is the overarching goal of their work.

P3 shared that they work with the ELLs to increase their academic language and allow them to use their home language in class. P7 acknowledged that meeting expectations is not always easy for the students, and there must be flexibility with boundaries. P3 implemented reflection circles in class as a way for students to safely consider the consequences of their choices and behaviors. P3 conveyed that they provide students with consistency, accountability, room for recovery, and honest dialogue by being flexible. P7 shared that the students understand they are expected to grow and progress. They shared how they celebrate all progress with their students,

I really look at my students who have high behavior needs. And you got to 50 the first time we took this quiz, but as we keep working together, we keep building this relationship. We're gonna keep on talking. You got to 70. You went from an F to a C, it's not an A, but I'm gonna take it.

Like P7, P8 shared that celebrating students' successes is essential to encouraging growth. They establish clear expectations with consistent structure and routines. They

also noted that expectations should be high, and students should know they will be pushed and their thinking stretched. P6 also celebrates students who are meeting the expectations and praises desired behaviors rather than admonishing those who are not. P6 reported that they conduct conferences with students to discuss their individual growth and academic progress. As a coach, P6 uses their coaching skills and relationships with the students to give them skills that will be beneficial on and off the court. P8 and P9 believe that students grow when pushed, and perspectives about learning and growing are changed. They believe that students need to feel successful during this growing period to boost their confidence and give them a sense of belonging in class and society. P9 noted that consistency is the key to clear expectations, and growth is not always comfortable. To this participant, learning equals progress, and discomfort means learning is happening. Participants shared their strategies and successes in establishing clear expectations and encouraging students to grow.

P4 also addressed the need to prepare for when students do not meet the targets. This educator has a recovery plan for students who do not meet the growth target, so their failure does not derail their academic career. P5 also explained that they remind their students that mistakes will happen, but they can self-correct. P7 shared that clear expectations, including reciprocal respect and honesty, improve classroom management. This educator identifies as a champion for students. They found that modeling the desired behaviors and expectations allows students to see them in action.

The participants noted that connecting to students' cultures, activating their interests, providing clear expectations, and encouraging student growth influence their

other pedagogical practices. The educators also reflected on their holistic growth as educators and shared the effects that growing professionally had on their classrooms and students. The following section includes the perceptions shared by the participants about how they have grown professionally and how the growth manifests in their pedagogical practices.

Educator's Pedagogy and Professional Growth

The participants considered how they effectively implemented CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging in their classrooms. They shared that the following behaviors produced the most success: their pedagogical practices, self-reflection to address and manage biases, and professional growth for themselves and their colleagues. Each participant shared how they used teaching best practices and CRT strategies to make their classes learning environments that promote academic achievement and give students a sense of belonging and ownership.

Curricular Changes

The designated curriculum was a critical component of each participant's instructional practices. Most participants shared that their current curriculum requires improvements to make the content relevant and inclusive. One participant shared that their curriculum was designed with CRT strategies embedded to address the needs of their unique population.

Most of the participants shared that they frequently make modifications to the curriculum or supplement the curriculum. P5 said, "I always use the curriculum as a guide and not as it's written down." P7 and P8 echoed the same sentiment as P5 and

viewed the curriculum as a springboard or guide for instruction. P7 shared that they allow their lessons to be spontaneous and influenced by the current climate of the school and students' lives. This educator credited CRT for permitting themselves to "deviate from the curriculum" and being more honest and sensitive with their students. P8 conveyed a similar sentiment about not being confined by the curriculum. They stated, "Consistency and flexibility is the key to a good teacher and being able to change on the fly."

Four of the 10 participants shared that they adjust or supplement their curricular materials to reflect the students in their classes more. Some adjustments are slight but very intentional. For example, P3 noted that they include students' names in assignments. P2 and P5 shared that they identify their students' cultures and backgrounds and use that knowledge to make connections throughout the curriculum to those cultures. P2, P3, and P4 reported that they use different strategies to expose students to various cultures, not limited to the ones in their classes. P2 reported bringing in personal cultural artifacts to share with the class. P3 reported researching scholars and leaders who are not referenced in the curriculum but mirror the culture or background of a student in the class and adding new information to the lessons. P4 reported adding texts to the curriculum that will offer various perspectives, prompting in-depth thinking from the students, and using probing questions that evoke awareness and consideration of other people's experiences and cultures.

P1, P2, P7, and P8 reported making or buying materials to make their lessons more culturally responsive and effective. P1 brings in puzzles and uses Montessori-style methods in their classroom. P2 is intentional when selecting materials and considers

students' levels and cultures. Several educators make presentations or outsource videos not included in the curriculum to bring current or familiar resources into the class. P7 allows students to contribute to the creation of materials. This educator sometimes infuses students' comments into assessment questions and has allowed students to create assessments for another cohort. P8 shared that they spend the summer researching and finding appropriate materials for the students in the fall.

Half of the participants have changed how students demonstrate content mastery. P4 and P9 no longer administer tests and quizzes. P4 explained that their goal in eliminating tests from their classes is for students to show what they have learned in a way that demonstrates their strengths, understanding, and identities in a way that is meaningful to them. Other participants apply scaffolds that allow students to demonstrate mastery in various ways. Both P3 and P5 shared that they use sentence starters to support language learners who may struggle with formulating responses. P5 explained how they use choice boards that give students options of how they want to show that they have mastered a skill. P7 described using level-appropriate materials to allow students to show mastery of grade-level skills with below grade-level resources. P9 allows students to use visual representations or their native language to demonstrate mastery.

All participants stated that they changed the presentation modality in their lessons. They incorporate engaging videos that are culturally familiar to some students throughout their lessons and address the various learning styles. P5 makes hard and electronic copies of classwork available to all students. Others incorporate technology for all students throughout the lesson. P3 uses a blend of lectures and hands-on activities in their class.

This educator shared their perspective on how students use various methods in class and that it makes them feel seen because students select the format they want to use for final projects based on their interests and preferred presentation method. P3 explained that they observe what the students do in class to suggest submission methods. This educator stated, “That structure where kids, the times, and their abilities are honored in the classroom helps build a sense of belonging.” P1, P6, P9, and P10 found that their curriculum included CRT components.

P1 described their experience as part of the curriculum selection committee for their school and was very intentional about finding a quality curriculum. They celebrated the committee’s success in finding a mathematics program “true to the human nature of people and sees people as a whole.” P6 shared that as they become more proficient at using the curriculum, they can identify helpful components and ensure they are used during instruction. They realized the importance of using a specific strategy after seeing low assessment scores when the strategy was not used. P9 uses a curriculum “that is a gender-responsive, strength-based, life management curriculum.” This educator shared that the tenets and components of the curriculum were better than others they have used, but they still had to improve the structure and lesson plans. P10 uses a curriculum that has CRT strategies embedded. This participant noted that district leaders struggled to find an appropriate curriculum, so they made their own. This educator spends little time supplementing and adapting the curriculum because it is designed to be culturally responsive. However, this participant noted that they have more teaching success when they select the reading materials. Each participant conveyed that they strive to address the

various needs of each student and support them through presentation, grouping, and mastery demonstration. They shared how they use their curriculum, but most find that they spend much time supplementing or adjusting to give the students the best instructional experience. The educators noted that they take time to consider what works and needs improvement.

Professional Growth

Each participant has had at least 3 years of teaching experience, but they all reflected on their need to grow continually to become better educators. They also reflected on authors that have influenced CRT practices. The growth path varies for the participants, as 70% grew through leading and teaching others, collaborating with educational peers, or participating in mentoring programs.

Three of the 10 participants have been presenters in their schools and districts to share their knowledge about CRT strategy implementation. Many of them found these experiences very rewarding when they could improve students' experiences by giving their colleagues new strategies and skills to become more culturally responsive. P3, P4, and P5 have all had roles as instructors or facilitators and have provided professional development on strategies that improve cultural responsiveness. P3 expressed that it was essential to present the information and allow the participants to apply the new learning in the moment.

P1, P5, and P9 shared that collaboration with other educators and mentoring were essential for educators to grow professionally. They noted that the mentor-mentee relationship is vital for educators to have someone safe to ask difficult questions. P1

shared their experience as a mentor who coaches novice teachers using CRT practices, presenting them as best teaching practices. P9 explained the benefit of having “really great mentors,” usually women of various races and ages. This educator also credited their TPPs for their ability to implement CRT effectively. They attended an HBCU and taught in diverse school districts for many years as a new educator. They shared that exposure to diversity and the skills they learned from their mentors shaped who they would become as an educator. P5 perceived the benefit of learning from one’s peers and believes that colleagues should collaborate, conduct peer observations, and reflect on what they learned during an observation. P5 shared that they push their colleagues to consider their queries more thoroughly before offering a solution or suggestion. Like P5, P7 shared how they assist colleagues in finding ways to bring more culturally responsive materials into their classes and curriculum.

Self-Reflection and Managing Biases

Another strategy that all participants described using was being intentional about self-reflection and managing their biases. As they reflect, they consider the biases they bring into their classrooms, the biases the students may have, and ways to confront and mitigate them. Each educator acknowledged their biases but tried to address and manage them.

Five of the 10 participants identified self-awareness as essential in addressing biases. They believe in the importance of introspection and knowing oneself. P3 and P10 reported using journaling to reflect on their biases and how to mitigate them. They also reported journaling to reflect on the success of a lesson and make considerations for new

practices. P2 shared that they have used self-talk to manage a bias when they become aware of it. P2 noted that they say to themselves, “Nope, we’re not gonna go there. The student’s an individual. They don’t fall within a group or category. They are their own person. And I’m going to worry about them and focus on them as a person and meet them where they are.” P1 and P7 shared that they use quizzes to learn more about themselves. P1 reported that they use the Gallup StrengthsFinder test to learn about themselves. P7 shared that they take an implicit bias quiz at least every 6 to 8 months to identify any ongoing or new biases.

P6 and P7 shared instances when a colleague suggested that they were acting out a bias. In each corrective instance, the participants appreciated the honesty and opportunity to self-correct. P6 shared an experience with a colleague addressing an implied bias evident in their classroom décor. It was not until their colleague showed them that their décor lacked diversity that this educator made a conscious effort to display a variety of cultures and professions on the classroom walls. Similarly, P7 reported that their colleague offered them a text, *Nonviolent Communication*, to address how their speech influenced relationships with students and coworkers. P4 shared a courageous conversation with the students and allowed them to call out any behaviors they observed from their teacher. This educator acknowledged their imperfections and created a safe space for students to call out inappropriate behaviors. P1, P4, P8, and P9 expressed their willingness to be held accountable when their biases appear and apologize and admit to their students when they have erred. P6 shared that they may be reflecting too much and can become burdened by what they may have said or done that could have offended a

student. P6 reported that their efforts to avoid offense have made them very cautious about what they say and how they interact with their students. P2 also described being very cautious while teaching to prevent biases from manifesting in their practices.

As participants shared how they manage and address their biases, P5, P9, and P10 perceived being open as one way to mitigate their biases. P5 said they get to know their students rather than rely on assumptions or information from former teachers. They explained that getting to know the students beforehand benefitted both parties. The students fostered a relationship with their teacher, and the teacher could prevent frustrations with the students because she understood them better. P9 noted that openness was the catalyst for change in their classroom when they became willing to have uncomfortable conversations with students. By being open to people outside of one's race, gender, or socioeconomic status, this teacher shared that they could reach a shared level of understanding with the students. P10's openness emerged when they immersed themselves in the community and their students' cultures. They reflected on past experiences as a student and an educator when they entered new school environments and made assumptions about the commonalities with their students. This educator realized that every new environment presents an opportunity to learn about a new culture. This educator provided a simplistic remedy for managing biases. They said,

It's to see where they stemmed from because a lot of times a lot of biases, you can change something for a day, but if it's something that is built up, it is taken inside of you. A lot of things, a lot of biases, didn't come by overnight. It's something

that is rooted. I try to thoughtfully look back and where's the root? Where did this come from? And deal with the root cause of that mindset.

Theme 1 was that teachers perceive their intentional strategy implementation and growth as successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Participants cited their practices to identify, address, and manage their biases, and they continued to demonstrate their intentionality in implanting proven CRT best practices in their classrooms. Each participant combines learning about and making connections to students' cultures and experiences; activating students' interests; providing clear expectations to promote student growth, with best pedagogical practices; and self-reflecting to ensure that students achieve academically and feel a sense of belonging. Theme 2 explores educators' perspectives on how students' experiences contribute to successfully implementing CRT strategies.

Theme 2

Theme 2 was that teachers perceive positive student experiences as a success in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The participants identified mirroring, connecting with their students, students interacting with one another, students feeling a sense of belonging, exposing students to real-world issues, and providing learning opportunities beyond the classroom as contributors to the students' positive experiences. Participants described organic and intentional ways in which students had positive experiences.

Mirroring

Mirroring is when students see themselves reflected in their teachers, texts, and classroom environments. Each participant considered their classroom environments, classroom libraries, and the people represented in their curricular materials. P4 shared, “If kids can see themselves represented in the materials that are being taught, they are going to more readily buy-in.” Each participant shared their belief that students need to see images of people who look like them and share the same cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. P1 shared the benefits of mirroring that they observed and said, “[Mirroring] allows them to see the curriculum as something that belongs to them, as well as belongs to the child sitting to the right and to their left, and something that they can truly engage in.”

Six participants said they used literary texts and classroom libraries, offering another mirroring opportunity. P2, P7, and P8 incorporate multicultural texts that align with the genre they are studying in class. Others intentionally fill their classroom libraries with texts, authors, and characters that reflect the cultures and experiences represented in their classes. During instruction, six participants intentionally shared notable contributions of a diverse range of people and used the content to share how people from various backgrounds have contributed to the topic. Three participants include opportunities for students to see themselves in people from the real world and facilitate situations during which students will meet successful people from their community who look like them. When mirroring happens for students, P5 found, “The students will naturally see themselves, and they’ll be interested in whatever the content is because they

feel included. And they'll go along the ride along with you." Each educator shared that they strive to create opportunities for the students to see themselves reflected in their educational experience. They also reported their strategies to promote positive relationships between themselves and their students.

Teacher–Student Connections

Participants shared that a positive relationship is crucial to making connections and making students feel that they belong because they spend so much time with their teachers. P1, P3, and P8 stressed forming teacher-to-student connections early. Nine of the 10 participants reflected on how their connections with students have been a positive experience. They shared how they established and maintained the relationships. Six participants stressed the importance of showing their humanity and being open with the students. Five participants shared that being neutral, non-judgmental, and respectful makes their students feel safe. In these relationships, the students trust their teachers with difficult topics. P7 shared that students come to them when they have negative experiences with another teacher. This participant acknowledged that students look to them for wisdom and advice and tend to take their recommendations and make better response choices. Three of the participants noted their use of greetings to begin building a relationship with their students. P1 described the special greetings they have for their students. P1 shared that they do an elaborate handshake with a student every morning. This educator shared that despite the time involved in the handshake, the benefit of doing it daily is a connection and dialogue opportunity with that student.

The participants stated that they strived to be observant of their students' behaviors and noted that those observations fostered relationships with their students from their observations. P1 shared that if this student enters the room without doing the handshake, that indicates something may be out of sorts. The better an educator knows their students, the better they can recognize shifts in their behavior. P1 shared their perception of why connections are so meaningful,

I have found over the 20-some years I've been teaching that I don't really have the behavior issues I once had because I do think my kids know that they're loved, and they're much more willing to help me and help each other. [The students are] willing to show that they care because you've shown that you've cared for them first.

Most participants shared the same perspective that once the students feel cared for, they feel safe enough to be their authentic selves in peer interactions.

Student–Student Interactions

Participants reported that how students engage with each other can significantly affect their sense of belonging in the classroom and influence students' views about their school experiences. Nine of the 10 participants shared their experiences and observations of positive student relationships. The participants noted that some interactions are purposefully facilitated, and others occur organically. For example, P3 shared that they use lower-level questions for students to answer to get information and learn about each other. P5 and P9 described the changes they make to the desk organization throughout the school year to encourage collaboration or to respect a student's preference to work alone.

Both participants perceived that collaborative or cooperative learning and planned partnering are two ways to ensure that students can engage with one another. P4 shared how they use whole class and cohort models to complete projects. This educator explained that the cohorts may stay the same for an extended time. P4 noted that some groupings are based on students' academic levels, while others are created to include students from various cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. This educator perceived that these groupings allow students to become better acquainted with their peers. P8 shared how students learn about and from each other organically,

I believe it [collaboration] starts with our class discussions, creating those environments where everyone feels open. To share, or at least the active listeners, even if they are not in a position to want to share certain experiences to connect to certain lessons, but at least that they are actively listening.

P3, P4, and P7 addressed peer teaching as another way that they encourage positive interactions among their students. These participants reported that this practice can improve students' confidence and empower them to share their expertise about a topic or skill with their classmates. P7 uses peer editing as a tool for students to work together to improve their final products. The participants reported that positive interactions between students could only happen when they feel safe to share, be open, make mistakes, and know they will be supported.

Sense of Belonging

Eight of the 10 participants described the necessity and significance of students feeling they belong in their classrooms. Five participants shared that their first step in

fostering a sense of belonging for students is creating an environment where they feel safe, seen, heard, valued, and respected. P5 said the classroom environment should be one where “everyone who walks in feels welcome; they see something in the classroom that speaks to them.” P1 shared that they deliberately greet every student in the hallway. P6 shared that they have students recite daily affirmations at the start of classes. P4 teaches empathy and compassion, especially for ELLs who may not have the necessary language to connect with their peers. According to P2, P3, P5, and P7, the sense of belonging gives students confidence and motivation, leading to academic achievement. P1 shared,

By using culturally responsive techniques, by using things that respond to the child as they are, it allows them to feel more comfortable in their setting.

[Students] see the curriculum as something that belongs to them, as well as belongs to the child sitting to the right and to their left, and something that they can truly engage in. And when they feel that connection to their curriculum, then they can get excited about it [the content] and they can find ways to progress within it [curriculum], and therefore have the kind of academic success that we hope that all of our students have.

Participants reported that once the students feel they belong, these educators introduce topics and experiences that can only occur in a safe environment and will push them toward growth in the classroom and beyond.

Exposure to Real-World Issues

Participants perceived that exposing their students to real-world experiences was related to positive learning experiences. Seven participants highlighted their efforts to expose students to the ‘real world.’ Five of the seven participants stressed the importance of skill transferability. All participants shared their goal of developing skills in their students that would be useful outside the classroom, such as collaboration, advocacy, and conflict resolution strategies. P4 and P7 acknowledged that teachers must be brave and willing to introduce real-world topics and issues and discuss uncomfortable and controversial topics. P6 shared that they reason with their students because “[Students] just want to know the how or why the things that they’re learning in class may relate to the real world.” P7 explained that they allow students to use social media and discuss the relationship between the work they do in class and how the hot topics from the various platforms. P10 said, “We have to prepare our kids for what lies outside of this bubble.” The students’ levels of access to information varied for each participant, but the goal they shared was to address what was happening outside of the classroom consistently. These educators noted that they wanted their students to be ready for adulthood, and some believed that that could not happen solely within the confines of the classroom.

Learning Experiences Beyond the Classroom

Four participants noted that students responded positively when they had opportunities to learn outside the classroom. Participants reported integrating field trips, schoolwide projects, and clubs to support student learning. All four participants perceived field trips as an effective way to expose students to new experiences that offer hands-on

learning, exposure to multiple cultures, and opportunities to learn from people other than their usual teachers. P3 conveyed that field trips offer “an opportunity to make learning more meaningful.” Participants shared that schoolwide projects also allow students to learn beyond their classrooms. They described projects, such as debates, that offered opportunities for students to tackle social justice issues and consider different perspectives. Other participants described projects that spanned across several grade levels. They reported that students can see the continuity of the topics as they matriculate through each grade and feel a sense of community when the entire school is involved in a project. P4 and P6 shared that they have used after-school clubs to make cultural connections with students outside of the classroom setting. Participants perceived that the students felt encouraged, equipped, and empowered to tackle social issues in these clubs.

Theme 3

Theme 3 was that teachers perceive school and parent connections and collaborations as successes in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. All participants expressed the significance of parent and family engagement. The participants identified parent engagement and input and schoolwide celebrations and observances as contributing to connecting and collaborating with the parents.

Parent Engagement and Input

All participants shared their experiences engaging with families and described how collaboration has benefitted the students and the school community. The participants perceived that being receptive to feedback and input, communicating frequently, and

making positive contacts are ways that parent engagement improves academic achievement. Five participants discussed parent feedback. They shared that they solicit parent input for ways to improve their students' experiences in the classroom. P8 shared that parents are excited when they can participate in activities at home with their students. P9 explained how they use a parent satisfaction survey to change and improve their school program. Six participants discussed the ways that they communicate with their parents. P3 and P8 described their use of newsletters to provide information that helps families get involved in the school community. P6 shared that they are required to make five parent contacts each week. The other three participants described their parent contacts as frequent but less formal. Four participants shared that they intentionally make positive parent contacts to celebrate their students. P7 explained that many of their parents were not used to hearing positive reports from their child's teacher. This educator shared an exchange with a parent who said, "You're the only person that calls me with something when my kid is doing something good." P6 noted that they use the weekly, mandatory calls to give good reports about students.

Participants also shared that family nights, programs and activities initiated by parents, classroom visits, and school-home assignments have encouraged parents and families to participate in their students' academic experiences. P1 described that empowering the families to take the initiative resulted in the families creating community projects that celebrated the various cultures represented. Seventy percent of the participants expressed a direct correlation between parent engagement and involvement and student achievement. P3 stated that the parent-teacher relationship is most effective

when they have shared expectations for the student. This educator stated that by having shared expectations between the teacher and the families at home, students “tend to do better academically, because they know that they’re being held accountable in school and then when they go home, they’re being held to that same standard of accountability.” P6 shared a similar sentiment about the effect of shared expectations between the teacher and the student. They said,

When there’s an active parent and the teachers and the parents have a good relationship as far as communicating the needs and the concerns of the student that also lights a fire under the student and helps motivate the student. Because now they’re thinking and now they realize, “There’s no room for me to fail.

There’s no room for me to be unsuccessful. I have my parents at home who are rooting for me. I have my teacher at school who’s rooting for me.

The participants shared how they encouraged parent and family engagement and discussed the positive results they observed. They also shared that some parental and family participation supports schoolwide celebrations and activities.

Schoolwide Celebrations and Observations

Ninety percent of the participants shared how they and their schools use activities and celebrations to embrace and acknowledge the cultural diversity in their communities. These educators shared that the school community’s participation in feasts, assemblies, musical productions, and student clubs can promote a sense of belonging in the community and allow students and their families to embrace their cultures and learn about others. Six participants shared that they enjoy celebrating holidays with their

students and have learned about the different holidays the students observe through those celebrations. P10 shared that their school hosts many community events and is the hub for school activities. P8 shared that their school communities use inclusive language that embraces the students' cultures and allows more students to participate in schoolwide activities. P9 described how they use "power, justice, and equity" as the driving mantra for the students in the school community. This educator shared that this language defines how they use CRT in their classroom. P7 and P8 explained that student choice makes schoolwide celebrations more meaningful for students. P8 shared that "allowing them [students] to have a say so in how they want to celebrate helps build that culture." Participants who shared how they use schoolwide collaborations noted how it has made them more conscious about using CRT strategies in their classes. They also shared that these conscious efforts are not without challenges.

Theme 4

Theme 4 was that teachers perceive their curriculum and materials as challenges in implementing CRT to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The participants identified issues with their curriculum and challenges with implementation. Only one participant did not mention a challenge with the curriculum and instead shared that their school district embraces the community's culture and has a curriculum with CRT strategies infused.

The curricular challenges the participants expressed were limited content, linguistically biased materials, and difficulties presenting the materials due to time and district constraints. Seven participants shared that their materials need more diversity. P4

stated that upon reviewing the texts that would be studied during the school year, they observed that all the texts “were written by and about dead white men.” This educator also shared a discussion with a student who shared their opinion about the alternative materials that had been selected. P4 shared that the student critiqued the quality of the selected books and that there were “so many beautifully written books by diverse authors that tend to not be taught.” P4 shared that they agreed with the student and explained that finding varied, diverse texts on the same Lexile level as the preset materials has been challenging. They also shared their concern that using materials that speak to the students’ history, cultural experiences, and possible trauma may hurt some students. P6 shared that many of the stories they use “aren’t necessarily stories that highlight different cultural backgrounds.” They look for themes within the stories to make cultural and real-world connections.

Six participants specifically mentioned that the language used in their materials can be culturally insensitive. P1 explained that some references in their materials are unfamiliar to their students. According to P1, these instances make it more difficult for students to connect with the content. P6 and P7 shared that their materials do not offer the language support ELLs need to grow linguistically. Another challenge the participants shared was the presentation of the curriculum and content. P3 shared their struggle with adapting the scripted curriculum. P5 shared that they sort through the curriculum to decide whether they will teach content that they find unnecessary. P9 explained that they are cautious about what they say while teaching to prevent offense. They shared that this

precaution makes teaching diverse perspectives and exploring culturally relatable content challenging.

Participants mentioned challenges that were unique to their experiences. P3 shared that the time required to implement the curriculum effectively and the technology used for teaching were challenges. Two participants shared that their curriculum is very restrictive. They described their limitations to changing the curriculum because their state has stringent laws that address instructional content and delivery. P4 shared the restrictions placed on their program by the district and the resistance to increase diversity in the curricular materials and the student population. As the participants shared their challenges with the curriculum and materials, they described the limitations they must overcome to continue effectively implementing CRT in their classes. Most participants noted that they want to connect the curriculum and materials with their students' cultures and experiences, but still lack a depth of understanding of those cultures and experiences.

Theme 5

Theme 5 was that teachers perceive their lack of knowledge of student experiences and cultures as a challenge to supporting student achievement and fostering a sense of belonging. Nine of the 10 participants shared their perspectives about this challenge. They shared that relatability is the most significant factor of this challenge. P5 shared that teaching without learning about the students can result in disengagement. The other eight participants expressed the difficulties that they have experienced in learning about their students' cultures and experiences. P1, P7, P9, and P10 all shared that they had very different life experiences than their students and could find it difficult to relate.

P2 shared that they find discussing cultures they know little about challenging. They shared,

It's kind of hard when I'm trying to bring in a whole bunch of stuff from a whole bunch of different cultures or use different things and I myself, am not completely clear or 100% positive how something works or what something is.

This educator also expressed that traumas and negative experiences, unknown to the educator, can “severely change how students think and interpret things and even create blockage in the brain passageways.” Four participants shared that they have not truly understood their students’ experiences and cultures and how those factors could shape the academic experience. P7 described the challenge they experienced in managing the effects of gang culture on students’ behaviors. They said, “So instead of us trying to just push this stereotypical, ‘This is a school, and this is the work you’re going to do now.’ We need to take the experiences that they’re having outside of school into account.”

One participant shared that they need more strategies to learn about their students. P4 described feeling very nervous about engaging with students and explained that the students would only accept them if they engaged in a culturally responsive way. P7 and P10 added that students with language barriers require more support and that learning about them and their cultures can be more difficult. P10 shared that it was challenging to learn about the students because they were unwilling to be open until they were better acquainted. In Theme 6, I explore other ways that students’ responses to CRT implementation have been a challenge for the participants.

Theme 6

Theme 6 was that teachers perceived student resistance as a challenge in implementing CRT to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. All participants shared that students were most resistant to their CRT strategies when their sense of belonging and self-esteem were low. The participants also shared that some students had low expectations of themselves, were unwilling to socialize with their peers, and resisted the educators' efforts to encourage academic achievement. P2 shared that "when they [students] don't feel like they belong, and that poor opinion or lack of confidence in oneself can affect a multitude of aspects of their life." This educator explained that when students did not feel that they belonged, they felt unmotivated. P2 shared that this resistance to trying was more evident when a student was a racial minority in the class. They explained that the cultural differences between the racial majority and racial minority groups could decrease the sense of belonging for the students in the racial minority group.

Another factor of student resistance shared by three of the participants was the unwillingness to engage in collaborative dialogue with peers. P4 asked, "If you have a student who would just rather sit and work by themselves, how do I get them to check in without standing in the group and forcing them to?" This participant shared that collaborative work is a significant part of the classroom. However, they struggle to identify ways to ensure that every student is a willing and productive collaborator. Three other participants noted that group work and collaboration were challenges in their classrooms because students were resistant to working in groups that would support the

work or task at hand. They shared that many students would want to work with their friends, and some would only want to work with students of their own culture. P3 also shared that they saw more off-task behaviors when students made group selections based on friendships. P2, P4, and P8 described an imbalance of work commitment from the students. P4 described the group dynamics where some students were eager to contribute and complete the task, and others “who just either don’t care or they don’t want to contribute as much as the other students, or they’re in their own world.” P8 referred to the students with varied task commitment levels as “the hogs and the logs.” They explained that the “hog” voraciously works to complete the task while the “log” is not as involved and merely waits for the class period to end.

Two participants noted that outside influences have contributed to their students’ experiences and willingness to engage in the classroom. P7 and P10 shared that students are resistant because of external issues. P7 shared that altercations around the school and community are brought into the classroom, resulting in students’ unwillingness to work together or focus on the task because they are consumed with external conflicts. P10 shared a similar experience and was told by their students that they could not relate to what they experienced outside the classroom. Each participant shared their experiences of students’ resistance to the CRT strategies or the effects of the strategies. They described a low sense of belonging, ineffective collaboration, varied levels of task commitment, and external influences as contributing factors to the students’ resistance. In the subsequent themes, I explore the participants’ perspectives of their ongoing needs and supports for

implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging for their students.

Theme 7

Theme 7 was that teachers perceive staff improvements and developments as supports needed in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Every participant expressed the need for targeted professional development to improve the implementation of CRT strategies. Four participants described the staff improvements as ongoing, with suggestions ranging from monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly sessions. The participants shared that all educators need professional development on CRT and strategic implementation. P3 and P7 shared an explicit need for White educators to be trained in implementing CRT strategies. P3 shared, “The majority of White teachers just don’t feel equipped, or they don’t know where to look or where to start in embedding culturally relevant teaching practices within their classrooms.”

When discussing the content of the professional developments, participants explained that the topics should be varied. P3 suggested a tiered staff development model that would differentiate the content based on educators’ level of understanding and implementation of CRT in their classrooms. This educator also shared that anti-bias and anti-racism strategies should be taught to educators on a global scale. P5 described a program where small cohorts of teachers would explore the following questions, “What is culturally responsive teaching? What does it look like? Why is it important?” According to P5, they would identify strategies for immediate implementation of participants’ learning. P1 described a coaching cycle that would include classroom observations,

identification of areas of improvement, and suggestions for strategies for using CRT effectively. Similarly, P3 and P5 expressed that the content in professional development must include connections to how strategy implementation will improve the classroom environment. P6 shared that they were unaware of what they needed and would benefit from training to help educators identify strategies and materials to support CRT strategy implementation.

The participants also shared their opinions about the format for professional development. P7 and P3 stated that the training should be engaging and specific to increase the likelihood that the educator participants would be attentive and engaged in the session. P5 shared their recommendation that all training sessions should be in person. P1 and P7 expressed the need for opportunities for educators to have safe and open discussions about CRT and the effects of implementing the strategies. P7 stated that in an ideal world, teachers would participate in ongoing, scaffolded training and “actually have to talk about what steps they’re implementing.”

Four participants shared that staffing recruitment, retention, and accountability are necessary to implement CRT strategies. P3, P4, P7, and P10 expressed that schools need to be intentional about their recruitment practices to increase the diversity of the teaching staff. P9 shared that counselors are needed in every school building to address the traumas and experiences that detract from students’ sense of belonging. P3 and P7 argued that educators should be accountable for implementing CRT strategies. P3 stated that schools should “go find teachers that actually have some basis of what it looks like to be teaching black and brown kids and to have high expectations for them.”

Seven participants shared scholars, authors, and literature that influenced their teaching practices and CRT implementation. P3 and P5 shared that Hammond's (2015) *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* informed their understanding of how their strategies affect their students' learning. P2 shared that Ladson Billings' work was part of their foundational learning about CRT. This educator also described how they use Adjapong and Emdin's (2015) Hip Hop pedagogy to increase students' engagement. P4 shared that their journey into CRT included reading A. Thomas's (2018) *The Hate You Give*. P6 described how a poem about a student struggling with identity shaped their perspectives about identity, and they now incorporate the poem in their instruction. P7 cited Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius*, Love's (2019) *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, and Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as literature that has influenced and guided their CRT implementation. P9 shared that principles from Novak and Chardin's (2021) *Equity by Design* are incorporated into their organization's work with students. Finally, P10 credited David Vadiveloo's works for their curriculum's robust, culturally responsive principles. As each participant shared their recommendations for ways to improve the quality and diversity of the staff, they also shared resources that helped them grow and improve their CRT practices. In the next theme, I explore the participants' perspectives on additional supports needed to implement CRT strategies.

Theme 8

Theme 8 was that teachers perceive access to culturally responsive resources as needed support in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Eighty percent of the participants shared their curricular and material needs

that would support their implementation of CRT strategies. They shared various needs related to content, materials, and resources. P3, P6, and P8 expressed the need to overhaul the current curriculum and create one that intentionally embeds CRT strategies, includes diverse representation, and includes materials that will support the presentation of the information. P9 shared a similar sentiment that the curriculum should include more diverse information. P1 and P8 expressed a need for content in the assigned curriculum that highlights diverse scholars and includes facts about and references to various cultures and contributors. P10 perceived that the curriculum needed to include resources that support and promote vocational skills, especially for students with disabilities. P3 and P10 shared that they need culturally responsive materials that students can connect to the real world and translate into skills that can be applied in life beyond school. P3 also discussed that the content in the curriculum needs to be more global and provide students with background knowledge that can be applied throughout the curriculum.

The participants shared that they need more materials to support their culturally responsive practices. P3 and P7 explained that they need an increased quantity of the materials that they have for their students. P3 shared that they want each student to have materials when working on science labs, while P7 shared that they need the funding that would allow them to purchase the materials that the students need. P3, P4, and P7 described improving student libraries and literary materials. P7 also shared that they would like to see books in various languages so students can read texts in their home languages. This educator asked, “Why are we not giving kids books that they want to read? Or books where they can identify with the characters?” P7 argued that students

would read more if schools improved diverse texts' content and availability. P3 shared that time is another necessary resource. They explained that schedule changes have decreased their instructional time and reported that “there’s a lot of learning that isn’t happening because of that 10-minute drop-off.”

P3 and P4 addressed the need to refine how the curriculum affects grading and reporting. P3 explained that they eliminated standardized testing because it did not assess students’ abilities, especially those performing below grade level. P4 echoed the same perspective that the grading should reflect students’ actual performance and that students should not receive default grades. This educator expressed the concern that this practice may result in students being unprepared for the rigor of post-secondary education. The participants shared their perspectives about the culturally responsive resources needed to implement CRT in their classrooms. In Theme 9, I explore participants’ perceptions about the need to engage and educate the school community.

Theme 9

Theme 9 was that teachers perceive community engagement and education as supports needed for implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. P9 expressed the need for legislative reforms to support educators in implementing CRT strategies without repercussion. Seven participants shared their perceptions of how community engagement and education would support schoolwide CRT implementation. P1, P2, and P3 shared that they need strategies for learning about their students and their families. P2 described using a survey to learn more about the students’ cultures and family lives. P4 shared the need to educate all cultural

demographics about academic programs and promote those programs to groups outside of the ones that “typically” apply. Similarly, P10 expressed the need to encourage diversity in programs.

P3 and P7 expressed the need to get families more involved in the school. Alternatively, P9 and P10 shared their perspective that educators need opportunities to go out and engage with the community. P3 suggested a parent or family university that would help families learn about activities and practices in the schools and teach families about CRT. P10 also suggested that families should be included in the school's decision-making process and that there should be ongoing discussions and education about diversity issues and support needed to address them.

P9 explained that the community needs to make connections with the students and be educated about students' successes. P3 also shared that schools and colleges should form partnerships to give students opportunities “to go on a college-level campus, be in a college-level science lab, and then speak to students and professors at that caliber.” The participants shared their perceptions of supports needed in engaging and educating the community. They shared ways to bring the community and families into the school and ways that educators and students can go out and engage in the community.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is imperative in qualitative research. In this study, I established and maintained trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this section, I describe how each element of trustworthiness was upheld during this study.

Credibility

Credibility addresses the believability of the findings from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used member checking and reflexivity with bracketing through field notes throughout the collection and analysis processes to ensure credibility. I used member checking after all interviews were concluded. I sent each participant a draft of the study's findings and offered them the opportunity to review them to confirm that I accurately captured their perceptions (see Bengtsson, 2016). The participants agreed with the findings shared in the draft summary and had no additional questions or feedback.

In addition to member checking, I used reflexivity. Ahern (1999) defines bracketing as an iterative process that requires the researcher to acknowledge their experiences and feelings throughout the data collection and analysis processes. During the interview and data analysis processes, I used reflective and field journaling to note the feelings and experiences that emerged. During the compiling phase of data analysis, I reviewed my field journal and reflective notes from the interviews. I considered the participants' noteworthy characteristics, nonverbal behaviors, and overall responses to the interview. As I collected and analyzed the data, I used bracketing to address biases and maintain objectivity.

Transferability

According to Billups (2021), qualitative research aims to produce findings that could be interpreted and applied in similar settings. To achieve transferability, I used the interview protocol with probes to collect thick descriptions that allowed me to evaluate the phenomenon of CRT implementation through the participants' perspectives. In

addition to the thick descriptions, the sampling procedures also ensured transferability. The 10 participants were from different cultural backgrounds from several states in the U.S., taught in schools with diverse student populations, taught in several content areas, and had a range of experience from three to 25 years. The sample of participants in this study would allow other educators to interpret and apply the findings to their own setting.

Dependability

Burkholder et al. (2020) define dependability as consistency in collecting and analyzing data and reporting the findings. I achieved dependability in this study by establishing and using a clear research design and approach. I also described the data collection and analysis processes and reported the results in a way that would allow for replication of the study (see Billups, 2021). Member checking also prevented misinterpretation of participant responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final component of ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study. For a study to be confirmable, the researcher must remove themselves from the study as much as possible (Burkholder et al., 2020). Other qualified researchers would draw the same conclusions if they examined the data collected (Burkholder et al., 2020). My reflexivity throughout each step phase contributed to the trustworthiness of the study. I bracketed my background knowledge and how that knowledge could affect or potentially compromise the sense-making of the participants' responses. Billups (2021) describes audit trails as the blueprint of the research process to be maintained by the researcher. To ensure confirmability, I maintained an audit trail to capture my

communication and engagement with each participant. In the next section, I will provide a summary of Chapter 4.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, results of the findings, and evidence of trustworthiness. In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews with 10 secondary educators who met the participation criteria. I used deductive coding and created a priori codes from the CREM framework. Then, I used two rounds of open descriptive coding to analyze and make sense of the information obtained from each interview to answer the RQs. In this chapter, I discussed the nine themes that emerged from the data during the data analysis process.

The key findings from Chapter 4 revealed that educators have succeeded at intentionally implementing CRT strategies. All participants reported that positive student experiences and collaborations between the schools and families contributed to successfully implementing CRT strategies to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. One spoke of the CREM framework is content integration. Most of the participants shared that their curriculum and materials present a challenge to CRT strategy implementation. Several participants described a need for more knowledge of student experiences and cultures as another implementation challenge. All participants noted that students' resistance is a challenge that they encounter when implementing CRT strategies. The participants offered suggestions and recommendations for the support needed to implement CRT strategies. Each participant expressed the need to improve the staff's ability to implement CRT strategies through specific and targeted

professional development. Most participants shared the need for culturally responsive materials in their classrooms and accompanied the curriculum. Lastly, the participants noted that they need the community to be educated and provided opportunities to engage with the schools and students.

In Chapter 5, I review the purpose of this basic qualitative study. I also share my interpretation of the findings related to the conceptual framework and existing literature. I also discuss the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research. I describe the implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and support needed in implementing CRT to support the achievement and inclusion of students in the classroom. A basic qualitative design was most suitable for exploring secondary educators' experiences with CRT and perspectives about what is needed to improve the implementation of CRT practices. A gap in practice was identified related to the successes, challenges, and ongoing support needed to implement CRT strategies to foster a sense of belonging and support student achievement. Filling this gap in practice may provide educators and school leaders with insight from in-service educators to inform their professional development plans, curriculum designs, and practices that could impact the schools and students in their district. In addition to a gap in practice, I also identified a gap in the literature related to CRT strategies and how the strategies support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for secondary students.

The findings may fill the gap in the literature related to secondary educators' successes, challenges, and ongoing supports needed when implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. I interviewed 10 secondary teachers with at least 3 years of experience implementing CRT strategies. The goal of this study was that the perceptions and experiences of the 10 participants might offer insight that could provide educators and school leaders with information that may support more robust implementation of CRT strategies in secondary classrooms and improve student achievement and sense of belonging.

Interpretation of the Findings

I conducted this basic qualitative study to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of their experiences implementing CRT strategies to support the achievement and inclusion of students in the classroom. The problem that was the focus of this study was the struggle that U.S. secondary teachers experience when implementing CRT strategies. After thoroughly reviewing the literature, I found a gap related to secondary educators' successes, challenges, and ongoing supports needed when implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging.

In the literature review, I addressed the cultural mismatch between the student and educator population, schools' responses to changes in the student population, belonging, CRT and belonging, CRT and academic achievement, shortcomings of teacher preparation programs for CRT, teacher bias, teacher self-efficacy, and in-service teacher professional development. Literature was limited on secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes and challenges in supporting academic achievement and fostering a sense of belonging. The findings of this study may extend the educational knowledge regarding the perceptions of secondary teachers' experiences related to the phenomenon.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings from Themes 1 through 8 were consistent with the literature regarding secondary teachers' perceptions of the success, challenges, and supports needed in implementing CRT to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The findings from those themes indicated that participants had experienced successes and challenges when implementing CRT strategies and had observed the

effects of the strategies on students' academic achievement and sense of belonging. The findings also indicated that the participants needed additional support to improve implementation. As emphasized by Gay (2010), educators must create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning for a diverse student population. Most of the current study participants discussed their experiences and perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT strategies. Their responses aligned with the following items addressed in the literature: student-teacher cultural mismatch, schools' responses to population changes, CRT and belonging, CRT and academic achievement, teacher preparation, and self-efficacy, self-reflection, warm demander, and in-service teacher professional development.

In this study, six participants experienced cultural mismatches with their students based on racial differences. The other four participants were race matched with most of their students, but they discovered mismatches based on the students' different cultures and experiences. According to Ramsay-Jordan (2022), cultural misalignment makes teachers hesitant to employ CRT and default to textbook implementation and test preparation practices. Nine of the 10 current participants found their lack of knowledge about their students' cultures and experiences challenging. The findings indicated that the participants were more committed to using CRT to create safe and inclusive environments that celebrated the students' diversity. All participants discussed their efforts to learn about students' cultures and experiences. The participants also described focusing on their connection with their students to overcome the effects of their cultural

differences. According to Johnson-Smith (2020), implementing CRT strategies can reduce the adverse effects of a cultural mismatch between students and teachers.

According to the literature, schools throughout the United States have had mixed responses to the increase in the diversity of the student population. Some educators believe that students' cultures should be ignored as the fairest way to address diversity (Catalano et al., 2020). In the current study, P10 shared that for many years, her students' native language and cultures were suppressed, and their school district had begun to dismantle that indoctrination and celebrate students' cultures and languages. Nine of the 10 participants asserted that schoolwide observance of celebrations and holidays and collaborating with parents and families to educate the school community about the cultures represented benefited the community. Raubaugh and Purmensky (2021) found that southern school districts had limited provisions that mandated CRT. The findings also showed that some school districts in southern states have instituted mandates that make it challenging to implement CRT strategies. Fredricks et al. (2019) found lower engagement among ethnically diverse urban school students. In the current study, three participants discussed addressing real-world and current issues with students as a practical approach to improve engagement. Four participants discussed field trips and schoolwide activities as effective methods to improve engagement. According to Berryman and Eley (2019), school leaders' policies, actions, and decisions around engaging students determine a school's level of inclusion.

In the current study, eight participants discussed belonging as essential to ensuring students have positive classroom experiences. DeNicolo (2019) found that

belonging increases through student-teacher and student-student interactions. Five participants in the current study discussed creating a safe and caring environment to foster a sense of belonging for their students. Nine participants affirmed that belonging increased when they formed meaningful connections with the students. Seven participants discussed collaboration and collaborative activities such as turn and talks and jigsaw activities to foster a sense of belonging and improve engagement. According to Lau and Gritter (2022), fostering a sense of belonging requires knowing the cultural makeup of the students. Participants in the current study shared their methods for learning about their students' cultures. Six participants discussed informal conversations and "getting to know you" activities as effective methods to learn about students' cultures and experiences. Two participants discussed student surveys as another approach to learning about students' cultures.

Participants in this study also discussed the challenges they experienced when attempting to learn about their students. Two participants shared that they knew about their students' cultures but found it difficult to relate to their lived experiences. One participant discussed student disengagement as a challenge when a teacher lacks knowledge about the cultures represented in their classes. Participants discussed the curricular adjustments they make to incorporate students' cultures and experiences in their lessons and classrooms. Students flourish when their cultural backgrounds are appreciated and incorporated but lack motivation when they detect racist behaviors or microaggressions from their teachers (Berryman & Eley, 2019). Six participants in the current study discussed infusing representational cultural elements into their class

presentations, lessons, and texts as a successful approach to ensuring that students see themselves in the curriculum. All participants shared that mirroring was necessary to foster a sense of belonging. Jones Roberson (2023) argued that this practice makes students feel valued. The participants in the current study discussed that this practice also promotes engagement, connects students to the content, and encourages students to connect with the lesson.

All participants in this study discussed the importance of connecting schools and homes to promote a sense of belonging for students and their families (see Bennouna et al., 2021; Gay, 2010). Five participants expressed the importance of soliciting and being receptive to feedback from parents. Kumar et al. (2019) found that students in racial minority groups were less likely to feel welcomed in their classroom environment. However, their sense of belonging improved when they participated in extracurricular activities. Eight participants in the current study discussed multicultural feasts, assemblies, family nights, and observance of holidays and celebrations as effective methods of engaging racial minority students outside the classroom. Two participants discussed parent participation in classrooms as another practical approach to make students and their families feel welcome. The findings from this study and the literature support the need to embed students' cultures and their communities into the curriculum to make them feel valued (see Jones Roberson, 2023). Students flourish when their cultural backgrounds are appreciated.

Romero and O'Malley (2020) argued that the secondary years can present peer conflicts and decreases in motivation, engagement, and achievement. Participants in the

current study discussed the challenges experienced when students resist CRT strategy implementation. Six participants shared that low self-esteem, low expectations, and not feeling a sense of belonging resulted in students resisting engaging or striving for academic growth. Nine participants reflected on the challenge their lack of knowledge of students' cultures and experiences presents. They discussed language barriers and a lack of understanding about how students' experiences affect their academic experiences. Durand (2020) asserted that positive perceptions of the ethnic-racial environment in middle and high school have been related to better behavioral and academic performance for students of color. Seven participants in the current study noted that cooperative and collaborative learning improved students' engagement and academic achievement in their classes. Idrus and Sohidi (2023) found that student engagement increased when CRT strategies were implemented because the environment promoted collaboration. All participants in the current study discussed incorporating culturally responsive elements and using various presentation methods for instruction as effective approaches to support academic achievement. Two participants discussed eliminating formal assessments and offering alternative methods to show mastery as an effective approach to improving academic achievement.

The findings from this study and the literature support the assertion that learning and engagement are maximized when teachers adopt students' languages, embed community examples in lessons, use relevant media tools, incorporate hands-on activities and games, and have students collaborate and work in groups (see Tanase, 2020). Participants from this study shared the success they experienced by having clear and high

expectations. McFarland et al. (2019) found that high expectations lead to more academic success. Participants in the current study asserted that when expectations are clear, their students are more likely to make progress and feel respected. Four participants discussed clear expectations as a successful approach to promote accountability. Five participants discussed celebrating students when they meet expectations and providing opportunities for students to succeed. Five participants discussed that having shared expectations between school and home results in academic achievement. According to Johnson-Smith (2020), students' academic achievement is influenced less by their teacher's ethnicity and more by the teacher's willingness to use CRT.

Based on the literature, TPPs need to equip educators with applicable CRT strategies, which results in difficulties for educators who teach diverse student populations (Choi & Lee, 2020). Doran (2020) found that new teachers felt the TPPs did not prepare them to teach diverse student populations. In the current study, only one participant credited their TPPs with exposing them to CRT in their undergraduate experience. Participants in this study discussed their successes and needs to implement CRT strategies effectively. Eight participants discussed the benefit of mentoring opportunities, collaborating with their colleagues, and seeking out CRT and equity professional development programs independently. Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) credited mentoring programs for novice teachers with increasing their pedagogical knowledge of employing CRT with ELL students. Each participant in the current study demonstrated the three mindsets highlighted by Roose et al. (2019). All participants described their diversity mindset in their discussion of their steadfast commitment to

embrace and celebrate students' cultural and educational differences. All 10 participants demonstrated a growth mindset in establishing and maintaining clear and high expectations. Every participant asserted the third mindset of considering students' needs when they made curriculum changes.

The findings in this study indicated participants' perceptions of the challenges related to the curricula and materials. The participants reported adding multicultural texts to their existing curricular materials, varying presentation methods to address the different learning styles in the class, and changing how students show understanding and mastery. Chu and Garcia (2021) found that educators with high self-efficacy with CRT strategies view student diversity as a classroom enhancement. Chu and Garcia also found that educators were the least confident in evaluating the cultural responsiveness of their curriculum. Participants in the current study discussed their ability to modify and supplement their curricula to meet the student's cultural and academic needs more effectively. Each participant noted the elements of their curriculum that supported their use of CRT strategies and shared their methods for circumventing the curriculum's limitations. The findings of this study and the literature indicate that teachers feel most confident in creating an inclusive environment for their student population (Chu & Garcia, 2021).

Warm demanders are educators interested in building relationships, learning about their students' cultures and learning styles, and adjusting their practices based on that information (Bondy & Ross, 2008). All 10 participants in the current study discussed practices that characterized them as warm demanders. Four participants discussed

regularly making positive contact with students' parents to reinforce expectations, build relationships with families, and offer support. Miller (2021) characterized this as a warm demander behavior. The findings in the current study and the literature support the need for warm demanders to encourage students to engage in class discussions and make decisions about their curriculum. Przybysz (2021) reported a shift in the classroom climate when this practice was implemented. In the current study, two participants discussed the importance of being receptive to and applying student feedback about the curriculum and classroom practices. Four participants discussed celebrating students' successes, even incrementally, to demonstrate belief in their abilities and instill pride in their achievements. The literature and findings in this study support the two main characteristics of a warm demander: They care about their students and will never give up on them (see Bondy & Ross, 2008).

Smets and Struyven (2020) argued that educators must become more culturally responsive to address diversity in U.S. classrooms. Seven participants credited professional development experiences such as mentoring, collaborating with colleagues, peer observations, focus groups, and exposure to diverse populations with improving their CRT implementation practices. Ten participants shared their professional development needs for implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Ellis-Robinson and Wayde-Coles (2021) argued that schools should include equity and CRT training in their onboarding process and for their in-service teachers. Cavendish et al. (2021) also stressed that professional development be continuous. Four participants echoed this belief that professional development should

be ongoing and consistent. According to the literature, educators need professional development to translate the theory of CRT into practice (Wachira & Mburu, 2019). Two participants discussed the need to properly define CRT and offer training to give an in-depth understanding of its elements. Participants discussed the need for training on, but not limited to, the following topics: anti-bias and antiracism, using CRT strategies along with the assigned curriculum, and the benefits of implementing CRT strategies. Martin et al. (2019) warned that misaligned professional development can adversely affect educators. Five participants discussed the importance of targeted, meaningful professional development tiered by proficiency and presented by CRT experts. Based on the literature and findings in this study, ongoing professional development in CRT strategies is essential to successful implementation.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework

Manns's CREM framework was used as the conceptual framework and informed the study, as well as RQs and data analysis. Manns (2021) discussed the practices necessary to implement CRT strategies in the CREM framework successfully. Manns believed that self-reflection and a culture of belonging were the entry points by which educators could access Banks's (1993) updated tenets of multicultural education. Manns reflected on the role of Kleinfeld's (1975) warm demander and the intention to show students that they are cared for and that the educator is committed to their academic success. Manns believed that Ladson-Billings's and Gay's foundational literature on cultural responsiveness presented educators with the understanding that quality teaching and multicultural teaching were synonymous. As the framework was unfolding, Manns

explored Hammond's (2015) work on CRT and the brain. Manns believed that education combined the "heart work" of trust and care with the "head work" of academic achievement (Manns, 2021, p. 8). The CREM framework asserts that educators should begin their culturally responsive journey with self-reflection. Manns argued that educators must self-reflect on the actions that influence the sense of belonging of their students. Beyond self-reflection and belonging are the five spokes grounded in Banks's multicultural education tenets: content knowledge, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and school empowerment. Manns asserted that educators could initiate their CRT journey by accessing any of the spokes of the framework and the classroom and school culture would determine the most significant area of need on a case-by-case basis. Teachers should employ the spokes of the CREM framework to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging.

In this current study, participants provided their perceptions and experiences in implementing CRT strategies. The key findings that emerged from the themes related to the conceptual framework are that participants incorporated all CREM components of self-reflection, belonging, and the five spokes into their intentionality of implementing CRT strategies and in the positive student experience. In Themes 3 through 7 and 9, six of the seven components' effects were prevalent in the participants' discussion. In Theme 8, participants' discussion of their needs for access to culturally responsive materials included five of the seven CREM components. Examining the CREM framework related to the study's findings was crucial for better understanding teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT strategies.

Self-Reflection

Each participant in this study discussed the importance of self-reflection and acknowledging and managing biases. Stevens (2019) asserted that teachers reflecting on their perceptions about CRT should ask themselves where they are, who they are, and what they believe. Six participants discussed the importance of self-awareness in their CRT strategies. These participants upheld Bondy and Ross's (2008) assertion of the importance of reflecting on how their experiences may influence their beliefs and practices. Participants in the study discussed journaling, bias quizzes, and open dialogue with their colleagues and students to monitor and attend to their biases. Glock et al. (2019) found that teachers' personal experiences and negative stereotypes form their attitudes about diverse cultures. According to the findings in this study, the participants' self-reflection and bias management were integral to their intentional implementation of CRT strategies.

Belonging

Six of the nine themes addressed components of Manns' (2021) culture of belonging. I found that positive student experiences were most instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging. Nine participants described experiences they found to create a culture of belonging in their classes, such as mirroring, positive student-teacher connections, and peer interactions. Sedláček and Šed'ova (2020) argued that students are more likely to be engaged when they feel liked and accepted by their peers. While having positive experiences was necessary to create a culture of belonging, I also found that the participants asserted the intentionality to create an environment where their students felt

welcome and safe. Berryman and Eley (2019) argued that belonging is internalized and is a direct response to students' experiences. Four participants discussed the challenges related to belonging and described students' resistance because of the feeling that they did not belong. The effects of the absence of a sense of belonging described by the participants were feelings of exclusion, decreased confidence, and decreased motivation. Three participants discussed the need for educators to access relatable materials and development opportunities to improve their CRT practices, which would create and improve the culture of belonging in their classes. Manns (2021) stressed the importance of creating a culture of belonging in the classrooms. I found that positive student experiences and intentional implementation of CRT strategies were necessary to foster that culture and that when the sense of belonging was absent, student resistance was the result.

Content Integration

Manns (2021) defined content integration as building upon the curriculum and programming to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of diverse groups. Participants perceived their curriculum and materials as the most significant challenges related to content integration in CRT implementation. Gay (2002) stressed incorporating cultural understanding into the curriculum to activate student interest and make the content accessible. Participants described adjusting and supplementing the curriculum to incorporate artifacts, texts, and contributions from various cultures as effective methods to integrate students' cultures with the content. Mirroring within the content allows students to see themselves represented and their cultures celebrated. Participants also

discussed the need to have access to culturally responsive materials rather than having to outsource them on their own. Manns (2021) asked educators to consider integrating culturally responsive materials rather than an addition. Most participants believed adding to their existing curricula and materials was necessary to make them culturally responsive. Students' interests were activated due to this practice, and they could see their cultures embraced, which led to a greater sense of belonging.

Knowledge Construction

Knowledge construction consists of educators considering the following: teaching time and student reflection opportunities, teacher understanding of the students' lived experiences, and knowledge activation of students' experiences through content and delivery (Manns, 2021). Eight participants discussed the importance of encouraging student growth by offering opportunities to take risks and consider their learning experiences. Participants discussed being flexible with their instructional time as a practice to ensure that they teach content while allowing for discussions that occur organically. Seven participants discussed their strategies early in the school year that have helped them learn about their students' cultures and lived experiences. Lau and Gritter (2022) affirmed this practice as necessary for successfully implementing CRT. Some participants discussed that the challenge of not knowing enough about their students or their inability to relate to the students' experiences makes engagement difficult and makes them apprehensive about their interactions. Participants described using information about their students to incorporate aspects of their cultures into the lessons. Participants asserted that information gleaned from the students about their

cultures and experiences informs schoolwide celebrations and efforts to embed cultural information into the content. Embedding students' cultures and communities in the lessons makes students feel valued (Jones Roberson, 2023). When these practices occur, teachers can activate their interests and expose them to real-world topics related to their cultures and experiences.

Equity Pedagogy

Educators must identify the most effective learning styles for their students (Manns, 2021). In Theme 1, I found that teachers must be intentional about their practices to address the diverse needs of their students. All participants discussed the methods they use to adopt the most effective learning styles for their students. In addition to learning about students' cultures and experiences, participants also explored the cultures' influences on students' academic experiences. Participants described the success of considering their students' academic abilities, needs, and presentation preferences and using that information to inform their instructional practices. Gay (2010) argued that educators should identify and leverage students' strengths. Participants discussed the academic success of giving students options on their preferred method of demonstrating mastery. Participants discussed the elimination of formal assessments in class with alternative learning checkpoints. Participants also asserted the importance of offering different presentation methods with tactile and digital options for students to select. Participants discussed implementing practices from the universal design for learning, Comer's (2005) whole child theory, and Montessori's strategies to support their students' learning styles. The challenges discussed by the participants included student resistance

and the limitations of the curriculum and materials. Moncrieffe et al. (2020) argued that decolonizing antiquated curricula requires purposeful efforts and entails acknowledging and appreciating the perspectives of marginalized groups. Most participants' prescribed curricula lacked sufficient inclusivity to be implemented without supplementation. As Manns (2021) prescribed, participants applied various strategies to reverse students' resistance and encourage engagement, considering their unique characteristics. Three participants asserted the need to improve their curricula to be more inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds, ability levels, and dominant languages.

Prejudice Reduction

Manns (2021) defined prejudice reduction as aiding students to develop positive attitudes about people from diverse groups while empowering them to identify and address injustices. To reduce prejudices, Manns asserted that educators must consider the opportunities given to students to consider their experiences and the experiences of others to identify prejudices and work towards inclusivity. Some participants discussed students' resistance to embracing other cultures. Participants described the benefits of encouraging positive student-to-student interactions to allow students to collaborate with their peers to increase their exposure to various cultures while working towards a common goal. Participants also discussed the importance of schoolwide celebrations to educate students and embrace the diversity in their community. Educators are encouraged to give students opportunities to consider multiple perspectives of content and social issues to engage in dialogue (Manns, 2021). Manns argued that educators should consider if their lessons are designed to empower students to act. Seven participants discussed

successfully encouraging students to grow academically and personally. This practice reduces prejudices by allowing students to look inward and consider how they can improve themselves and how they present themselves in society. I also found that all participants believed exposure to the real world was necessary to provide positive student experiences. Stevens (2019) argued that students can contribute to the curriculum and see evidence of the infusion of their cultures. Participants discussed their interactions with students who offered feedback about the curriculum and reflected on their methods of actively empowering students to critique the content and materials used.

Empowering School Community

Manns (2021) recommended that educators reflect on practices and policies that may hinder students' success while also considering the choices made to build relationships that foster a sense of belonging in the school community. In Theme 9, I found that the school community needs more education and engagement to improve the implementation of CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. Six participants discussed their need to educate the community about CRT's benefits and create opportunities for the community to collaborate with the school. Manns stressed the importance of ensuring that communication, engagement, and procedures are responsive to all families. All participants asserted parent engagement and input as a critical strategy for empowering the school community. Four participants discussed the benefits of schoolwide observations and celebrations to engage and educate the community. Participants also discussed learning about students' cultures and families as integral to CRT implementation. I found that participants in this study asserted that

being receptive to feedback from families and encouraging parents to be involved around the school empowers families to become a part of the school community and educates them about the learning environment. Participants also discussed the benefits of solid connections with their students that empower them to share their experiences and challenges in a safe environment. The benefit of solid connections in the school community is a sense of belonging for students and their families (Bennouna et al., 2021)

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the sample size. Although I interviewed 10 participants, this is a small sample size compared to the secondary educator workforce and an even smaller sample compared to the K-12 and post-secondary workforce. Another limitation of this study was the secondary educator criteria. This criterion excluded many other educators who may have had insights to share about the successes, challenges, and supports needed in implementing CRT strategies. I overcame these limitations by reaching saturation from semistructured interviews with questions and probes. The interview was designed to elicit participants' perceptions of the successes, challenges, and support needed in implementing CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging. During these interviews, I obtained rich, thick descriptions, which enabled me to reach saturation (see Yin, 2018). According to Burkholder et al. (2020), saturation is reached when ongoing analysis reveals no new information and there are no unexplained phenomena. As the responses from the participants became similar and no new information emerged from the participants, I knew I had reached saturation.

Another limitation that I experienced during this study was my personal experience with teaching culturally diverse students. As a classroom teacher and administrator, I have worked with culturally diverse students throughout my educational career. I overcame the limitations related to these experiences by using member checking and reflexivity with bracketing through field notes. Member checking is a practice employed by researchers to prevent bias during data collection and analysis that entails sharing a draft summary of the findings with participants for feedback and incorporating any feedback received in the final interpretation (Burkholder et al., 2020). I used reflexivity with bracketing through my field notes to isolate my biases from the data collection and analysis. Bracketing is a qualitative research method used to mitigate the effects of preconceptions that may spoil the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Considering my experience working with culturally diverse students, I recorded my reflections on my experiences related to the phenomenon before conducting interviews (see Ahern, 1999). In those reflections, I addressed any preconceptions and biases to ensure that my focus during the interview process was solely on the participants' experiences (see Ahern, 1999). Throughout the data collection process, I used reflexivity with bracketing to eliminate any preconceptions and biases and to confirm that no assumptions, alterations, or eliminations were made to the participants' experiences (see Ahern, 1999). As I conducted data analysis, I continued to bracket by focusing on my thoughts to revisit my preconceptions to ensure they did not influence my interpretation of the data (see Ahern, 1999). I also used field notes during the data collection and data analysis processes. After each interview, I wrote field notes to reflect on the participants'

responses and my performance as the researcher (see Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). I continued to use field notes during data analysis to make sense of that data and identify the patterns and themes that emerged during the analysis.

Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore U.S. secondary teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and support needed in implementing CRT to support the achievement and foster a sense of belonging. There are limited studies on secondary teachers' perceptions and their recommendations for change in these areas. This study contributes to literature related to CRT strategies that support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging for secondary students. Based on the findings from this study, I recommend further research to explore populations of culturally diverse secondary students, using a mixed method study, to explore how teachers' implementation of CRT strategies equates to quantitative academic achievement and a sense of belonging or lack thereof. Although this basic qualitative study provided lived experiences on the phenomenon from teachers, a mixed method study will allow students to provide their perceptions on their sense of belonging because of CRT strategies and then test the effects of the strategies quantitatively based on student data. I also recommend the use of Manns' CREM framework for teachers and school leaders.

The literature indicates that educators become in-service teachers with limited knowledge of CRT and how to implement CRT strategies. Therefore, I recommend that TPPs incorporate CRT strategies in the coursework and provide field opportunities in

culturally diverse communities for preservice educators. Preservice teachers could observe CRT strategies in use and apply the strategies with diverse populations of students (see Scott et al., 2022). Another recommendation based on the literature is to include CRT strategies in teacher certification assessments. TPPs may be more likely to focus on CRT strategies in their preservice programs if the knowledge is required to obtain certification.

Based on the findings, schools and school districts should offer targeted professional development on implementing CRT strategies for in-service teachers. As teachers begin their in-service experiences, their self-efficacy in using CRT decreases (Clark & Andreasen, 2021). All participants in this study discussed professional development as a need and offered recommendations on how professional development would support teachers applying CRT strategies that could support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging in their classrooms. Findings from this study also showed that teachers shared the perception that professional development should be ongoing and consistent. By participating in regular professional development related to CRT, teachers could learn about new strategies, apply them in their classes, and then reconvene to reflect and improve on those practices over time. Another recommendation based on the findings is that professional development includes differentiated content based on educators' proficiency levels in using CRT strategies and teacher input of the support they need (see Cavendish et al., 2021).

The final recommendation is for school districts to invest in culturally diverse curricula incorporating CRT elements and celebrating diverse cultures in their materials

and lessons. Participants in this study discussed their need to outsource materials and texts and modify lessons to make them more culturally responsive. Several participants in this study also discussed assessments as a curricular limitation and recommended that districts consider incorporating various methods for students to demonstrate mastery within the curricula. Based on findings in this study, core content materials should include diverse topics, represent a variety of cultures, provide clear strategies for differentiation, and be more inclusive to the diverse student populations while maintaining high levels of academic rigor (see Gay, 2018). If districts provide a more culturally diverse curriculum, they will support the implementation of CRT strategies in the classrooms and minimize teachers' need to outsource materials.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. This study helps address the gap in the literature on the phenomenon of teachers struggling to implement CRT from their perspective. The participants in this study provided details of their teaching experiences that provide a consensus of successes, challenges, and needs which could be used to support secondary teachers struggling to implement CRT strategies to support academic achievement and foster a sense of belonging.

Positive Social Change

Implications for social change on a societal and organizational level would be increased academic achievement and students' greater sense of belonging. C. L. Williams

et al. (2020) affirmed that increasing students' sense of belonging resulted in fewer disciplinary reports and failed classes and an increase in grade point averages. This study provided opportunities for participants to describe their experiences and perceptions of the successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. This study also offered recommendations for supporting secondary educators in successfully implementing CRT strategies. The recommendations and findings from the study may lead to improved TPPs, in-service professional developments, and curriculum selections in school districts, which would lead to increased CRT implementation, thus increasing students' sense of belonging and improving academic achievement. Finally, the recommendation for practice is to continue research on the effects of implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging for secondary students.

Theoretical Implications

Manns's (2015) CREM framework integrates many CRT theories. The framework focuses on culturally responsive teaching with pedagogical principles of multicultural education (Manns, 2021). The theoretical implications of this study would be to continue expanding this theory by seeking to understand the effects of training educators to implement the framework's elements. Another theoretical implication of this study would be to explore the student experience because of the implementation of the framework's elements.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The participants in this study provided meaningful insight into their experiences with implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms. From the participant perceptions, it was concluded that their greatest success is when they intentionally implement the strategies. All participants described the benefits of positive student experiences and school and parent collaborations and connections as successes of implementing CRT strategies. When teaching culturally diverse students, it is necessary for teachers to self-reflect, create a culture of belonging, and focus on content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school community to ensure that students achieve academically in an environment that embraces and celebrates their cultures (Manns, 2021). While participants discussed the plethora of successes experienced in implementing CRT strategies, the findings also showed that curricular limitations, the lack of knowledge of their students' cultures and experiences, and student resistance presented challenges to the participants' implementation efforts. According to Manns, implementing the CREM framework elements will likely cultivate more equitable educators and increase the culture of belonging in classrooms. Therefore, the recommendation would be to ensure that teachers implement the spokes of the CREM framework in all classrooms to ensure that students have a strong sense of belonging and are supported in their academic achievement.

It is necessary for teachers to consider the successes, challenges, and needs they experience to continue to improve their use of CRT strategies. It is also imperative that school districts provide the materials and professional growth opportunities to promote continued implementation of CRT strategies with fidelity. Participants discussed their need for curricular materials and resources that activate students' interests and acknowledge and celebrate the cultural diversity in U.S. classrooms (see DeSantis & Christopher, 2021). This basic qualitative study may provide educators and school leaders with reliable tools that could be used to support teachers, increase academic achievement, and increase students' sense of belonging.

Findings from this study indicated that participants need more professional development based on CRT topics that they recommend and differentiated content to provide support at all levels of CRT strategy proficiency. Participants in this study discussed the importance of having opportunities to learn more about practical CRT strategy implementation. This study's findings can also help improve TPPs in infusing CRT strategies in preservice coursework and offer opportunities for preservice teachers to implement the strategies in their field experiences.

In conclusion, it is paramount that educators have the understanding, training, and materials necessary to implement CRT strategies successfully. This study explored secondary teachers' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and needs in implementing CRT to support student achievement and foster a sense of belonging. The results from this study could provide teachers and school leaders with CRT practices they can use to help improve CRT strategy implementation, which could result in increased

academic achievement and a greater sense of belonging in classrooms on a local and national level.

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