2016

Characteristics of Effective Reading Language Arts Teachers in Closing the Achievement Gap

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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December 2016

Abstract

This study examined an urban school district in the southern United States that continued to experience student achievement gaps despite the implementation of initiatives as the African American Success Initiative. The school leadership needed a deeper understanding regarding what strategies were successful with closing the achievement gap. Using Gay's theory of cultural responsive pedagogy, the purpose of this study was to identify inward attributes, outward strategies, and professional development perceptions of teachers with no achievement gap among ethnically diverse students. Employing an instrumental case study design, 8 middle school reading teachers who closed the reading achievement gap were interviewed; these narratives were supplemented with classroom observations and archival data of district-administered students' surveys for the teachers, professional development plans, and teacher lesson plans. Data were analyzed using comparative and inductive analysis and were thematically coded. Findings indicated that teachers who closed the achievement gap shared culturally responsive characteristics and behaviors, including a caring attitude, high expectations, content relevance, and a belief that their existing Professional Development (PD) was not specific to the needs of teachers working in high-minority, low-socioeconomic urban school environments. A 3-day PD was designed to produce positive social change by reframing the beliefs, responses, and approaches to teaching minority students, allowing teachers to develop stronger teacher-student relationships, tolerance, and strategies, to ultimately increase student motivation and achievement.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my daughter, Kyrie. Since you were six years old, you have observed me continuing my education. You have been inquisitive throughout the process about what I was writing, and through this process, I have watched you grow academically to hold the scholarly merits that you now have. I hope that I have been a role model in your life to show you the power and value of an education for women. As you embark on your final years of high school, I pray that my journey inspires you to chase your dreams to the fullest and to never waiver from doubt or obstacles that life may throw your way. I am so proud of you!

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my inner circle. Kyrie, thank you for understanding the days I skipped volleyball tournaments, especially those that you weren't playing in due to your injury. Thank you for helping out with your brother. I love you. To Lester, my love, thank you for stepping in cooking, washing, and just running the house when I was wrapped up in this last stage of writing. Thank you for vacations and mind breaks. Thank you for words of encouragement, date nights, and just unconditional love. I don't know if I could have mustered up the energy to finish if not for you. To my girlfriends, thank you for understanding the missed birthday events, brief conversations, and space. Thank you for your words of inspiration that motivated me to finish.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of Walden University. Dr. Cathryn Walker and Dr. Pamela Harrison, you have been great mentors who have truly guided my thinking and given tough love at time. Dr. Ramo Lord, thank you for serving as my URR and assisting me through this process as well. I appreciate the conversations, feedback, resources, and encouragement from each of you. You made me a better writer and a better scholar. No words of appreciation can ever repay you.

Lastly, thank you to the many friends, colleagues, and family members who shared words of encouragement, funny doctoral study stories, and inspirational messages. This journey has not been easy. As a single, working mom, there were many days and nights I contemplated quitting. I thank you for stepping in and bringing me back to my ultimate goals. Thank you!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

The U.S. educational system faces the challenge of providing a high-quality education to every student, no matter the child's circumstances. While national reform efforts have been made in the past decades, the achievement gap between Black and White students has widened despite overall achievement having improved (National Education Agency [NEA], 2015; Reardon et al., 2012). The achievement gap between Black and White students is prevalent before students enter kindergarten and remains prevalent throughout adulthood (Jenson, 2009; Williams, 2011).

There is disagreement in how to ensure quality education within the array of factors such as standards, teacher quality, and curriculum options that effect achievement outcomes. President Obama stated in a March 2009 address to members of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce that "the most important factor in a student's success from the moment they enter a school is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents. It's the person standing at the front of the classroom" (Office of Press Secretary, 2009). However, some researchers have argued that the achievement gap is not a phenomenon that occurred because of schools (Jenson, 2009; Williams, 2011).

Researchers agree that the most significant factor in student achievement is effective teachers (Bright, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Stronge, 2007; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Teachers have direct access to students and with intense, purposeful instruction, teachers can close achievement gaps (Jenson, 2009; NEA, 2015). However, the hiring and retaining of effective teachers in urban, high-minority, low socioeconomic school districts is a challenge and many leaders

debate what effective teaching is for economically, racially, and ethnically marginalized minorities (Jacob, Vidyarthi, Carroll, & The New Teacher Project [TNTP], 2012). Urban school districts struggle to find candidates that meet the highly qualified standards of suburban school districts in respect to characteristics such as experience, educational background, and teacher certification. However, the lack of these characteristics does not mean that these teachers are less effective (Jacobs, 2007).

Some researchers argue that there is little relationship between the presumed teacher characteristics and student outcomes in urban schools (Glazerman et al., 2006; Gordan, Kane, & Straiger, 2006; Hall, Pearson, & Carroll, 2003; Jacobs, 2007). Roehrig et al. (2012) argued that there are four dimensions to teacher effectiveness on student outcomes: classroom management, classroom atmosphere, classroom instruction, and encouragement of self-regulation. Teacher selection process must coincide with school administrators' expectations for teaching excellence. O'Donovan (2012) argued that district administrators must review hiring practices for teachers by asking themselves, "What do we know about good teachers - what they know, what they do, and how their actions demonstrate their commitment to core beliefs and values?" (p. 23). This basic qualitative case study focused on determining the answers to these questions and the impact those characteristics had on the achievement gap.

In Section 1 of this study, I discuss the problem, rationale, and significance of the problem from both the local and national perspective. In addition, I discuss the definition of terms, research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework, implications, and summary.

Background of the Problem

State and local data showed that minority students in the south and southeast of USISD (pseudonym), an urban school district in Texas, were not meeting academic standards at the same rate as their White peers. These gaps in some grade levels in reading were as large as 30% (Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013; Johnson-Smith & Anduamlak, 2013). To address this problem, the district created a district-wide initiative addressing Black students in hopes of closing the achievement gap (Johnson-Smith, 2011).

USISD created policies to lower school administrators' ability to suspend, change grading policies, and support parents (Betzen, 2014; Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013; Johnson-Smith & Anduamlak, 2013). In addition, the district also placed an emphasis on transformational leadership, extended the school day for teachers and students in certain schools, and created a new teacher pay for performance evaluation system. While these initiatives rendered some growth in student achievement, none were successful in closing the achievement gap (Johnson-Smith & Anduamlak, 2013) and despite growth in student achievement, less than 1% of graduates from the high schools in this area were college-ready according to Texas Education Agency (TEA) standards (Stand for Children; 2013; TEA, 2014).

High juvenile crime rates were also a problem in USISD at the time of this study. Stand for Children administrators (2013) noted that 10 zip codes in the district's zone accounted for 3,100 prisoners, which is a high number coming from one zone. High juvenile crime rates, poor behavior in school, low parental involvement, gaps in elementary education, and inadequately trained teachers were possible causes of the gaps

in achievement. With a clear pipeline to prison evident within the district (Stand for Children, 2013) and federal standards requiring growth, it is imperative that schools in the southern and southeastern section of the district close the achievement gap.

Problem Statement

This study addressed the problem of continued gaps in achievement in middle school reading at the study site. Symptoms of the problem were shown in suspension rates of minority students in the school's parent district, high teacher turnover rates, and low performance on the state assessment for reading (District Evaluation and Assessment, 2014; Foundation for Community Empowerment, 2013). At the time of this study, the change in leadership in the district had resulted in an emphasis on hiring teachers with educational credentials and high college exit scores, and Teach for America candidates, but nevertheless suspension rates increased and teacher retention and reading achievement decreased (Hobb, 2013; District Evaluation and Assessment, 2014).

Concerns were expressed from teachers, principals, board members, parents, and community leaders about the continued drop in reading proficiency, high rates of suspensions, and increased teacher turnover (Columbia Broadcast System [CBS], 2014; Foundation for Community Empowerment, 2013; Hobb, 2013). In 2010, the African American Initiative was created but a three-year evaluation of the program showed minimal improvement (Johnson-Smith & Anduamlak, 2013). Thus, this study was designed to explore the characteristics of teachers who had been successful in closing the achievement gap in targeted areas of the district. The problem was explored through a qualitative case study to understand the characteristics, beliefs, instructional behaviors

and practices, and perceptions of professional development of teachers who closed the

achievement gap in schools located in the south and southeastern section of the district.

An outcome of this study was a deeper understanding of the characteristics and behaviors

of teachers who close the achievement gap and their perceptions of PD in supporting their

needs as teachers of marginalized students.

<center>**Rationale**</center>

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The district's mission, according to the district's website, is to "educate all

students for success." However, according to the 2014 district report card on the district's

website, state and local assessment data showed that Black students were not meeting

state standards at the same rate as their White and often Hispanic peers, particularly in the

south and east of the district. The 2015 data also showed large gaps in academic

achievement between Black and White students with greater gaps in high-minority, low-

socioeconomic schools in the eastern and southern areas with many student groups at the

schools performing lower than they performed on the previous year's state assessment.

Further, 14 more schools have been rated as "Improvement Required" since 2007, when

USISD had 29 schools under the Title 1 School Improvement Plan, increasing the overall

total of USISD schools to 43 under the Title 1 School Improvement Plan in 2014 (Betzen,

2014).

A community empowerment foundation (2013) stated in an executive summary

that part of the problem in the district was a gap in the cultural awareness and experience

between the district leadership and the community it serviced. Since the 2010-2011

school year, the teacher turnover rate had increased over 120% going from 12.9% to 28.5% by 2013-2014 (Betzen, 2014). Although researchers supported that the quality of a teacher was more likely found in veteran teachers (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011), according to the district website, USISD began the 2014-2015 school year with 33% of first year teachers, the largest percentage in the district's history. Meanwhile, as the number of new teachers increased, the suspension rate of minority students also increased (Betzen, 2014).

A local board representative for the southern section of the district where many of the low performing schools were located, inquired about what training was being done in schools to deal with the issue of excessive suspension (Hobb, 2013). The district's chief of school leadership responded that staff training and home visits were being conducted, as well as an investigation into the increase in suspensions. However, a community advocate concluded that one reason for the increase of suspensions was the lack of retention of veteran teachers, leaving younger, more inexperienced teachers in the classroom (Hobb, 2013).

Researchers also found that Black students in the district were significantly overrepresented in the school disciplinary decisions compared to their percentage in overall student population (Texas Appleseed, 2007). In a study conducted by the Department of Education on Texas schools, 62% of the students in the district who received police-issued citations at school for conduct violations were Black (CBS, 2014). The Department of Education recommended that schools in the district train staff in order to create more positive classroom environments that prevent and change students'

inappropriate behaviors (CBS, 2014). If Black students are not in school or while in school participate in classrooms lacking positive environments, it is possible that achievement gaps and low student achievement were products of such an environment.

In an attempt to provide a more equitable education, the district superintendent changed the teacher evaluation system, eliminated the teacher pay scale, initiated a Distinguished Teacher program and the Accelerating Campus Excellence program (ACE) in order to encourage teachers who had shown through data that they were highly qualified to move to underperforming schools within the district (USISD, 2014). Strong teachers have the ability to change students' attitudes about learning, increase students' capacity to learn, and increase student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The district's superintendent at that time stated, "Our lowest performing schools need the most effective teachers," citing that 27.3% of the teachers at the district's magnets schools were distinguished eligible compared to 15.2% at the regular schools, and 7.9% at the Improvement Required schools. However, the debate among researchers remained for what makes an effective teacher for minority students, who comprise the majority population of Improvement Required schools in the district.

The characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of teachers who are able to close the achievement gap in schools with a large minority population may not be the same characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of teachers in magnet schools with low-minority and larger White populations. These differences in qualities may contribute to teacher effectiveness in closing the achievement gap. In addition, being effective in improving student achievement, a measure the district

used to distinguish teachers, does not necessarily mean that those same teachers are able to close the achievement gap as seen in district data (USISD Evaluation and Assessment, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). The purpose of the study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of teachers who had closed the achievement gap while improving student achievement for students located in low-socioeconomic, high-minority south and eastern sections of the district.

Global Achievement Gap in Reading

Since the 1980s, closing the achievement gap has been an area of focus for educators and policymakers across the United States (Bromberg & Theokas, 2013). NCLB was created with a major focus of closing the student achievement gap by providing fair, high-quality, equitable education to all students, mandating that state governments ensure that all students meet or exceed standards in reading and math (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002). Despite the implementation of NCLB, gaps in academic achievement are still prevalent, although actual achievement has increased (Reardon et al., 2012).

The education of minority students in the United States is at a crisis. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), half of all minority students are not graduating on time from high school. President Obama stated that far too many children of poverty are lacking high-quality preschools, strong teaching, and high standards, and the gap between minority and white students' academic achievement is still wide (The White House, 2009). Researchers have suggested that leaders could close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers by assigning great

teachers five years in a row (Varlas, 2009). However, Walsh (2007) stated that the chance

of disadvantaged students having great teachers for five years running is 1 in 17,000

(Varlas, 2009).

Despite some success in making gains in overall achievement, results from an

international test in math, reading, and science indicated that there still remain enormous

gaps in academic achievement among racial groups (Organization of Economic Co-

operation and Development, 2012). Scores from the 2009 Programme for International

Student Assessment (PISA), a worldwide study conducted by the Organization of

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of 15-year-old students' performance

in mathematics, reading, and science, showed that the United States ranked 24th among

other member and nonmember nations in reading (OECD, 2010). Even more, when the

results were analyzed between groups within the United States, there was a gap of 170

points in reading between the highest performing racial group in the United States, Asian-

Americans, to the lowest performing, African-Americans (OECD, 2012). Both Hispanic

students with an average score of 478 and Black students with an average of 443 scored

below the OECD average of 496, while White and Asian students scored above the

OECD average with a score of 519 and 550 (OECD, 2012). In this period, the scores of

Black and Hispanic American students fell among the scores of students from less

economically advanced or developed countries, which supports the idea of inequities in

education in America and a need for reform to close achievement gaps (OECD, 2012).

In September 2014, President Obama launched *My Brother's Keeper*, an initiative

that focused on closing the achievement and opportunity gaps of Black and Hispanic

young men. The President challenged urban districts to tackle the problem of improving

academic outcomes for Black and Hispanic boys (Superville, 2014). The President's

initiative aligned with findings of researchers. Johnson (2009) concluded that there is a

need for cultural competences including respect for and understanding of diverse ethnic

and cultural systems as the United States moves towards a more heterogeneous country

where there is no majority and with the level of diversity in our schools, cities, and

communities. It is critical that policymakers and educators determine what competencies

and qualities are needed to educate diverse students.

Local School District Reform Efforts

Since 2010, district administrators have developed several initiatives targeting the

gaps in Black student achievement with minimal results of success. The district was

divided into five areas or sections of the city and one area of academies and magnet

programs prior to the arrival of the previous superintendent. These areas had an uneven

distribution of economically disadvantaged student, with two areas comprised of mostly

high-minority, low-socioeconomic schools in the eastern and southern section of the

district (Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013). The eastern and southern areas also had high

numbers of low-performing and underperforming schools and student achievement

(USISD, 2014). In an attempt to make the areas more equitable and to provide an array of

support throughout the district, in 2012, the new superintendent restructured the district,

compiling each division with varying schools across areas that diversified the student

population and income levels (Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013).

District administrators, namely the principals, were the superintendent's focus during the first three years of his tenure in the district. Following the theoretical concepts of the administrator reform mindset, which is reformers concerned with organizational performance and uniform goals (Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013), the superintendent emphasized a restructuring of the leadership team from a top-down approach and released a number of principals from the low-performing schools. According to an Executive Summary by the community empowerment foundation (2013), the superintendent (a) created a new cabinet, (b) dismantled the former superintendent's learning communities into strategic feeder patterns, (c) established the Leadership Development Academy (Principals Fellow Program) to train new principals according to the core beliefs outlined in his initiative, and (d) created and implemented a new principal evaluation system which ended with numerous nonrenewals based on short-term data. According to the Executive Summary Report, the superintendent's initiatives failed to consider or account for the socioeconomic conditions of minority students in the district.

Data from schools led by graduates of the Leadership Development Academy showed mixed results (Betzen, 2014). In fifth grade math, for example, 11 out of the 13 schools led by former principal fellows had a decrease in scores from the 2013 to 2014 school year. Betzen (2014) reported that the district, however, had a 7-point gain in fifth grade math, from 62 in 2013 to 69 in 2014. In reading, 5 out of the 13 schools saw an increase in fifth grade while the district dropped overall. In eighth grade, student scores dropped in both reading and math in all but one middle school (Betzen, 2014). Thus, despite specific attention to district and campus leadership in a top-down approach,

student academic achievement in reading and math failed to demonstrate significant or consistent gains while gaps in achievement continued to be persistent (Betzen, 2014; Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013).

The superintendent's initiative, according to the district's website, also consisted of development of a new teacher evaluation system, which focused on improving the quality of teaching and placing effective teachers in every classroom. According to the district's website (2014), the district leaders established a vision for effective teaching and how it was evaluated, differentiated professional training was developed for campus leaders to suggest and assign teachers to attend, and a new compensation package was created for principals and teachers based on their professional growth and impact on student learning, which was assessed through high-stakes assessments and observations. According to the district website, each campus throughout the district was provided campus instructional coaches to assist principals and teachers in curriculum planning, instruction, and assessment, teacher support, and data. Academic facilitators were hired to oversee curriculum in each of the five divisions of the district and support campus instructional coaches (USISD, 2014).

Data from the district's 2013-2014 report card showed some improvement in math on the state assessment as students moved from 62% passing to 69% passing; however, student achievement in reading during the 2013-2014 school year dropped across the district, with the achievement gap widening in reading between minority students and Whites (District Evaluation and Assessment, 2014). Data from the district's 2014-2015 report card also show that in reading achievement from Grades 3–8, the percentage of

students passing the reading test went down on eight of the 11 tests from 2014; and since 2012, all grade levels from 3 through 8 have seen a decline in reading (Weiss, 2015). More Black students failed the reading exam than in the previous year, while their White peers improved and Hispanic peers assessment scores remained at approximately the same mastery level as in the prior year (District Evaluation and Assessment, 2015).

The district's board allocated a substantial amount of funding for educational programs according to the budget found on the district's website since 2012. The current administration spent $8.8 million for professional development, extended school, and other programs in the 2013-2014 school year in schools identified as low-performing, which were the schools located in the predominately Black, low income, southern section of the district. Despite this funding and development of programs, performance in these schools and the academic disparity among student groups continued to be of concern (Foundation for Community Empowerment, 2013; Hobb, 2013; Johnson-Smith & Anduamlak, 2013). The theoretical approach of top-down reform has not shown adequate change in student academic achievement or of closing the achievement gap, indicating that other theoretical approaches need to be considered (Heilig, Redd, & Vail, 2013).

In the 2010-2011 school year, the district established the African American Success Initiative (AASI) to eliminate the achievement gap by "ensuring that African American students' academic, social, cultural, and emotional needs were being met as they engaged in rigorous and relevant instruction, while striving to become college and workforce ready". The program encompassed community and clergy leaders, parents, school principals, teachers and students to inform and improve African American

achievement (USISD, 2014). The AASI Religious Forum encouraged participation and insight from community and clergy leaders to implement strategies to increase positive outcomes for African American males. The district also conducted a seminar that included about 500 district students, teachers, and school staff in which Black male students voiced their opinions and experiences related to school, community climate, and social and academic stressors. The program evaluator did not address if or why the strategies and seminars were not effective but district data did not show an improvement in student achievement or in closing the achievement gap in the 2010-2011 school year (Johnson-Smith, 2011).

Another component of the AASI, according to the program evaluator, was a student advocate-mentoring program, which matched at-risk middle and high school students with mentors consisting of district teachers and staff members. Student advocates served as mentors for the program's students connecting the students to resources that empowered them in choosing and completing rigorous academic coursework and obtaining financial aid that would prepare them for college. However, the program evaluator noted that data on the number of advocates and mentees were not available for evaluation (Johnson, 2011).

The AASI also focused funding and time in building teacher knowledge and parental support. The AASI implemented the K-2 Reading Academy where about 1,000 Kindergarten-2nd grade teachers participated in professional development activities focused on increasing instructional skills with an emphasis on Black students with the goal that by the end of their 2nd grade year, all students would be reading at grade level.

AASI funding was allocated for supplemental pay to teachers at targeted campuses who provided tutoring to struggle readers. The AASI promoted parental involvement by supporting and assisting parents and families in encouraging their children towards college. However, state reading data has not indicated that the academy has yielded much success and student achievement in reading has declined since 2012.

District leaders also sought to understand the influence of personal, social, family, school, and community factors, or Developmental Assets Profile (DAP), on student choices and responsibility. These assets framework was based on research about student development, resilience, and prevention. Specialists of the DAP survey claim that when combined with school attendance, achievement, and "other factors" which were not indicated on the website, it is possible for district leaders to gain greater insight of the lives of young people which will allow district leaders to "design and implement better strategies to prepare young people to thrive in some type of college, high-skill career, and citizenship" (Survey Institute, 2015). There were 44,095 secondary students who participated in the DAP. Specialists of DAP have asserted that low levels of assets correlate to increased risk for negative outcomes including academic underachievement and school problems among other indicators. Of the 44,095 students, 10,516 or 24% were Black. Results showed that 51% of all Black respondents fell within the "excellent" range, 26% in the "good" range, 15% in the "fair" range, and only 9% fell within the "low" range of family assets, which examined youth's involvement in positive family communication and support, clear family rules, quality time at home, advice and encouragement from parents, and feeling safe at home. In fact, out of the five categories

consisting of Personal, Social, Family, School, and Community, 4 out of the 5 categories showed above 50% of Black students reporting "good" to "excellent" levels of development. Only two categories showed more than 10% of Black students in the low assets. Interestingly, these two categories were "School" with 15% in the low range and "Community", which showed 21% in the low range.

The results from DAP indicated that personal, social, and family assets were not factors in the majority of the Black students who participated. However, a significant number of Black students indicated that school and community were indeed low assets, which may contribute to underachievement (Johnson, 2011). Compiled with the number of suspensions for Black students, the results from DAP indicate that perhaps there are factors in the school and community that contribute to the underachievement and achievement gaps of the Black population or at minimum, contribute to the continued gaps in achievement.

Since the inception of the African American Success Initiative, other programs geared towards Black females and specific content-related programs have been funded under the initiative's umbrella. The AASI leadership also partnered with the district's Reading Language Arts department to implement Comprehensive Literacy Academy for Secondary Schools (CLASS) with the goal of increasing the quality of instruction by empowering middle school reading teachers to use culturally relevant methods for engaging adolescent readers, learn research-based practices to develop fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills, establish routines, use resources to diagnose reading difficulties, and deliver targeted interventions. According to the program

evaluation report, 156 teachers participated in the voluntary initiative. Of those 156

participants, 89% were female and 11% were male. The majority of CLASS participants

(62%) were Black, 26% were White, 10% were Hispanic, and 2% were Asian or

American Indian. Sixty-six percent (103 out of 156) of the participants had 10 or more

years of teaching experience, 30% had six to nine years of teaching experience, and 15%

had two to five years of experience. Only five CLASS participants, according to the

evaluation, were first year teachers.

  The effectiveness of the program could not be evaluated at the time because the

state transitioned from the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills* (TAKS) to the

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). However, data showed that

there were still significant gaps in achievement between Black and White students

(STAAR, 2012). Based on the Program Evaluation report (Johnson, 2011) of the CLASS

initiative, it is possible that the voluntary participation in CLASS did not reach the

educators who most needed the professional development. Cone (2012) explained that

one factor in underperforming achievement by students of color is the inability of current

educators to develop relationships with students by race and experience. The voluntary

nature of CLASS did not guarantee that teachers who were unable to develop these

relationships attended the professional development. Poplin (2011) asserted that the most

effective teachers of Black students are often Black women, and Stronge (2007) stated

that more experienced teachers are significant in improving student academic

achievement. The majority of participants were Black women who were veteran teachers.

Thus, the majority of teachers who participated in CLASS were teachers who possibly

did not need the professional development or the professional development did not meet their needs. Conducting an analysis of data to determine who needed to participate in CLASS might have been more effective in developing teachers and improving overall student achievement in Black students.

Although not always consistent, the district has been active in attempting to solve the academic achievement performance issue and gaps within student populations. Research-based strategies have been implemented including involving local community leaders, building parental support, providing mentors, developing culturally diverse teachers, encouraging postgraduate studies, and building leadership, yet academic achievement gaps and poor performance remain among Black students. In analyzing the participants in the CLASS initiative, which aimed at developing culturally diverse teachers, teachers who were effective in teaching minority students had not been clearly identified by the district making the effectiveness of the initiative questionable. This study will seek to gain a deeper understanding of who the effective teachers are in the district and their perceptions related to self-reported characteristics and traits, which enable them to work effectively with Black, middle school students, and their classroom management strategies.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Many U.S. minority children in low-socioeconomic homes grow up without the skills needed to be successful in the 21st Century (Russell Sage Foundation, 2015). The Russell Sage Foundation wrote that low levels of performance often present long-term problems, in particular within the economy. Improving academic achievement in future

workers accelerates the economy and can promote more equal opportunities (Lynch, 2015). However, since the 70s, Lynch explained that both income inequality and educational achievement gaps have risen rapidly. In the United States, 27% of Blacks and 24% of Hispanics live in poverty compared to 10% of Whites and 14% of those classified as Other (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015). Likewise, Black and Hispanic students lead the gaps in academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; OECD, 2012). Lynch and Oakford (2014) explained that the gaps in education are threatening the economic future of the country. The researchers concluded that if the United States was able to close the educational achievement gap between Black, Hispanic, and White children, the U.S. economy would be 5.8%, or nearly $2.3 trillion, larger by 2050.

There is a plethora of research about the projected increase of the number of ethnically diverse students in the United States school system (Ford, Stuart, & Vakil, 2014; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Taylor, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Census, 2010). Data also indicate that the United States public education system is currently not meeting the needs of diverse students (Rychly & Graves, 2012). If it is true that diverse students are not achieving proficiently, then it follows that as the percentage of diverse student increases, higher percentages of students in the United States will continue to underachieve.

Closing the achievement gap has been an ongoing discussion since the publication of *Equality of Educational Opportunity* in 1966 (Webb & Thomas, 2015). Gabriel (2010) explained that the administration of NAEP math and reading assessments indicate that Black and Hispanic students trail about two grade levels behind their White peers while Black males lag behind White males by three grade levels (Webb & Thomas, 2015). As a

result, reform efforts such as Race to the Top have been established to promote innovation in education and turn around the lowest achieving schools (Weiss, 2014). However, these reform efforts have yielded minor, if any, success in closing achievement gaps in reading (Strauss, 2011).

The purpose of the case study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of teachers who close the achievement gap in underachieving schools in the district. By gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of professional development of these teachers, I was able to identify potential considerations for professional development that best support the needs of teachers who work in the schools located in the south and eastern section of the district.

Definition of Terms

Accountability: The process of evaluating school performance to school performance measures (Hanushek, Machin, & Woessman, 2011).

Achievement gap: The difference in performance between each student group within a school or school district and the highest achieving student group in the school or school district as measured by designated assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Effective Teacher: A teacher who yields high academic achievement and closes the achievement gap by incorporating instructional objectives and strategies in order to provide instruction to different students of different abilities and assessing the effective

learning mode of all students (Goldhaber, D. & Anthoney, 2007; Markley, 2004; Varlas, 2009; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Characteristics: The special personal qualities of the teacher that enabled different students of different abilities to become successful in academic achievement (Walker, 2010).

Equity in Education: The minimum standard of education for all where gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnic origin are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (OECD, 2007).

Nations Report Card: The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the national report card, is a scoring report that provides results on achievement, instructional experiences, and the school environment for a representative sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in every school district in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Title 1: A federal grant program designed to give educational assistance to children in poverty (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Title 1 School Improvement: A designation given to schools by the state and federal government identifying Title 1 schools in need of improvement (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it explored the characteristics, perceptions, beliefs, and instructional strategies of teachers who teach students in the southern and eastern sections of USISD who have been successful in closing the achievement gap in

reading. Investigating the characteristics and beliefs of these teachers may be significant for the achievement of minority students, the development of reading teachers, and the hiring practices for school administrators. An analysis of teachers who are successful in closing the achievement gap may help determine whether there are trends in the educational background and training of teachers in the district that contribute to their ability to close the achievement gaps. This analysis of teachers may also help determine if the ability to close achievement gaps lies more in teacher mindset and purpose rather than educational credentials or if teacher effectiveness is a combination of both educational background and teacher mindset. Roehrig et al. (2012) argued that teacher effectiveness is a combination of an array of characteristics and behavioral practices. Therefore, teachers may benefit from training in targeted areas to build their capacity to work in low-achieving schools in high-minority areas.

This study may also serve as a tool for social change. Studying educators who are effective in teaching diverse students in high poverty, urban areas informs practices that may improve the quality of education, the level of discretionary discipline actions, and social development of minority students. Determining what makes urban teachers effective in teaching diverse students provides opportunity for district administrators to match teachers and students in order to provide an equitable education for all students across racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bomberg & Theokas, 2013; Equity in K-12 Public Education, 2007).

Research Questions

The characteristics of an effective teacher are difficult to measure especially when social factors of poverty, crime, and low-socioeconomics are contributing factors (Markley, 2004). Bright (2012) summarized the habits of an effective teacher as a mindset. According to his research, effective teachers are able to recognize that instruction extends beyond the classroom and that teaching is partly a performance. Effective teachers are accountable for all results and make no excuse for failure (Bright, 2012). In addition, an effective teacher recognizes that it is her responsibility to generate interest in the content (Bright, 2012; Stronge, 2007). It is important that teachers know content well enough to extend instruction beyond the classroom, as well as how to motivate a student's interest. However, this knowledge requires training and development (Cone, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to understand the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of middle school reading teachers who have demonstrated an ability to close the achievement gap while also raising student achievement in high minority, low-socioeconomic areas. Understanding teachers who have closed the achievement gap is critical in identifying strategies that may improve student achievement and close the achievement gap in areas where low reading achievement persists. A possible outcome was to determine what, if any, common characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs these teachers shared. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the inward attributes (i.e., beliefs and characteristics) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student achievement in regards to effective teachers and effective teaching for ethnically and socioeconomically diverse students?

2. What are the outward strategies (i.e., instructional strategies and classroom management techniques) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student achievement in regards to teaching ethnically diverse students?

3. What are the perceptions and needs of teachers about the professional development they have received in regards to teaching ethnically diverse students?

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to understand the characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of middle school reading teachers who demonstrated an ability to close the achievement gap. The significance of teacher perceptions and beliefs as well as the role of culturally responsive instruction and teacher-student relationships on reading achievement are discussed in this review of literature. Literature behind each research question is addressed to explain the significance of the research question and why these questions guide this study. This subsection includes a discussion of literature related to the conceptual framework of the study, the contradicting literature of the characteristics of effective teachers, effective strategies to use to improve reading for minority students, and the role of professional development in closing achievement gaps.

My literature search saturation was accomplished with database searches including the use of Educational Resource Informational Center [ERIC], EBSCOhost, Sage Journals online, Walden dissertations, and GoogleScholar web searches. Most searches were limited to the last 5 years, but some of the literature led to investigation of previous study findings beyond 5 years. Boolean searches included *culturally responsive pedagogy*, *teacher beliefs* AND *student achievement*, *teacher perceptions* AND *student achievement*, *effective teachers*, *characteristics of effective teachers*, *reading strategies*, *reading and minorities*, *teaching reading to diverse students*, *student achievement* AND *behavior*, *culturally relevant education*, *professional development for diverse students*, *preparation for urban school teachers*, and *reading professional development*. These sources provided a rich body of information regarding what has traditionally been identified as characteristics of effective teachers, the significance of cultural awareness and relationships in effectively teaching minority students, reading instructional strategies for improving reading achievement for minority students, and the role of professional development in closing achievement gaps.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized Gay's (2013) theory of culturally responsive teaching as the basis for its conceptual framework. Applying this theory created better insight into the needs and challenges of working with diverse students.

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2013) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 50). Gay described

culturally responsive teaching as a way of improving student achievement by providing instruction through the cultural filters of students. Rychly and Graves (2012) stated that in this pedagogy, teaching practices focus on cultural characteristics that make students unique from each other and from the teacher as well as nurture the strengths students bring to school in order to promote student achievement. These cultural characteristics include the traditions, values, language and communication, learning styles, and relationship norms of the students (Rychly & Graves, 2012). To implement culturally rich instruction, Herrera et al. (2012) stated that teachers must explore the linguistic, sociocultural, cognitive, and academic dimension of students, which they referred to as Biography-Driven instruction.

Using culturally responsive pedagogy has shown positive results in improving academic achievement. Taylor (2015) found that teachers who taught in a diverse high-poverty, Title 1 elementary school perceived an increase in their ability to engage their ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse students when using culturally responsive teaching strategies. Ford, Stuart, and Vakil (2015) argued that teachers can transform their pedagogy and maximize student learning by maintaining high expectations, providing culturally responsive instruction, and establishing strong family connections. While culturally responsive pedagogy consists of three dimensions: (a) institutional, (b) personal, and (c) instructional, this study centered in the personal and instructional dimensions because both the personal and instructional dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy addressed the research questions guiding the study.

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Perceptions

Race and class in impoverished areas often marginalize students, which is evident in consistently low student achievement in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools (Dell'Angelo, 2016). Richards, Brown, and Forbe (2007) explained that teachers' values impact relationships with their students and the environment of the classroom. Teachers' beliefs also aid or hinder student motivation, which is important because student motivation necessary to maximize student academic achievement (Weisman, 2012). In addition, the way that teachers perceive their students and the abilities of their colleagues can hinder school improvement goals (Hunt, 2014). Therefore, it is critical to investigate the research findings related to teachers' beliefs and perceptions and what strategies or approaches, if any, best support changing these perceptions and beliefs. The question addressed in this section of the study was "What are the inner characteristics, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who close the achievement gap while raising student achievement?"

Gay (2013) explained that culturally responsive teachers see cultural differences and experiences as an asset. The beliefs of these teachers make prominent the learning possibilities of marginalized students (Gay, 2013). Richards et al. (2007) argued that teachers who engage in reflective practices as well as explore the sociocultural dimensions, both personally and of the students, discover a sense of self and a greater understanding of personal beliefs enabling the teacher to confront biases that have influenced the value system. This practice is significant because researchers have linked teacher beliefs to teachers' ability to be effective in educating diverse students

(Haberman, 2005; Richards et al., 2007; Zyngier, 2012). In a mixed-methods study

conducted by Zyngier (2012), the researcher found that student teachers who hold deficit

attitudes towards disadvantaged children may be unable or subconsciously unwilling to

affect change in the system and subsequently, in the lives of the students in which they

service. Thus, minority students would remain marginalized and low-performance and

gaps in achievement would persists (Zyngier, 2012).

Teachers' beliefs in their own self-efficacy also affect student achievement.

Teacher self-efficacy is the judgment of teachers in their own capabilities to achieve

desired outcomes of student engagement and learning among diverse learners, has been

linked to student achievement and test scores (Muijs & Reynolds, 2015). In fact, teachers'

self-efficacy is one of the few characteristics that have been found to reliably predict

teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Mohamadi & Asadzadeh, 2012). The

confidence teachers possess in their ability affects either positively or negatively how

much they invest in their teaching capacity, the goals they set for themselves, their

behavior in the classroom, and their mindset (Mohamadi & Asdzadeh, 2012).

Incorporating teacher collaboration with administrative support is one strategy to building

teacher efficacy to improve student achievement (Bartling, 2015; McGuire, 2011).

Teacher beliefs and perceptions may also influence social change. Culturally

responsive teachers use their understanding of diversity to participate in reforming the

institution of education and social justice (Richards et al., 2007). As the United States

confronts the challenges of inequity across the public school system, developing

culturally responsive teachers will help bridge gaps in understanding diverse students,

their values, and learning styles to improve academic achievement and close the achievement gap (Aronson & Laughter; 2015; McCollin & O'Shea, 2005; Richards et al., 2007). However, Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) found in a 5-year study on 17 new minority teachers that using cultural and linguistic teaching practices often contradicted the systematic demands supported by government policy. The U.S. educational system is a mono-cultural system that has promoted biases in curriculum and instructional practices that "have been detrimental to the achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (Richards et al., 2007, p. 65). Standardized education means that regardless of cultural background and experiences, all students must meet standards mandated by institutions (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Rogers, 2008). Culturally responsive theorists emphasize that teachers are in a significant position to facilitate change because they are the link between the institution and the students.

Culturally responsive teachers question traditional policies and practices. These teachers give voice to minority students when instructional practices eliminate or minimize their voice (Gay, 2013; Richards et al., 2007; Rogers, 2008). According to researchers, if the desire is to engage and motivate students, teachers who teach diverse students must give voice to the students. In addition, teachers should be aware of their biases and beliefs and how those biases and beliefs govern their classroom. The educational institution must support the development of culturally responsive teachers, so that teachers feel safe in challenging traditional approaches and utilizing cultural approaches that support academic achievement for diverse students.

Culturally Responsive Instruction

In order to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing demographic society, instruction in school must become culturally responsive. Irvine (1992) stated that students become disconnected from school when instructional tools (i.e., books, teaching methods, and activities) marginalize their cultural experiences. This disconnect could come in the form of underachievement, behavioral issues, or dropping out (Richards et al., 2007). Researchers have argued that there is a relationship between student academic achievement and school conduct problems (Choy, O'Grady, & Rotgans, 2012; Hughes & Cavell, 1999; Johnson & Hannon, 2014).

There appears to be a disconnect between the needs of Black students in the United States and the schools that service them. The lack of interaction with people of color or their cultures causes a lack of understanding and misinterpretation of student behavior and response to behavior (Reiter & Davis, 2011). Focus on Black (2011) found that 80% of U.S. youths in special education services are Black and Hispanic males. Black males are also three times more likely than White males to be suspended from school (Focus on Black, 2011). Despite these statistics, teachers often do not make the effort or do not have the resources to become culturally aware of the students in which they teach, which makes these teachers less effective for students of color (Sparapani, Seo, & Smith, 2011). Culturally responsive researchers argue that teaching using culturally responsive strategies may motivate minority students, lower behavioral problems, and improve overall student academic achievement (Richards et al., 2007; Rogers, 2008; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Culturally responsive teachers use instructional practices and supplemental resources that validate students' cultural identity capitalizing on the strengths the students bring to the school (Gay, 2013; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, & McMillan, 2014; Richards et al., 2007). These teachers promote equity and mutual respect among students and their families (Gay, 2013). In addition, culturally responsive teachers promote a sense of responsibility by encouraging students to become active participants in their learning and in society (Lethwaite et al., 2014; Richards et al., 2007). Villegas and Lucas (2002) argued that teachers who are culturally responsive not only promote social consciousness in their students, but they also become socioculturally conscious. Through affirmation of students from diverse backgrounds may have direct implications for how successful students are in academic achievement.

Rogers (2008) argued that the best teachers are social advocates. Culturally responsive teachers fight for change that will enhance student achievement, promote social justice, and quality education. In addition, the National Education Association (NEA; 2005) stated that cultural awareness and culturally competent teaching will be significant in closing the achievement gap that exists among racial and social class groups. If culturally competent teaching is an effective tool in student academic achievement and key in closing the achievement gap, then it is critical that teachers become culturally competent.

Qualities and Characteristics of Effective Teachers

The discussion about the qualities of good teachers is not contemporary nor is the discussion limited in research. In fact, some of the earliest theories date back to Plato's

menno dialogue of the Socratic method (Watson, Miller, Davis, & Carter, 2010). In 1896,

Putnam identified content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and authentic personality

as three components of effective teaching (Watson et al., 2010). Over the years, more

traits have evolved and other traits have been reevaluated as the diversity in schools

increased. There is now little disagreement by researchers that highly effective teachers

are the most significant variable in improving student academic achievement (Bright,

2011; Darling-Hammond, 2005, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Stronge,

2007; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). However, defining the characteristics of effective

teachers is complex. While most researchers agree that content knowledge and pedagogy

are essential, the influence and effect of personality (a component of effective teaching

first argued in 1986; Watson et al., 2010) on student academic achievement is of great

debate (Bright, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2005, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Youngs,

2002; Stronge, 2007; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). In this section, I explore the various

characteristics that have been argued as components of effective teachers.

Teacher academic and professional background. Some researchers argue that

teacher academic and professional background are the most significant characteristics of

effective teachers. Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2011) argued that college

selectivity and test scores, teacher certification, subject matter background, pedagogical

training, and experience are all factors of effective teachers. Adamson and Darling-

Hammond asserted that low-socioeconomic schools servicing minority students usually

have teachers who are inadequate in each of the characteristics. Berry, Daughtrey, and

Wieder (2009) stated that more effective teachers are certified in their specific content

area, score higher on licensing tests, graduate from more competitive colleges, have two or more years of teaching experience, and are nationally board certified. Berry et al. further contended that teacher effectiveness has more to do with teacher opportunities for peer learning and collaboration than with teacher personality attributes. However, other researchers have suggested that when teaching students in urban, high-minority, low-socioeconomic schools, personality attributes do play a pivotal role in teacher effectiveness (Poplin et al., 2011).

Personality traits. Certain personality traits are important in helping teachers who work in high-minority, urban schools to support cultural differences and norms, which affect student achievement (Poplin et al., 2011). Nezhad and Nezhad (2014) found a correlation between teacher personality characteristics and student academic achievement. In a study conducted in 2013-2014, Nezhad and Nezhad found that the attributes of effective teachers were care for students' emotional needs, development of affectionate relationships, respect for all students, a sense of responsibility for students, and high expectations. Nezhad and Nezhad found that when teachers demonstrated these attributes, students showed more interest in learning and student achievement improved.

Educational background and license credentials alone do not guarantee academic achievement. Teachers must also take ownership of their students' success and failure and must believe that all students can and will achieve (Bright, 2011; Haberman, 2005). In a four-year study of low-performing urban schools in Los Angeles, Poplin et al. (2011) found that effective teachers in urban, high poverty middle schools share some distinct personality traits. First, the teachers were strict disciplinarians. The researchers found that

effective urban schoolteachers perceived that strictness was necessary to establish safe and respectful classrooms to effectively teach, and students perceived their teachers' strictness as caring and effective. In addition to their strictness, the teachers demonstrated instructional intensity with little down time, provided individualized support with constant classroom movement, maintained traditional classrooms, exhorted and taught virtue, and established strong teacher-student relationships (Poplin et al., 2011).

The demographical characteristics of the effective teachers examined Poplin et al. (2011) were diverse (Poplin et al., 2011). Eleven (11%) teachers were African Americans, nine (38%) European Americans, three (13%) Middle Eastern Americans, and one (4%) Asian American. The teachers' ages ranged from 27 to 60 and years of experience from 3 to 33. Certification also varied with two-thirds of the teachers having been educated in nontraditional educational programs and nearly half having changed careers. Almost one-third of the teachers were first generation immigrants to which the researchers noted contributed to their success because they understood what students would need to do well in the larger culture. Poplin et al. also attributed the African American teachers' authority, sense of urgency, and straightforward instruction to their race, arguing that while each of these teachers was highly effective, few of them fit the definitions of highly effective in terms of degrees or National Board Certification. Poplin et al. (2011) concluded that the teachers' effectiveness was attributed more to personality traits and characteristics such as the traits of dedication, a sense of calling, and cultural and social responsiveness than to characteristics of school training and preparation.

Culturally responsive researchers also believe that there are distinct teacher characteristics associated with culturally responsive pedagogy. Rychly and Graves (2012) identified four characteristics that are necessary for culturally responsive pedagogy to be fully effective: caring and empathy, personal reflection about attitudes and beliefs, personal reflection about one's own cultural frames of reference, and teacher knowledge about other cultures. Rychly and Graves did not associate *caring* with being *nice* or *kind*, but referenced a state of unwillingness to tolerate underachievement. Gay (2013) described *caring teachers* as teachers who hold their culturally diverse students to the same standards as other students. Rychly and Graves (2012) defined *empathy* as the ability of teachers to understand the classroom from the perspective of their students. Thus, by understanding where students were, the caring teacher was more successful at holding all students accountable to rigorous standards and high expectations (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Classroom management. Low achieving urban schools with economically, racially and ethnically marginalized students often have behavioral problems that academic background and academic certifications do not address. Conroy and Sutherland (2012) found that urban, low socioeconomic school districts have high numbers of students with emotional and behavioral problems. In a study on the qualities of effective teachers who work with students with emotional and behavioral issues, Conroy and Sutherland (2012) found that teachers who are effective with behavioral and emotional students had strong instructional procedures in place. The teachers were proactive in managing student behaviors by establishing clear and consistent procedures to prevent

behaviors rather than waiting to be reactive when inappropriate behaviors occurred. These effective teachers provided positive attention to the students by giving behavior-specific praise and spent less time giving attention to negative student behavior. The teachers also fostered positive teacher-student interactions, which resulted in positive classroom atmosphere.

Conroy and Sutherland (2012) also found that effective teachers of students with emotional and behavioral problems established consequences for both positive and negative behaviors. The characteristics of these effective teachers suggest that teacher effectiveness in urban, high-minority, low socioeconomic schools consist of more than college attended, grades on license tests, and achieving National Board Certification (Conroy & Sutherland). Effective teachers in urban, high minority schools must have strong classroom management skills to sustain a safe, positive, and functioning environment (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Poplin et al., 2011).

A sense of purpose. There is a commonplace assertion that suburban schools have more effective teachers, which has led politicians and other stakeholders to believe that hiring similar teachers in urban schools would improve academic achievement (Bright, 2012; Haberman, 2005). However, Haberman (2005) challenged this belief stating that when presented with the cultural challenges of high-poverty and minority students, the characteristics of educational background, teacher license, and National Board Certification are irrelevant and ineffective. Bright (2012) echoed Haberman's argument stating that teachers who are effective in teaching marginalized students

understand that school is not solely about academic performance but also to prepare students to do well in life.

Bright (2012) argued that there are five habits of highly effective teachers:

1. Taking a wider view of student success. These teachers are able to filter the curriculum into what is absolute and what is frivolous. Bright argued that these teachers have a moral obligation to prepare students for success after graduation.

2. Recognizing instruction as a performance and understanding that what they teach every day is a sales pitch that they must get the students to buy. Regardless of teachers' knowledge or degrees, Bright argued, "If instructional delivery is boring, students spoiled by their sensory-overloaded world will unlikely make intellectual 'purchases' of the lesson's intrinsic value" (p. 2). Knowing this, effective teachers utilize a variety of strategies to improve instructional delivery.

3. Internalized personal accountability. Effective teachers do not focus on factors beyond their control, but focus on what they can control, which are their own actions. These teachers take ownership for student learning and have the belief that if the students failed, they fail.

4. Understanding student motivation. They use instructional strategies that focus on ability and importance to overcome lethargy and apathy. Their instruction includes rubrics detailing evaluation criteria, exemplars demonstrating the expectation of excellence, and cumulative review schedules helping students to become self-sufficient and self-regulating. These teachers are able to convince

students that what they are learning is important and worth knowing and

continuously apply knowledge to real-world application.

5. Having a continuous focus on instructional improvement. These teachers

    challenge past practices, try new approaches, and have an unyielding drive to do

    what was best for their students (Bright, 2012).

Leadership and motivation. Other researchers, such as Quereshi and Niazi

(2012), have also argued that teacher credentials and educational background are not the

most essential in teacher effectiveness in urban schools. Qureshi and Niazi (2012)

defined effective teachers as leaders "who can inspire and influence students through

expert and referent power" (p. 31). These researchers identified several specific

characteristics of teachers who are effective in educating marginalized students:

- thoroughly knowing the subject they teach,

- being kind and respectful toward their students,

- empowering and inspiring their students,

- being thoughtful and committed,

- making sincere attempts to know how their students perceive the environments
  around them, and

- knowing how their students can be stimulated, persuaded, and induced.

Qureshi and Niazi argued that effective teachers are concerned with students' learning

outcomes, set goals for themselves, and endeavor to complete goals assigned to them by

others.

Qureshi and Niazi (2012) also argued that effective teachers come well prepared for class and start class on time. According to Qureshi and Niazi (2012), effective teachers:

- are optimistic about their job and about their students,

- create highly engaging lessons even when they are absent,

- have good classroom management,

- encompass an ability to provide reinforcement to their students,

- rarely face discipline problems,

- teach students how to self-regulate, and

- help students develop and choose appropriate tools and skills when they are faced challenges rather than wait for the teacher to tell them what or how to do something.

These traits or attributes suggest that effective urban schoolteachers need more than a set of academic credentials to be effective in teaching urban school students. Based on the researchers' findings, effective urban school teachers of minority students also need a keen awareness of how students learn, how to hold students accountable, and how to inspire and motivate students who may not be invested in what the teachers are teaching. These findings are also ground in the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teacher and Student Perceptions of Effective Teachers

Teacher and student perceptions of effective teachers also suggest that effective teaching consists of more than credentials of educational background and professional

experience. Watson et al. (2010) studied teachers' perceptions of the effective teacher. The researchers found that the most common teacher perceptions of effective teachers were caring, dedication, interactions, and enthusiasm, which were similar characteristics identified by Stronge (2007). However, many of the qualities identified, 19 of the 28 qualities, were limited to less than 10% of the respondents demonstrating the variation in teacher perception of what makes for effective teaching. Watson et al. (2010) discussed the implications of such findings asking whether diverse environments and population served require differing qualities and whether an individual's personal traits determine which qualities are more important and effective in working with students. These implications served as guiding ideas for the project study.

Like the perceptions of teachers, student perceptions of effective teachers focused less on teacher qualifications or credentials and more of teacher cultural responsiveness as well. In a l5 year longitudinal retrospective qualitative study, a variety of college students from various races and social backgrounds majoring in education in either in-service or preservice teaching were asked about the outstanding characteristics of their most effective teacher. Walker (2010) discovered that students felt their most effective teachers were instructionally prepared daily, positive towards the students and their learning, maintained high expectations for the students, and showed respect for all students. These findings led me to conclude that the most profound characteristics in effective teachers as it related to student perception were not teachers' collegiate choices or subject matter content knowledge, but more related to teacher-student relationships and tailored instruction that met the needs of the students.

Luschei and Chudgar (2011) stated that there is little evidence in research that supports that teacher characteristics that have been deemed important are effective at all for students from low-income backgrounds or are related to student test scores. These researchers have suggested that effective teachers in urban schools require more than training in top college programs, high-test scores on licensing tests, and National Board Certification. Effective teachers in urban, high-minority, low socioeconomic schools need a sense of purpose and calling traditional teacher preparations programs cannot or do not teach or develop (Haberman, 2005; Luschei & Chudgar, 2011; Stronge, 2007). According to these researchers, teachers must care about the diverse students they teach and must be driven beyond content mastery to motivate and inspire students to perform at high levels of academic achievement that closes achievement gaps. The research presented supports that characteristics most common in effective teachers of urban, minority students are qualities that center in culturally responsive pedagogy that supports the needs of diverse students.

Teacher-Student Relationships

A great amount of research indicates that positive teacher-student relationships can boost student academic achievement and health of low socioeconomic minority students (Hunt; 2014; Roehrig, 2012; Wilkens, 2014; Yonezawa, McClure, & Jones, 2012). Some researchers have suggested that the most significant tool for learning is an affirmative relationship between teachers and their students (LaPoma & Kantor, 2013). Low-socioeconomic students are often disengaged in their learning but are more responsive to teachers who demonstrate they care (Espinoza, 2012; Williams, 2011).

Haberman cited human relation activity and the ability to make and maintain positive and supportive connections to students with diverse backgrounds as the primary quality for an effective teacher in an urban, high-poverty minority school. Haberman argued that it is only after a teacher has developed a relationship with the student that their content knowledge becomes transferrable.

The implications of this research suggest that minority students become more motivated to learn when they know that their teacher cares about their learning. This motivation can improve students' engagement and ownership of their own learning. Rodriguez (2005) explained that his approach to teaching troubled students at an alternative high school in Boston was to engage the student relationally before attempting to engage them instructionally. When students have a strong relationship with their teachers, they are more likely to seek help when needed, which, in turn, positively correlates to higher student academic achievement (Smart, 2014). A teacher's concerted effort to support and mentor low-socioeconomic minority students can greatly strengthen the educational goals and aspirations of these students (Espinoza, 2012). Teachers who recognize how their interactions with students impact student learning and achievement work to establish mutual respect and trust early in the learning process (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Strong teacher-student relationships provide anchors for urban students who often have had negative experiences with educators (Rodriguez, 2005). Developing supportive relationships with students early can lead students to not only perform academically but are also motivate students to take ownership in their learning.

Teacher-student relationships appear to directly influence student motivation and student ownership. In a qualitative study conducted by Adkins-Coleman (2010) to document the beliefs and practices of teachers who successfully facilitate engagement among Black students, Adkins-Coleman found that teachers who were successful in motivating students created environments that were structured to promote student motivation to take initiative in their learning. In these classrooms, Black students asked questions and participated in classroom activities. Adkins-Coleman found that these teachers implemented practices that motivated students to meet and even exceed behavioral expectations and motivated the students to engage in cognitive tasks. The teachers established motivation by facilitating warm social interactions, demonstrating concern for their students, and focusing on student learning rather than performance on tests (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Therefore, these teachers who took time to nurture a relationship with their students and focus on the student, instead of focusing on high-stakes tests, motivated their students to engage in the content and thus, perform at higher cognitive levels.

Researchers argue that solid teacher-student relationships improve instructional practices, which maximizes the potential for high student motivation. In a study involving 24 participants in a large, ethnically diverse, urban middle school, Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley (2014) found that having high quality teacher-student relationships informed teacher instructional practices and supported student motivation, which affected teacher effectiveness. Teachers in this study made continuous attempts to know their students within and outside the constraints of the school focusing on building relationships and

giving value to the students which resulted in tailored instruction that supported high student engagement and student motivation to learn (Kiefer, Ellerbrock, & Alley, 2014). The attention of the teachers to building a relationship with the students demonstrated a keen awareness of the impact of strong teacher-student relationships on student motivation and student academic achievement.

Teacher-student relationships have also been linked to academic performance on achievement tests. In a study conducted over three years on 690 academically at-risk elementary students, Hughes, Oi-man, Villarreal, Johnson, and Juin-Yu (2012) found that cross-year changes in boys and Black students reading and math achievement correlated to student-perceived teacher-student conflicts. The researchers found that Black students and boys reported more teacher-student conflicts. These findings could support why gaps may be found in reading and math achievement scores of the demographical groups who reported greater teacher-student conflicts in particular, Black boys. The results also shed light on possible solutions to closing the achievement gap. Improving the teacher-student relationships may support student motivation and emotional needs, which can improve student achievement (Yonezawa et al., 2012).

Effective Reading Strategies

Researchers have found a correlation between socioeconomic status and cognitive ability and performance that persist in childhood throughout adulthood (Jenson, 2009). According to Jenson (2009), children beginning school should know about 13,000 words and by high school, should know between 60,000 to 100,000 words. However, children from low-income homes experience less language capabilities. In a six-year study that

followed children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, Hart and Risley (1995) found that by age three, children of professional parents added new words to their vocabulary at about twice the rate of children in welfare families (Jenson, 2009). The lack of vocabulary has a substantial effect on reading comprehension. Researchers have also found a correlation in standardized tests between poverty and lower cognitive achievement. Children from low-SES households often earn below-average scores in math, science, reading, and writing (Jenson, 2009). Thus, teachers of students in schools that are high-poverty and high-minority have the challenge of closing gaps in reading achievement that began far before the student walked into their classroom. It is then critical that teachers implement the most effective reading instruction and strategies that target the needs of low socioeconomic students ensuring higher achievement in reading and through this targeted instruction, close the achievement gap. However, reading and math teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools often are inexperienced or teaching outside their specialties (Jenson, 2009). This gap in experience does little to build students' vocabulary, close gaps created prior to school, or improve student achievement.

Reading is a complex skill that requires both skill-based competencies and knowledge-based competencies. Skill-based competencies are described as sound and word recognition, and knowledge-based competencies are described as conceptual and vocabulary knowledge necessary to comprehend text's meaning. Lesaux (2012) explained that considerable progress has been made United States schools in teaching skill-based reading competencies, but much less progress has been made in teaching knowledge-based competencies. It is the knowledge-based competencies that are key

sources in the disparity between children of different ethnic and racial groups and socioeconomic groups (Lesaux, 2012). Readers not only decode words on a page, but also use knowledge of those words to assess, evaluate and synthesize information (Lesaux, 2012). For academic success, educators must implement instructional approaches that teach both the skilled-based and knowledge-based reading competencies.

Increasing reading achievement of culturally diverse students requires attention to several specific gaps in reading. Lesaux (2012) explained that educators have made gains in teaching phonological awareness; however, McCollen and O'Shea (2005) argued that incorporating culturally diverse materials could improve gaps in phonological awareness, fluency, and comprehension. Culturally diverse materials stimulate interest in students from diverse backgrounds because the text holds meaning to the students (McCollen & O'Shea, 2005). The improved motivation supports multiple reading of text to build phonological awareness and fluency. The researchers explained that incorporating different reading levels with material embedded in culturally diverse themes and relevant experiences enhances comprehension skills by supporting students' understanding of what they are reading. According to McCollen and O'Shea, culturally aware teachers select stories that are relevant to their students' background and experiences. The teachers also help students target relevant themes by stressing story's structures, themes, and plots (McCollen & O'Shea, 2005).

Teachers must also utilize research-based strategies to improve reading. According to the researchers, culturally aware teachers utilize graphic organizers that support students' comprehension and encourage students to paraphrase text into their own

words to support understanding. Teachers should incorporate various strategies such as asking students to illustrate their understanding of text. The researchers encouraged the use of model reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and curing students to link text prior experiences and information. Mnemonics, story maps, and sentence organizers are useful strategies to aid students in processing text for meaningful connections and making inferences (McCollen & O'Shea, 2005). By using these research-based reading strategies, students are able to connect prior knowledge and experience to new knowledge to support reading comprehension.

Application is also important to support reading comprehension for students from culturally diverse background. McCollen and O'Shea (2005) emphasized the use of explicit opportunities for students of culturally diverse backgrounds to apply their experiences and knowledge. The researchers advised that teachers create situations where students have the opportunity to use and build their vocabulary through reading written language from various literary genres and inviting community leaders, role models, and motivational speakers to promote reading success (McColen & O'Shea, 2005). The researchers also suggested that teachers encourage students from culturally diverse backgrounds to read newspapers and journal reading and increase students' computer usage. Lastly, the researchers suggested that teachers allot the appropriate time for reading comprehension activities, utilize small groups, and reinforce students' self-esteem through praise for their reading attempts. By utilizing specific and targeted strategies, teachers can increase reading comprehension for students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Many middle and high school teachers lack the knowledge of how to bridge the gap in reading between Black, Hispanic, and White students. Williams (2014) explained that most secondary teachers lack the preparation in reading instruction that would prepare them in helping struggling readers. One way to begin to close the achievement gap for middle school students is by combining literary instruction with content-based material (Palumbo, 2009). In school surveys and data meetings, many reading teachers in USISD identify students' inability to read as the cause of low achievement in reading; however, analysis of student data supports that most students have basic reading skills but lack background knowledge and vocabulary to comprehend the growing complexity of text they are reading. Palumbo (2009) explained that by spiraling curriculum and teaching across curricula, teachers were able to raise student academic achievement while also increasing curriculum knowledge. The approach of teaching across curricula also improved student motivation (Palumbo, 2009). Palumbo's conclusions suggest that educating teachers in how to spiral content across curricula can spark student interest, raise academic achievement, and close achievement gaps.

Integrated reading comprehension strategies may also improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Bui and Fagan (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study of integrated reading comprehension strategies, which consisted of story grammar instruction and story maps, prior knowledge and predication method, and word webs through culturally responsive teaching framework. The researchers also included multicultural literature and cooperative learning. The researchers found that by incorporating these integrated reading strategies, students improved significantly in word

recognition, reading comprehension, and story retelling which indicated that culturally responsive teaching could significantly improve academic achievement for minority students in reading achievement.

Professional Development

There is a growing amount of research that supports that teacher credentials are not the primary determinate of effective teaching (Cone, 2012). There is also growing research that indicates the need for culturally aware and culturally responsive teaching (McCollen & O'Shea, 2005; Richards et al., 2007; Sparapani et al., 2011). Culturally responsive teaching can improve achievement of minority students and the National Education Association (2005) explained that culturally responsive teaching played a significant role in closing the achievement gap. Thus, professional development that focuses on building teacher cultural knowledge and knowledge of culturally responsive teaching is necessary.

Most teachers do not begin teaching with the necessary competence to successfully teach urban, high-poverty, high-minority students (Reiter & Davis, 2011). The lack of cultural competence increases disruption in the learning and behaviors of minority students and often causes both students and teachers to disengage and quit. Teacher preparation programs focus on child psychology, content, and pedagogy, but high-poverty, high-minority urban schools also require skills and knowledge in cultural competencies related to language learners, special needs students, integrated cultural and content instruction, and behavioral management (Berry, Wieder, & Center of Teaching,

2010). Professional development can be a bridge to build teachers effectiveness in raising achievement and closing achievement gaps in minority students.

Numerous researchers have asserted that professional development can improve teacher cultural responsiveness to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. Cone (2012) investigated one community-based service-learning project of individuals seeking to become teachers and in their preservice years. Results showed that teachers who participated in the community-based service learning developed beliefs complimentary to the description of effective teachers of diverse students that has been supported in literature. Cone's findings help support the idea that the effectiveness of teachers of diverse students can be developed. With targeted and purposeful activities and professional learning, cultural responsiveness to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps can be developed in teachers. Pianta (2011) echoed Cone's finding that professional development could be a powerful tool in closing the achievement gap. Pianta explained that teachers become more effective when professional development provides tailored training, individualized coaching, and observations of effective teachers.

The type of professional development that teachers experience is important to the effectiveness of professional development. Researchers suggested that interactive professional development is amongst the most likely types of professional development to produce gains in improving student learning because teachers are able to learn from their peers and build a professional support group (Berry et al., 2010). In a study of 1,210 teachers and follow-up interviews with 29 participants, Berry et al. (2010) found that teachers felt teacher-driven and ongoing professional development was the most useful.

The researchers also found that teachers supported action research projects that explored differentiated learning and cultural issues in schools and classrooms.

Implications

In this review of literature, I explored the various characteristic attributes, behaviors, and instructional practices of effective teachers. I also discussed the types of professional develop (PD) that support teacher efficacy and the need for culturally responsive PD. The review of literature highlighted the various arguments in research about what makes teachers effective in teaching diverse students and a positive correlation was made between teacher characteristics and practices and student achievement (Roehrig et al., 2012). The purpose of this case study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of PD of middle school reading teachers who were successful in closing the achievement gap while raising student achievement. Gay (2013) maintained that culturally responsive teaching is necessary if educators desire to close achievement gaps and raise student achievement. As a result of this investigation, data led to a project that addressed the development of teacher competencies to build culturally aware and responsive teachers. This study may result in improved teacher self-efficacy and ability to development meaningful relationships with diverse students to close the achievement gap, which may promote positive social change.

Developing a project that shows teachers how to build relationships with students, use their culture as a guide to motivation, and embed culturally based instruction into reading may yield improved student motivation to close the achievement gap and raise

student achievement for students who have been marginalized by their race and socioeconomic background. The review of literature highlighted the importance of culturally responsive teaching, personality characteristics, reading expertise, and engaging PD. The development of the final project was determined by the results of this study and may build teacher self-efficacy while promoting social change. By gaining an understanding of the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of PD of middle school reading teachers who closed the achievement gap through data collection, I identified emerging categories and themes through the analysis process. After analyzing the data collected, I developed a project that addressed the findings of the study.

Summary

The various dimensions of the problem of student achievement and gaps in achievement for minority students with emphasis on Black students in USISD were described in section 1 of this study. The significance of the study for students, teachers, academic leaders, and districts was explained. Social justice is served through equitable education for the success of minority students, lessoning the school-to-prison pipeline that is evident in urban, low-socioeconomic schools. The guiding question for the project study is the following: How can school administrators in high-poverty, high-minority schools hire or develop effective reading and language arts teachers who close the achievement gaps between Black, Hispanic, and White students? The research questions were designed to identify the commonalities between teachers of middle schools in an urban school district who have little to no achievement gaps between Black, Hispanic,

and White students. The questions were designed to understand beliefs, behaviors, and preparations teachers take that support their effectiveness as teachers in teaching the variety of students in their classrooms which attribute to equal achievement. In addition, questions regarding district professional development and teachers' perceptions of professional development effectiveness were explored to determine what the district can do to provide further training and support to teachers in being effective in closing the achievement gap.

In the Review of Literature subsection, the conceptual framework of culturally responsive pedagogy and the implications of culturally responsive teaching were described. The characteristics of effective teachers, the importance of teacher-student relationships, culturally responsive reading strategies, and professional development were examined through various studies. Implications for the project study included goals of supplying recommendations to school administrators for hiring and providing professional development to teachers in order to close the achievement gap.

Section 2 of this study focused on the methodology, including the research design and approach, the criteria for selecting participants, including a justification of the number of participants balanced with depth of inquiry, and the setting, sample, instrumentation and materials, data collection and analysis, and limitations. The project study is described in Section 3 and Section 4 focuses on the reflections and conclusions.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of teachers who had successfully closed the achievement gap in their classroom while improving student achievement for their students. The goal or outcome was to analyze these teachers' characteristics and perceptions for any commonalities in beliefs, values, and instructional preparations to determine what district administrators can do in hiring practices or professional development to either seek or develop teachers to be effective in closing the achievement gaps in reading among Black, Hispanic, and White students.

To explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of professional development, this study focused on three central questions:

- RQ1: What are the inward attributes (i.e., beliefs and characteristics) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student achievement in regards to effective teachers and effective teaching for ethnically and socioeconomically diverse students?

- RQ2: What are the outward strategies (i.e., instructional strategies and classroom management techniques) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student achievement in regards to teaching ethnically diverse students?

- RQ3: What are the perceptions and needs of teachers about the professional development they have received in regards to teaching ethnically diverse students?

In this section, I discuss the methodology used to discover the findings for the research questions. I discuss the 60-minute face-to-face semi-structured interviews and 45-minute observations with eight middle school reading teachers who taught Grades 6-8. These interviews provided information about the teachers' beliefs about teaching low-socioeconomic minority students and their learning, and why they chose to teach in low-socioeconomic schools. I also discuss the insight I gained into the characteristics of teachers who successfully close the achievement gap. The observations provided data on teacher behavior and instructional strategies as they related to teacher-student relationships and reading strategies in support of student learning. Professional development plans and district professional development sessions are also discussed. Additionally, in Section 2, I discuss sampling procedures, data collection and analysis methods, and my findings.

Research Design

The research design and approach used in this qualitative research study was a case study. Quantitative approaches attempt to determine causation and predict similar events in the future, while qualitative approaches contribute to an in-depth understanding of how people interpret their experiences and what attributes they believe contribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative research design is an inductive approach where the researcher observes a phenomenon systematically, searches for patterns and themes, and developments a generalization from the analysis of those themes (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Quantitative studies summarize data numerically usually to a substantial number of participants and do not address how and why

phenomenon occur (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). In this study, I sought to understand the beliefs, perceptions, and instructional practices of reading teachers who close the achievement gap. The subjective nature of participants' beliefs, perceptions, and characteristics could not be measured with standardized instruments. Therefore, I selected a qualitative design for this study because it allowed for a deeper understanding of the research problem and phenomenon of some teachers having the ability to close the achievement gap.

To ensure that a case study was appropriate for this study, I considered and rejected other qualitative design approaches such as ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, and collective case study. Ethnography designs are used to investigate how interactions in a cultural group are impacted or influenced by a larger society (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, ethnography designs take an extensive amount of time with long-term access to the participants where the researcher becomes part of the group being studied (Creswell, 2012), which was impractical for this study. While I sought to understand the beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions of a group of educators who close the achievement gap, I did not have long-term access to the participants nor did I become part of the group. Thus, ethnography was not suitable for the purpose of this study and was rejected.

A phenomenological design is an approach in which the researcher attempts to understand human conditions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) or the essence of the human experience (Lodico et al., 2010), which was not an appropriate design because I sought to understand the beliefs, characteristics, and perceptions of teachers who were able to close

the achievement gap. Ground theory was also considered and rejected because it was not my purpose or goal to build a theory but to understand the nature of a phenomenon. Action research was rejected because I did not use observational protocol to identify a problem and change the action of the participants. Observation in this study was designed to observe practices to assess the behaviors and instructional practices of teachers who closed the achievement gap rather than to change the practices that were observed.

I also rejected a collective case study design because there were not multiple cases but rather one case of teachers bounded by a single phenomenon. Therefore, a case study was the most appropriate design. The case study design approach was used to help me understand and narrate the common characteristics and traits such as beliefs, values, and personalities as well as instructional practices of teachers that closed achievement gaps among Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites from southeastern schools in the district.

Participants

The setting of this study was a large, urban school district, hereafter referred to as USISD (pseudonym). USISD is located in the state of Texas; I specifically focused on five of the district's 42 middle schools. Three of the five schools were predominately Hispanic, defined as over 50%, while two schools were predominantly Black, defined as over 50%. The schools ranged in student population from 700 to nearly 1,100 students. Each selected school had consistent gaps in achievement in Black students compared to the Hispanic and White students regardless of school population or ratio over the past four years in one or more grade levels, while the 2015 state assessment data showed a decline in achievement in most demographic groups in reading.

During the principal approval process, several principals at the selected schools explained that their best teachers voluntarily transferred for the 2015-2016 school year to one of the schools that I selected. This was the result of district initiatives had been established to pay incentives to high-performing teachers who moved to low-performing campuses to help raise student achievement and close the achievement gap. School D (*See Table 1*) was predominantly Black, and district data supported a need for intensive support as students who attended the school had very low achievement in reading on the state reading assessment the past three years and had major behavioral concerns. Table 1 illustrates the demographic information of each selected campus from the 2014-2015 school year, which I used to identify which campuses were selected for participation. The schools were randomly sorted, with the English Language Learner data added to show the significance of gaps in achievement for Black students.

Table 1

2014-2015 Middle School Demographics and State Reading Assessment Passing

School	Population	Passing%	Black	Hispanic	White	ELL
				Number Tested		
A	809	59.6%	51.7% (29)	59.8% (774)	-	51.8% (510)
B	1083	67%	59.7% (191)	67.3% (735)	76.6% (145)	55.4% (388)
C	715	58.6%	54% (411)	64.4% (281)	72.7% (11)	64.7% (187)
D	753	42.8%	42.4% (509)	44% (241)	-	36% (197)
E	834	58.6%	49.8% (203)	61.6% (625)	-	56.1% (433)

Note. ELLs in this population were primarily Hispanic students.

Teachers whose students had a 5% achievement gap or less when comparing Black students to Hispanic and White students, based on state and local 2014-2015 reading assessment data, were the targeted sample to participate in the study. Equity in education, which includes expectations, is important for all students; researchers of culturally responsive pedagogy assert that culturally responsive teachers maintain the same expectations for all students (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The goal of NCLB and Race to the Top was to raise the achievement of all students while also closing the achieving gap(No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002). The goal of this study was

therefore to find educators in the southeastern schools who were effective in closing achievement gaps in reading between Black, Hispanic, and White students while maintaining the same expectations for all students. Targeting teachers who had the lowest gaps in achievement among their Black, Hispanic, and White students while raising student achievement was essential in determining what characteristics are needed for teachers in urban school settings.

All teachers from each of the five middle schools who met participation criteria were invited to participate in the study based on achievement gap measures with at least 10 participants for the study. Although 15 teachers were invited to participate in this study, the number of those individuals who agreed to participate in the study determined the actual sample size. The sample for this project study thus consisted of eight reading and language arts teachers who had demonstrated an ability to close the achievement gap and raise student achievement across five middle schools in the school district and who were recommended by their principals (N=8).

Each participant also completed an online demographic survey, interview, and observation. The demographic survey consisted of questions about race, gender, educational background and training, and childhood socioeconomic experiences. These questions allowed me to identify any demographic characteristics the participants shared that may have contributed to their ability to relate to minority students in order to close the achievement gap; this allowed me to compare their academic and professional background to research-based characteristics of effective teachers.

All of the participants who agreed to participate in the study were female. Only one of the 15 teachers recommended by principals was male, and he did not respond. Eighty-eight percent of the participants identified themselves as Black/African-American, while 12% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic. Participants were also asked their highest degree attained. Fifty percent indicated a bachelor's degree, and 50% indicated a master's degree. Of the participants, 50% indicated that they had taught four or less years, and 12.5% indicated they had taught between 6-10 years. Twenty-five percent of the participants indicated they had taught between 10 to 15 years, and 12.5% indicated they had taught more than 15 years (See Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of Participants' Demographic Information

Gender (%)		Race Ethnicity	Highest Level of Education (%)		Grade Level (%)		Years Teaching MS Reading (%)	
Male	0 (0.0%)	Black 7 (87.5%)	Bachelor's	5 (50%)	6th Grade	1 (12.5%)	1 to 4 years	4 (50%)
Female	8 (100.0%)	Hispanic 1 (12.5%)	Master's	4 (50%)	7th Grade	2 (25%)	5 to 9 years	1 (12.5%)
			Doctorate	0 (0%)	8th Grade	5 (62.5%)	10 or more years	3 (37.5%)

Note: N=8; MS=Middle School.

When asked where the participants obtained their bachelor degrees, 50% indicated a historically Black college or university and 50% were from a historically White college or university. None of the schools were identified as Ivy League. Only 38% of the participants indicated a grade point average at 3.5 or above. Twenty-five percent of the participants graduated with a grade point average under a 3.0.

When asked about teacher certification programs, 63% indicated that they had obtained certification through an alternative certification program and 38% indicated that they had obtained certification through a traditional teaching program. None of the teachers were nationally board certified. Participants were also asked about their

socioeconomic background and type of secondary school they attended. Thirty-eight

percent of the participants indicated they grew up middle class, while 25% indicated they

grew up upper middle class. Twenty-five percent indicated they grew up in a low

socioeconomic household, while 12% stated they grew up in an upper class household.

Fifty percent of the participants indicated they attended urban schools, 38% suburban,

and 12% rural. This information provided me with insight into the participant group, and

allowed me to conclude that socioeconomic background was not an indicator of teacher's

ability to close the achievement gap.

Access to participants. I obtained permission to conduct data collection in

USISD from the district Research Review Board (RRB) in November 2015. To secure

approval, I submitted an executive summary of my study, documentation of completion

of National Institutes of Health (NIH) training, consent from principals and an IRB

approval letter to the Chair of the Research Review Board (See Appendix F). Once I

received IRB approval to conduct the study, approval number 04-20-16-0050008, I

solicited principals and instructional coaches through district email for names of

Reading/Language Arts teachers who had STAAR data averages above the district's

average and whose growth indexes showed those teachers to be effective in growing

student achievement. One campus administrative team requested that I meet collectively

with the recommended teachers to inform them of my study and allow those teachers to

decide if they wanted to participate. I honored the principal's request.

Researcher-participant relationship. Once I received the names of potential

participants from the principals, I worked to establish a researcher-participant

relationship. I emailed a standardized letter of introduction and consent, which included

the required language of the district and Walden University (See Appendix C) to each

potential candidate via district email, obtained through the district internal address book

or campus instructional coaches, explaining the purpose of the study, how the participants

were identified, the data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks

and benefits of participating in the study, confidentiality of participation, and contact

information. I requested potential participants indicate whether they consented by

responding via email. Of the 15 consent forms sent, eight teachers responded with

consent.

Once consent was received, I emailed a request of those who consented to provide

times of availability for a face-to-face interview and subsequent classroom observation.

After reviewing times that were mutually available for the participants and myself, I

emailed the participants who consented within five days of initial contact with their

interview and observational times, and I forward the link to complete a demographic

survey. All eight completed the online survey within two weeks of initial contact. Each

interview began with an informal introduction of myself and to promote a researcher-

participant working relationship, I initiated an unrecorded general conversation not

related to the topic of this project study about their school year overall and the joy of the

school year ending. During two observations, teachers introduced me to their students

while the other six did not. During one observation, students also chose to interact with

me throughout the observation and the participant appeared comfortable with the

interaction.

Protection of participants. Most of the participants scheduled their interviews during their planning periods during the school day. Upon entering the schools for both the interviews and observations, I asked the school receptionists to notify the teachers that I was on campus. The purpose for my visit was kept confidential and not discussed with any office personal. I was the sole researcher in this project study. The identity of the participants, as well as any identifying factors, were kept confidential and stored on a password-protected computer in my home office not accessible to any additional individuals. All electronic data collected from each participant were stored in encrypted files. Encrypting the files ensures that in the unlikely event that my computer is lost or stolen at any time, no third party will be able to read the data. I will store these data for 5-years, per Walden University protocol. After 5-years, I will destroy all electronic and nonelectronic data.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research approaches rely on interviews and observations that do not restrict the views of the participants (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). However, Creswell (2012) also explained that qualitative data collection presents challenges and ethical issues that the researcher must consider when conducting face-to-face interviews or entering a participant's workspace. Thus, I carefully and methodically considered the collection methods within this case study. The purpose of this study was to understand the characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions of middle school reading teachers who were successful in closing the achievement gap while raising student achievement in high-minority, low-socioeconomic areas.

The data for this study consisted of surveys, interviews, observations, and archival data. After the informed consent process, the participants were instructed via district email to participate in an online demographic survey, answering 19 questions related to gender, highest level of education, years teaching middle school reading, other experience teaching reading, and current grade level taught. (See Appendix G) The data collected through the survey allowed for analysis of any demographic similarities. Some researchers have asserted that college attended, subject matter background, pedagogical training, certification, test scores on licensing tests, and experience were all factors of effective teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011; Berry, Daughtrey, & Weider, 2009). The survey data helped me to discern if there were demographic factors and characteristics that were common among the teachers in the district who were identified as effective in closing achievement gaps and raising student achievement and what those characteristics were. These data may indicate a rational for commonality in perceptions, beliefs, and practices.

Interviews. Interviews provide a source of information that cannot be gathered from observations or archival data (Creswell, 2012). The information that cannot be observed includes reasons for behavior, feelings and thoughts, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 2009). One of the most crucial components in conducting a good interview is the construction of an interview protocol (Merriam, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). Using an interview protocol helped to ensure standardization for each interview and helped minimize any anticipated ethical issues, such as confidentiality (Lodico et al., 2010).

The semi-structured interviews were guided by 15 open-ended questions. I met with each participant at the mutually agreed upon time at their assigned school and established a rapport through general introductory conversations not related to the topic of this project study (Lodico et al., 2010). Participants were reassured that all names and identifying information would be kept confidential. I explained the purpose of the project study, the research procedures, and methods to protect confidentiality. I also reminded participants that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence. I included these procedures to ensure all participants felt comfortable throughout the duration of my study and to separate my role as researcher from my role as work colleague.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), good interviews allow subjects to talk freely about their points of view. Each interview was one-on-one and face-to-face, lasting no longer than 60-minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the participants to respond to a series of open-ended questions. I avoided leading questions, multiple questions, and yes-or-no questions (Merriam, 2009). The teachers were asked questions related to the project study research questions in order for me to ascertain their inward and outward attributes and their perceptions of district professional development that supported their ability to work with minority populations and close the achievement gap. A protocol of an established list of questions (See Appendix D) was used with each participant with individual probes being used in an unbiased nature to elicit additional information or get clarification about a response (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

In an effort to make certain I received the type of responses I expected or wanted from the interview protocol and to strengthen reliability, I conferred with two educational experts (one reading specialist/assistant principal and one academic facilitator) prior to IRB approval to review and provide feedback regarding the quality of the interview questions in soliciting teachers' perceptions. The use of two educational expects to review the data collections instrument strengthened dependability that the interview questions would yield information needed to produce a research-based study based on thorough explanations (Lodico et al., 2010). The reading specialist/assistant principal has 13 years of reading experience in teaching and coaching reading teachers in USISD. The academic facilitator has over 20 years of experience in K-12 instruction and coaching. I emailed each expert information regarding the background of the problem, my problem statement, research questions, and interview protocol to use as a guide to provide meaningful suggestions regarding possible revisions to my interview questions. The experts did not identify any issues related to the interview questions as related to the background and problem. Rather, they made suggestions in interview questions clarity and ambiguity. Once those questions were revised, I emailed the questions back to each expert and no further suggestions were requested.

Each interview was numbered to ensure teacher confidentiality. All interviews were audio recorded and labeled with the associated number of each participant. All interview data were transcribed verbatim so that data could be easily coded, analyzed, and stored or retrieved post research (Merriam, 2009). In addition, member checking was used to verify the accuracy of the findings and minimize ethical issues (Creswell, 2012).

All data were kept on my personal password-protected computer and were triangulated with observations and archival documents.

Observations. Observations allow researchers to study actual behavior and record information as it actually occurs (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) noted that observational data present a researcher with a first-person encounter of a phenomenon. However, Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) warned that although observations are a large part of how people learn, researchers must conduct observations in a way that results in accurate, unbiased, and detailed information. Before beginning an observation, a researcher must first determine the degree of involvement he will have in the setting. For the purpose of my study, I conducted eight nonparticipatory observations within each participant's classroom for 45 minutes. For one participant, the 45 minutes amounted to a class period, but for the other seven participants, 45 minutes amounted to only half of a class period. I arrived 5 to 10 minutes before the start of the class period being observed on the agreed upon day, time, and location. Each participant introduced me to their students and sat me amongst them in a desk.

An observational checklist (See Appendix E) based on the research questions was developed to generate data on the types of resources used to teach reading, the instructional strategies used during reading instruction, the language and proximity of teacher and students, the length of the class period, and the number of students in the class. Specifically, the observation checklist addressed how teachers delivered reading instruction, including what scaffolds were used, what, if any, cultural literature was used, and what connections to real-world experiences and relevance were made. The checklist

included how the teachers engaged the students and how the students participated in the classroom. For example, how often did students of different races and ethnicities ask or answer questions, how often did the teacher affirm student behavior and ideas, and how often did the teachers make references to interests and backgrounds of students to motivate and engage the students. The checklist included a measure of how the teachers maintained a culture of respect in the classroom including how the teacher handled discipline, such as what the teacher corrected and how often, what was said to address undesired behavior, and how the undesired behavior and teacher redirection affected the classroom environment. Hughes, Oi-man, Villarreal, Johnson, and Juin-Yu (2012) found that when boys and Black students perceive conflicts with their reading teachers, changes in reading achievement often occurred. The findings in their study was important to this project study because of the possible effects that teacher-student relationships as it pertains to discipline and conflict have on student achievement and student achievement gaps. A reflective journal was used to keep track of data and emerging understandings. A numeric pseudonym was assigned to each observational protocol that corresponded to the interview protocol. Within five days of each observation, I electronically recorded the data in a narrative format within a case study database for coding, analysis, storage or retrieval post research (Merriam, 2009). At the conclusion of the observation, I explained to each participant that a transcribed copy of both the interview and observation would be emailed to them for accuracy.

Documents. In addition, archival documents were requested from each participant. These documents provided insights into the instructional strategies and

activities teachers used in reading instruction throughout the year. In addition, these documents provided me with a rich source of information that strengthened the validity and reliability of data collected in the interviews and observations. I requested that teachers send archival documents to me via email after the observations. Archival documents reviewed included: (a) current school year's lesson plans for each participant, (b) professional development plans for each participant, and (c) district-administered student surveys. Lesson plans supported differentiation and learning activities that contributed to the achievement of minority students. These plans provided insight into the considerations teachers took to prepare for the learners in their classrooms including resources, activities, and pacing. Professional development plans showed what training participants had received or planned to receive in supporting them to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The plans also provided insight into common professional developments related to instruction or student behavior the participants had attended.

When the interviews began, the district released student surveys that recorded student perceptions of their teachers. Each teacher voluntarily and willingly shared their student survey results and areas related to my study as we interviewed. After careful consideration and as a result of so much information about the surveys in the interviews, I emailed each participant and asked that they forward their student survey results to me. After examination of the archival documents, the documents were analyzed and coded for themes and descriptions. These archival data were triangulated with the interview and observation data. All identifiable data, such as names of teachers and schools, were removed from the archival documents.

Role of the researcher. I have been a reading and language arts instructor in the district for 13 years in five schools and three divisions. I have been a reading instructional coach for three years in the district and a consultant in surrounding districts. In this role, I have formed my own ideas about what good instruction is and am well informed on effective teaching strategies that improve student achievement in reading. Specifically, I believe that well-developed lesson plans that involve media, heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping, guided practice, independent practice, and facilitated learning is the most effective instruction for all students. In addition, I realized through the data collection process that I had facilitated and coached three of the eight participants in previous years. My position in the district and knowledge of reading instruction may have directly or indirectly influenced participants' responses or my interpretation of participants' responses.

Reflective field notes include researcher feelings, thoughts, initial responses and interpretations, and reactions to what is discussed and observed during the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers continually monitor their subjective views and bias by recording reflective field notes (Lodico et al., 2010). To monitor any biases I might have, I recorded reflective field notes about my feelings during and after each the interview session and during and after each observation. I took measures to self-evaluate using those field notes. Clarify questions were asked to participants when I recorded feelings of uncertainty and notes were written when I felt a participant was not answering a question. I also used member checks by sending transcribed interviews and

observations to the participants. No data or findings were shared with the principals

during the data collection process or the identities of any of the participants at any time.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data analysis is a highly inductive process that begins with identifying

units in the data that are responsive to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The

inductive process consists of systematically searching and arranging data collected from

transcripts, field notes, and archival data for analysis and interpretation (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2007). In preparation of data analysis, Creswell (2012) wrote that researchers

must transfer spoken data to a typed file. To prepare for data analysis for this study, the

interviews and observational data were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word

document on my computer after each interview. By separating the process of data

preparation and analysis, researcher bias is less likely to influence the study's findings

(Lodico et al., 2010). To ensure accuracy and increase validity of the interview data prior

to analysis, I emailed each participant a copy of their transcript and asked for any

changes, elaborations, corrections they would like to make. None of the participants

opted to make changes. After receiving approval, I began the systematical process of

reading, dividing, and coding the transcribed data.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that certain words, phrases, patterns of

behaviors, and participant beliefs may become visible as a researcher reads. Using coding

categories recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the questionnaire, interview,

observation, and archival data were coded to initiate direction and help to identify themes

by category. The initial categories that were explored came from the review of literature

and included beliefs, motivations, instructional practices and behaviors, and professional development. These categories were reflective of the research questions and corresponded to the interview questions regarding the inward and outward attributes of the participants and their perceptions of professional development.

The interview responses and observation data were broken down by individual teacher beliefs and practices (i.e., high expectations, one-on-one interaction, and student interest) and color-coded. Tally marks were assigned to each subsequent participant's reference to similar or identical terms. The related beliefs or practices were then categorized. For example, positive affirmation, protector, love of students, supplying food, clothing, school supplies were combined to create the category nurturer. The categories with the greatest number of tally marks, indicating a shared belief or characteristics, evolved into themes that addressed the research questions.

The interview transcripts and observation protocols were reviewed numerous times to re-evaluate emerging themes placed under specific categories. By reviewing these data numerous times, themes emerged organically through the inductive process. Notes and reflections were added under each theme. Lesson plans and professional development documents were then analyzed to support or amend emergent themes from the interview transcripts and observations. The questionnaire was evaluated next to determine any common demographic characteristics that may contribute to the shared themes.

Accuracy and credibility. Research is interpretative and as such, researchers should be self-reflective about the interpretations made, how the interpretations are made,

and what prior history influences the interpretations (Creswell, 2012). To avoid personal bias, member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation should be considered to validate the accuracy of findings and strengthen accuracy and credibility (Lodico et al., 2010). In this instance, being an instructional coach and a reading consultant influenced my interpretation of teachers' actions and beliefs as they pertained to reading instruction. In analyzing data and identifying themes to answer my research questions, I engaged in member checking with each participant to ensure my interpretations of the data collected were aligned with their perspectives. Participants reviewed transcripts for accuracy during the data collection stage. Each participant was asked to notify me of any they wanted to make changes, additions, or omit anything in the transcript. None of the participants opted to change, add, or omit any responses.

Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009) also suggested using triangulation to increase credibility and validity. The use of different data sources strengthens the validity of the study because the information draws on multiples sources for information (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation was conducted by comparing all eight interview transcripts, classroom observations, lesson plans, and professional development plans and observations. After completing a narrative draft of my findings, I shared my findings with all participants to ensure my interpretations were accurate and consistent with their perspectives. An external auditor not involved with my study would have been solicited to review the logic of my inferences and accuracy of my themes in the event of any discrepancies. There were no discrepant cases in the study.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this case study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of middle school reading teachers who close the achievement gap while raising student achievement in low-socioeconomic, high-minority middle schools. Semi-structured interviews and observations with eight middle school reading teachers were conducted with each sharing in-depth discussion of their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences working in a low-socioeconomic, high-minority middle school as a reading teacher. In addition, the participants shared an array of examples and details to support their beliefs and opinions when prompted. Lesson plans and district administered student survey results were emailed along with professional development plans. The PD plans were then used to determine what summer professional development teachers attended, and these sessions were observed to understand the participants' perceptions of district-provided support for teachers working in high-minority schools. After the data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed, aggregating my findings allowed me to answer the research questions. Thus, the findings were organized by research question. The combination of teacher responses along with direct quotes contributed to the rich narratives under each research question.

Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question in the study was:

- What are the inward attributes (i.e., beliefs and characteristics) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student academic achievement

in regards to effective teachers and effective teaching for ethnically and socioeconomically diverse students?

Based upon data from the interviews, the participants appeared to care about their students, their education, their families, and their futures. The participants believed that social and emotional learning was necessary in teaching minority students from low-socioeconomic, urban neighborhoods and expressed an importance of nurturing their students to meet their needs. Participant 5 shared, "I teach my students as if I'm teaching my own." Participant 4 explained, "You have to have a nurturing, caring environment with your students, and that's where the mom role comes in because if the students think that you don't care about them as a person, then they start to lose focus and are not interested in what you want them to learn."

The participants also believed effective teachers genuinely loved and cared for students beyond the classroom. Some participants reflected that they were not natural nurturers, but because they genuinely cared about students, they reflected and actively inquired about their students' lives in order to better serve their students. Participant 1 shared, "It took a lot of trial and error, and I had to adjust myself because I wanted to teach. I knew my behavior linked up to their ability to learn, and I wanted them to learn." Another inward attribute was high expectations and student engagement. The participants expected their students to perform at high levels of achievement, engage in dialogue, participate in their own learning, and control their feelings and responses. The participants expressed an appreciation for students talking, questioning, challenging, and interrupting instruction with new ideas rather than a frustration with such behavior.

A third attribute was a motivation or desire to empower low-socioeconomic, minority students to change their circumstances and those of their community. The participants focused as much on teaching the whole child as they did the curriculum. They believed that teachers have a responsibility to teach the whole child and inspire students to be greater than their circumstances. Participant 8 explained, "The students could either go down the right path or the wrong path, and these days there are so many influences that could push them the wrong way." With this desire, the participants possessed cultural awareness and an appreciation of cultural differences.

Lastly, the participants were self-reflective. They had a willingness to change themselves, their beliefs, and practices in order to be effective in the classroom. They believed that teachers who work with minority students must have a mindset to grow culturally and challenge cultural stereotypes. Table 3 lists the themes found in relationship to Research Question 1 and the next section explores each theme.

Table 3

Inward Attributes of Teachers with No Achievement Gap

Major themes	No. of occurrences	% of occurrences
Genuine care for students	8	100%
High expectation and student engagement	8	100%
Motivation to grow the whole child	7	88%
Cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness	7	88%
Reflective and a growth mindset	3	38%

Theme 1: Genuine care for all students. Overwhelmingly, the most common inward characteristic of the participants was genuine care and empathy for their students. Collins and Ting (2014) argued that teachers cannot not properly teach if they do not care. Stronge (2007) explained that effective teachers not only care about their students, but also demonstrate that they care in a way in which students are aware. Researchers have argued that although most teachers genuinely understand the importance of caring and genuinely want to care about their students, they do not know how to connect with them (Sinha & Thornburg, 2012). Every participant in the study was aware of how to connect with students in order to meet their needs. In addition, the participants possessed an understanding of the affect of care and nurture on student academic growth and achievement.

The participants explained that caring about the students was demonstrated inside and outside of the classroom and school. The participants reflected on their practice of providing supplies and basic needs, serving as mentors to address emotional needs, and being active in their lives beyond the classroom. The participants discussed the importance of teaching their students how to cope with their environment, societal issues and stereotypes, perceptions of themselves and their race, and also how to adapt to social environments and build their interactions with others. In addition, each participant believed that nurture and care helped develop strong teacher-student relationships, which they attributed to their ability to manage student academic and social behaviors. Participant 1, 5, and 7 explained that care and nurture helped guide their instructional

practices. Participant 1 explained that she was able to overcome her greatest challenges because of her genuine affection for her students. "I love them. I would say okay, I don't want to hurt them. What do I need to do?" Participate 5 reiterated, "I think being nurturing has helped me in being effective in reaching my students academically." Participant 7 shared, "If we don't build that relationship, how are you going to allow me to help you learn? If you have that trust, you've got them."

Participants 2, 3, and 6 explained that their students were aware that they cared and discussed how this knowledge affected student behavior. Participant 2 shared, "I think that students appreciate the fact that I show interest in what they're interested in. My students know that I care about their learning. I care about them." Participant 3 explained, "I think not giving up on them and being able to wipe the slate clean helps... So, I think some forgiveness maybe." Participant 6 echoed the importance of caring and nurturing her students:

> You have to know what students need and you have to be caring, nurturing, concerned about your students, know what's going on, and get involved. I have been told don't touch the students, don't hug them. My attitude is if I don't hug the child, he or she is not going to get a hug. So, if they're not going to get it at home, why not give them what they need? And it doesn't matter if they're males or females. I don't care. If they need a hug, I'll hug them; and if they do something outstanding, I'm going to let them know... Anything to build them up and make them feel important which they are.

Theme 2: High expectations and student engagement. Another theme that emerged among all the participants was high expectations in student achievement and behavior. All participants attributed their ability to close the achievement gap to high expectations, requiring students to meet standards and engage in their own learning. Participants 1, 2, and 3 shared that demanding excellence in behavior and academics was how they maintained relationships when dealing with challenging and apathetic students. Participate 3 explained, "I'm okay with you not liking what I said or what I'm asking you to do. I'm okay with you being angry, but how you communicate that is what I am most concerned with and communication cannot mean shutting down, ignoring me, or yelling." Participant 1 shared that she demands her students complete her work whether in class or for homework. "I am going to call their parents, demand parent conferences, and require tutoring. You are going to do my work." Each participate maintained an expectation of their students despite student behavior or environmental obstacles.

Reading instruction is more effective when students are actively engaged, such as by annotating texts, responding with questions and inferences, and constantly interacting with each other through classroom discussion (Harvey & Goudvis, 2013). Although minority students associate teacher expectations to rich learning environments (Wilson & Corbett, 2001), teachers who do not understand cultural norms often "teach down" to poor or racial/ethnic minority students (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2014). Muhammad (2015) argued that teachers who work in urban environments often limit or restrict engaging and rich learning environments such as cooperative learning due to a fear of violence, verbal combativeness, and student apathy. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and

8 shared beliefs that students should interact with the text, ask questions, and engage in dialogue. Participant 3 stated that effective teaching is when her students are "interrupting because they want to add substance to the topic, and challenging what I'm saying. Questioning...because it's making them think." Participant 6 shared, "They're able to act it out, show you, give you feedback as to what went on in the lesson." Participant 7 added that effective teaching looks like "kids responding and asking questions rather than just repeating questions that teachers ask." Participant 8 reiterated that in effective classrooms, students are "able to articulate or explain what I am teaching."

Theme 3 - A motivation to grow the whole child. Seven out of eight (88%) participants explained that what drove them to teach in a low-socioeconomic, high-minority area was a desire to change students' mindsets and help the students see their worth and power. Mohammad (2015) argued that communities and schools that teach students at the low end of the achievement gap fail to realize and help students realize that they possess the power to change themselves and their environment. Participant 1 and 8 explained that they grew up in similar environments. Participant 8 explained, "I never saw someone close to my own age or just a younger teacher who would explain things to me. I always had the older, motherly type of teacher. I always thought it would be cool to be a young teacher to kind of help them see that you can do this. You can change. You can get out the neighborhood and do something different." Interestingly, in Participant 8's response, she attributed to her success to teachers who nurtured her, a theme present in all the participants.

Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 felt that minority students in low-socioeconomic environments need encouragement and a belief that they can succeed. Participant 3 shared, "I really want the students to understand that they are brilliant. I want the students to understand that they are not putting in the effort and look at what they can do... Just think if they really understood the value of education, their mind, and what they could do." Participant 4 shared that what drove her to teach in a low socioeconomic, high-minority area was a desire to "make a difference and to make students global, world-wide citizens." Participant 5 admitted that what drove her desire to work in a high-minority, low-socioeconomic school was driven by a speech she once heard. She explained the effect of hearing Congressman Elijah Cummins speak about how we are a product out of expectation not environment. She said, "Hearing that speech and his struggles was a turning point for me. I felt like if they have the same expectations put on them, a student in any area would achieve because it's the expectations."

Theme 4 - Cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness. When discussing their greatest challenge in working in low socioeconomic, high-minority schools, seven out of eight (88%) participants felt cultural awareness and proper cultural responsiveness was their greatest challenge. Cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness consisted of social emotional states of students, building trust within different cultures, communication barriers, and student and family values. Participant 2 explained, "I was not prepared for the emotions of these scholars. I think that one day it just hit me like a ton of bricks, and I literally just cried because it was just so much that students were dealing with and so much that I just had to help them overcome."

Participant 3 discussed her challenge with parents. "I can tell whose parents are doing those things we really need parents to be doing...and because I do home visits and use to work in Home Protective Service, I'm doing parenting classes." Participant 7 shared that it is important to avoid being "judgmental of the kids." She stated, "The easiest way to connect with the community is making sure that you don't make yourself above them including how you speak to these parents. Just being aware of the fact, almost more sensitive to the fact, that you're vocabulary, your demeanor, everything with the kids helps build those connections. Humbling yourself." Participant 5 added:

> What I think helps me here and I think that would help a lot of teachers is to understand our students more because our perspective is different. Just how we look at things is different and that's vital when talking to their parents. I heard a teacher say students don't come to school with pencil and paper, but your hair is always done and you have a brand new pair of Jordan's. Right. Priorities. If their parents do not value education, then they don't see the value...If your value is in what you look like so you don't get bullied, you're going to keep a fresh pair of Js. And I think teachers need to understand that because all of that is a part of teaching. You're teaching them to value education.

Participants explained that if they were not familiar with the culture, they had to learn, adapt, and change demonstrating reflective behavior. Once they were able to become relatable to the students, they were able to establish trust and meet the students' needs.

Theme 5 - Reflective and growth mindset. Although only a few participants spoke directly about the need to be reflective or have a growth mindset, this theme derived organically through my personal notes and analysis of the interview transcripts. The novice participants constantly discussed their shortcomings and how they had to adjust for their students. Participant 1 stated, "I knew that they needed me to be more than just a drill sergeant. So, I had to adjust myself only because I wanted to teach." Participant 2 asserted, "You have to be able to live with a growth mindset. It's almost impossible to think that you can do the work on a minority campus without having a growth mindset." Participant 5 disclosed,

> My background is different from theirs and that's obvious. They see that very quickly. So, there was little trust at first. They thought I was disconnected...It wasn't until the students saw a different side of me by accident and you know, even in that, even still in that situation, I use as a learning example to show how you should carry yourself even when you're wrong.

Participant 2 also reiterated that teachers need to have the "ability to see yourself because you first have to realize your own faults...it's never the child's fault. The class is out of control? What is the teacher doing? You have to be able to not be afraid to see yourself, just accept it, and stand in it."

Research Question 2

The second research question in the study was: What are the outward strategies (i.e., instructional practices and classroom management) of teachers with little to no achievement gaps and high student academic achievement in regards to teaching

ethnically diverse students? To answer this question, I divided the outward strategies into categories: Instructional Practices and Classroom Management.

Eight 45-minute observations were conducted to support data obtained through the interviews (See Appendix E). The observations were conducted the day after each interview and occurred two weeks before the end of the school year. Observation data were analyzed, categorized, and coded to triangulate themes in regards to instructional practices, classroom management, and teacher interactions.

Table 4

Outward Strategies of Teachers With No Achievement Gap

Category	Thematic Category	Strategy	# of occurrences	Frequency of occurrences
Instructional				
	Research-based reading strategies			
		Discussion and writing	8	100%
		Graphic organizers	8	100%
		Modeled instruction	8	100%
		Multiple intelligence	8	100%
		Student interests and real-world connections	8	100%
	Relevance, student-interest, and culture		6	75%
	Student Engagement		8	100%
Classroom management				
	Well-planned, structured assignments with clear expectations		8	100%
	High-expectations in a semi-structured environment		8	100%
	Positive reinforcement and strong teacher-student relationships		8	100%

In addition, to reduce bias in my analysis of the interview and observational data and to corroborate my interpretations, participants were asked to submit a weekly lesson plan previously taught during the year. Lesson plans were reviewed to identify any common instructional strategies and activities as it pertained to teacher instructional planning. These strategies and activities were coded and placed in the following categories:

1. Modeled Instruction

2. Graphic organizers

3. Technology

4. Collaboration and Discussion

5. Guided Practice

6. Writing

7. Peer teaching

8. Connection to Student Experience and Prior Knowledge

9. Multiple Intelligences

10. Higher-order and Critical Thinking Questions

11. Standards-based instruction

12. Authentic Assignment Tasks

13. Assessments (Teacher or Student)

The categories were triangulated with themes based on insights from the participants during their interviews and observed practices during the observations. The lesson plans complemented the interview and observation data in that it allowed me to

analyze resources and strategies the participants selected when planning their instruction. I was able to view evidence of strategies used to engage the students and examine how teachers built upon students' prior experiences to support the curriculum. Overall, I found that the lesson plans supported the themes identified in the interview transcripts and observation protocol.

Instructional Practices

   Theme 6 - Evidence of research-based reading strategies. Based on the data obtained through teacher interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plans, teachers who were able to close the achievement gap provided highly structured lessons that were clear, concise, and relatable. The teachers developed lessons that were standard-based with activities that were aligned and scaffold to support students' mastery. Analysis of the interview, observation, and archival data showed that while a variety of instructional strategies to support students' understanding of reading standards were written into lesson plans and observed, the teachers often failed to report most of the strategies they used when teaching reading.

   Discussion and writing. Discussion and writing were the core strategies of student engagement on each lesson plan, and the teachers shared an inner belief that effective teaching was students collaborating, giving feedback, and challenging information. However, when specifically asked what reading strategies they used, only one teacher referred to discussion or writing as a strategy even though every lesson plan submitted incorporated student discussion and writing throughout the lesson cycle. Each lesson plan submitted had essential or leading questions guiding instruction and each

lesson plan consisted of embedded critical thinking questions. During observations, students were grouped and often told to confer with their peers. In Participant 1's lesson plan, she incorporated a Socratic Seminar. It is not clear why teachers failed to state that they used questioning and discussion as reading strategies, but they all incorporated the practice in their lessons.

Graphic organizers. Another strategy that teachers did not mention but utilized was graphic organizers. Graphic organizers were seen throughout the lesson plans and often in the observations. Participant 1 explicitly stated, "I don't really like or use organizers personally because they remind me of elementary school." However, during her observation, the students used a chart to organize their research. Participant 4 used a Venn diagram in her lesson plan, but did not mention organizers as a strategy when asked. Participant 7 used a plot diagram in her lesson plan to help the students summarize the plot in order to synthesize information.

Modeled instruction. Modeled instruction was also a strategy that was not mentioned in the teacher interviews, but was evident on the lesson plans. Participant 5 modeled how to begin a writing assignment. Participant 8 modeled reading of a poem to her students and how to complete a TP-CASTT, an acronym meaning Title, Purpose, Connation, Attitude, Shift, Title, to guide students through an analysis of a poem. Participant 1 modeled how to annotate a text's plot development in order to analyze how characters' internal and external responses develop the plot. It is not clear why the teachers did not mention these strategies; however, my theory is that some teachers do not know the labels of the strategies and approaches they use.

Multiple intelligence strategies. One strategy that the participants did mention that was also observed in their instruction and evident in the lesson plans was the use of multiple intelligence strategies and technology. Music and videos were frequent tools used to help students comprehend text. Participants 2 and 3 stated they used songs to explain concepts in a way that their students understand. Participant 3 explained, "It's almost like sliding the content in there on them and the students don't realize the difficulty of the skill." The participants used video clips in their lesson plans to help build students' background knowledge before reading.

Student interest and real-life connections. The most frequent strategy the teachers reported using was generating student interest by making the content relatable and having the students to make real-life connections. Participant 4 explained, "You have to incorporate the real world into your content to make that bridge with them." Participant 2 shared, "You can incorporate reading with anything and every chance I get, I try to pull something else. How can I make this real-life for the kids?" Participant 1 added, "I use real-life examples to teach students difficult concepts." The lesson plans complemented teachers' reported practices. Throughout the lesson plans, real-life scenarios were used to support students' understanding of concepts including point-of-view, drawing conclusions, and conflict.

Lesson plans. Evidence of effective teaching strategies includes setting objectives, cueing questioning, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, and summarizing and note taking (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Each participant's lesson plan identified the Texas Essential

Knowledge and Skill that drove the instruction and had an aligned learning objective for the day. Teachers often began their lessons with an essential or leading question. Cues and questioning were also found throughout the plans. For example, to get the students to understand the significance of internal and external responses of characters, Participant 1 began by asking the students, "How does an author make a story seem real?" Participant 4 asked a series of questions during the exploration section of her lesson: "What do you think the above quote means? Why? What do you think that Mr. Frost is trying to tell us about poetry? Do you think the language of the poet affects the poem? Why or why not?" In her lesson on how to synthesize and make logical connections between texts, Participant 5 asked the essential question, "Do all countries view independence the same way?" She also used cueing such as "What effect do the photograph and map have on your understanding of the article?" Participant 8 asked her students, "How does the author's use of language influence the mood of the poem?"

Participants also used nonlinguistic representations such as graphic organizers to aid understanding of content. Participant 8 used a TP-CASTT organizer. Participant 4 used a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the characteristic, purpose, and forms of poems. Participant 5's lesson plan called for students to record their finding on a chart as they read. In addition to graphic organizers, Participant 3 used student models for students to convey what they learned about memoirs. Participant 2's lesson plan called for visual cues, supplemental aids, visuals, word banks, and stations.

Each participant included cooperative learning and writing into their lesson plan. Participant 2 used cooperative grouping to assess students understanding and

incorporated peer teaching in those groups. Participant 4 used cooperative learning during reading where the students read and worked together answering guided questions. Participant 1 included a Socratic Seminar. Students answered open-ended questions either by short answer response, writing about topics that related to the text topic, or developing their own poem or paper. Participants used the writing tasks for a variety of reasons including supporting students' background knowledge, inciting student interests about the topic to be read, and checking for understanding. Other writing examples included note-taking and summarizing text.

  Interviews. Participants reiterated the importance of learning styles when considering instruction during reading. Participant 2 explained that she used music as a tool for teaching poetry. "I use music. We immediately start off with Jay-Z and Justin Timberlake's 'Holy Grail'. Then we check out Nikki Minaj. Then we go old school. We listen to some Chaka Khan." Participant 3 explained, "I like to use videos and songs for those topics that may be a little more difficult for the students. I also try to stay away from the textbook." Participant 6 shared that she tries to plan lessons that are "hands-on" where "students are talking to each other." Participant 7 discussed teaching reading by treating "stories like a movie." Participant 8 expressed that she includes "daily discussion questions" and tries to include "video clips and do Power Points."

  Theme 7 - Relevance, student interest, and culture. Another theme that emerged was relevance to the students, student interest, and cultural strategies in planning and implementing reading instruction. Participant 8 explained the she has to "make students see themselves in the story or be able to relate to it or make real-life connections

to it." Participant 4 echoed relevance stating, "Everything you do, you want to make a real-world connection to it and you want to keep abreast to the students' environment and what's current, so they can connect to what you are trying to get accomplished." Participant 5 explained she tries "to pick things that I think they would like." During the interview, Participant 3 also demonstrated how she uses cultural chants and beats to engage her students and grab their interest. She explained she ensures that students are "learning the concept in a way that speaks to them." Participant 2 shared, "I'm going to present to you Edgar Allen Poe, but I'm going to make it interesting for you because I'm going to read a part with you, and I am going to get into it with you and make it interesting and memorable for you so that you don't feel like you can't read it." Fun was a frequent description of lesson implementation described by the participants. Participant 3 explained, "Learning should be fun." Participant 6 stated that she looks for materials that are interesting because she likes to try to "make the lesson fun."

Lesson plans showed evidence of the utilization of multiple resources to stimulate interests and support understanding of the skills. Music and videos were frequently found within the lesson plans to introduce or expound on ideas. Reading selection choices varied with many not culturally related to the students. However, the plans called for questions that would tap into students' prior knowledge and experience as a way to help students understand the perspective of the speaker or character in the texts. Often, teachers also used conflicts found in the text selections as anchors to show students why certain conflicts occurred and how to handle those issues in real-life. For example, Participant 1 used role-play to help students understand the significance of point-of-view

and how point-of-view affects the way we respond to one another. She wrote in her lesson plan, "Many times the conflicts we experience in our own lives result from experiencing things in a different way from another person. To see how this works, we are going to do some role plays." The lesson plan called for the students to take the perspective of various characters, and then discuss how they personally related to each perspective. After defining a memoir to her students, Participant 8's lesson plan called for the students to write about their most memorable experience.

Real-life and relatable instruction was also evident in text selection. Participant 2 used text selection as a way to generate high interest and began instruction with a probing question, "If you could change one thing about your community, what would it be and why?" The text selection chosen was one centered on cultural issues similar to the students' experiences. Participant 5 also chose a real-life topic to teach concepts. The students read about independence, terrorism, and the life of teens affected by those two ideologies. During the observations, three teachers engaged their students in research or a project study where the students explored issues that were prevalent in today's society. In her study of the Holocaust, Participant 8 presented relatable issues and behaviors of teens to allow for background knowledge to help students understand motives and draw conclusions.

Theme 8 - Student engagement. Although a variety of instructional lessons occurred during the observations including research, a Holocaust study, and test preparation, there was a high level of student participation and engagement within each

lesson. The level of freedom and movement varied from participant to participant; however, all students showed interest and were involved in collaboration and discussion.

Participant 4, 6, and 7 were involved in test preparation for the district's exams. Students discussed their answers to questions and the textual evidence they used to support their answers. The teachers provided one-on-one support when needed, but students drove the discussion beyond the guided questions. Students sat in rows in Participants 6 and 7 rooms, but collaborated with a peer that sat next to them. In Participant 4's room, students sat in groups of three or four to collaborate and discuss their answers. These classes had student engagement as it related to active participation, questioning, and feedback.

Participant 1, 3, and 5 conducted project-based learning centered on high-interest topics. In Participant 1's classroom, one student inquired, "What is feminism?" Another student asked, "Where are we going to apply what you've told us to write? " Students moved freely to different groups to collaborate and discuss their findings as they completed their project. In Participant 3's classroom, students critiqued and corrected each other as they shared writings from their memoir. When students asked the teacher questions, the teacher responded, "Did you talk to a partner?" Most of the questions and comments from the students in this classroom centered more on affirmation or to sustain the teacher's attention. "Does mine (assignment) look fine?" and "How did we do?" The teacher responses varied with, "What is it that you want from me?" or "Figure out what you can do and cannot do and fix it." In Participant 5's classroom, the students conversed with the teacher about facts they found during their exploration. The students mostly

collaborated with each other, asking and answering questions as the teacher walked the room providing one-on-one feedback. When the students had questions, they frequently walked up to the teacher and posed their specific questions for individual guidance. Students in all three classes asked questions and shared findings with the teacher for feedback and affirmation.

Participant 8's students were reading a unit about the Holocaust. The class began very teacher-centered with model reading and shifted to a reading strategy called cold calling, where the teacher called on nonvolunteers. Next, the participant posed a question and had the students answer the questions in writing. Students were quiet, but shard out freely in discussion. Everyone appeared on-task and the teacher paced the room checking answers and keeping time. Students were compliant but did not appear engaged, so the teacher made an adjustment. She posed another open-ended question related to teens and parents during the Holocaust. She had students to stand and assemble themselves into groups with like answers. Once in those groups, the teacher had each group to share out their answers and debate. This shift improved student engagement and students began to generate discussion and questions for the teacher. The topic became relatable and the student interests improved.

Participant 2 used a variety of strategies to engage the students in her lesson. Collaborative learning was used to help students identify the elements of plot in a story. Most groups sat together in arranged desks while others chose to sit on the floor or stand. During the collaborative learning process, it was evident the teacher had paired some groups by ability. She worked solely with one group where she provided individual

support by asking specific questions based on answers provided from the group. "How do you know who Tea is?" Student answered and the teacher reiterated, "In this first paragraph? Where did you see that?" The student then used textual evidence to explain her answer to which the teacher pointed out, "but Tea is spelled like a cup of tea. So, our exposition is going to have what added to it? What are three things that the exposition is going to introduce?" The teacher then had the students in the group read aloud another segment of the story to determine what information they learned from this segment. When the students came to a significant part of the story, the teacher interjected, paraphrased the section, and asked, "What does that sound like?" When the student went to explain what the sentence was saying, the teacher rephrased her question, "What element does that sound like?" While Participant 2 worked with this group, the other students were actively discussing the assignment and determining the plot elements. Students were allowed to express their understanding using language they felt would best express their thoughts. One student defined "rising action" as "the point when everything gets juicy."

No redirection was given during the assignment and every student was actively participating. Students held each other accountable and corrected one another without teacher warning. This section focused on the instructional practices of the participants. The next section discusses classroom management attributes the participants possessed related to Research Question 2.

Classroom Management

Based on observational data, the teachers had established rules and procedures. In each classroom, the students knew what to do upon entering the classes, and the teacher had the assignments ready for distribution. Transitions from one activity to the next were smooth. Teachers used timers or for one, a whistle, to call students back to attention after activities. Resources and materials were prepared and ready for each activity and there was no loss of instructional time in any of the classrooms. While some teachers allowed more freedom of movement, talk, and technology than other teachers, the students were all on-task and very little redirection occurred.

Teachers reported that structure and consistency helped prevent behavioral problems. Participate 3 shared, "I can be a stickler. My students will tell you that I'm strict. But I am a firm believer that kids need structure, and I think the students with whom I have the most struggles, are those who need the most structure." Participate 7 explained, "This group of kids need structure. They are not afraid of me or anything like that. They respect me. My classroom is structured." However, Participant 8 clarified that structure and strictness is not synonymous with being mean. "Being mean doesn't work for me, personally, that doesn't work at all. I've tried being mean but the students automatically put their guard up." Participant 1 added that her students checked out early in the year because she was more like a drill sergeant. "I was too rough on them. They didn't even want to be in here."

The teachers reported that when they did have behavioral concerns, office referrals and suspension were not their first options. Instead, the participants relied on the

relationships they had established to correct student behavior. Participant 2 discussed how knowing the needs of her students helped her to address behavioral problems. She explained that some students needed the nurturing of a mentor or "big sister," while other students sometimes needed time to go to teachers they had established a stronger relationship with to help the student cope. She explained that there were other moments where she pulled students next to her to help them correct their behavior. Participant 4 discussed that she also uses nurture as a means of correcting behavior. "When you know your students and they know you care about their future success and that they can talk to you, they're comfortable with approaching you. That gets them back on track so that you can cover the academic side." Participant 5 echoed the responses saying that she spends a lot of time with her students who misbehave. "We're going to build each other up. I challenge them to work on communicating, being good listeners in a healthy way."

During the observations, very few of the teachers had to redirect their students. Most redirection was given from peer to peer interaction. Students held each other accountable. In the classrooms where there was more freedom, teachers used classroom consequences to help generate student accountability. Participant 3 reminded the students that if she had to correct off-task behavior, the students would lose the opportunity to complete their projects in class, and the presentations would begin. Participant 1 used students' desire to listen to their iPods to help students monitor each other. However, because the assignments were structured and the pace very tight, students had little opportunity to engage in off-task behavior. Participant 2 shared, "If the class is out of

control, what is the teacher doing? Were the students not adequately prepared for the work that was given to them? Are they bored?"

Theme 9 - Well-planned, structured assignments with clear expectations.

Although the assignments varied and the level of teacher-led verses student-led instruction varied, all participants had well-planned assignments and activities prepared for the students. Resources were readily available and little instructional time was loss. When Participant 1 entered her classroom, she greeted her students and began to discuss the assignment. Students were assigned to work on a social justice research project where they had to report about one issue that was prevalent in the 21st Century. Students were given a rubric and told to copy the chart that was displayed on the board. The teacher assigned each group a laptop and reminded them of their project's presentation format. An example of an electronic presentation similar to what the students were assigned to complete was displayed and discussed. The teacher grouped a set of students that had been absent and missed the initial lesson so that she could support them in completing the assignment.

Students in Participant 3's class were completing a 6-word memoir project that was to include a poem, an image, vivid verbs, and correct punctuation. The students were lined up around the room with poster boards already hanging on the wall for them. Materials such as markers, highlighters, pictures, and laptops were readily available in the middle of the classroom. The teacher explained that any questions the students had would first need to be addressed with their partners. She also reminded them to ask their classmates nicely to use class provided supplies they wanted to use.

In Participant 5's classroom, students worked in pairs completing a research assignment about current events affecting their community in order to write a persuasive paper where they took a stand. The teacher provided the students with outlines and laptops, and modeled how to develop the outline. Participant 5 called the students to attention by standing on a chair where she discussed student ideas and allowed the students to share their own ideas. Participant 8's students worked on a Holocaust unit where the students were provided a reading packet that included a Read, Think, and Explain section. The teacher began by ensuring that all students had their resources and the teacher used two reading strategies, cold calling and popcorn reading, to engage students during reading. Students stopped after a few paragraphs and answered questions about the text structure. The students were required to explain and support their answers using textual evidence. This class was more teacher-driven where the teacher frequently asked guiding questions. The students answered and the teacher expounded on their answers.

Participant 2 began her lesson with a test preparation bell-ringer, but quickly and smoothly transitioned into the lesson by having one student collect assignments while she distributed the next activity. She had the students read the posted objective silently, and then asked the students to explain what they would be learning for the day to a neighbor. In order to get students to understand the concept of plot, the teacher had divided a story into segments and provided students with strips labeled with the plot elements and emojis that correlated with features of the elements. For example, she used a house emoji for setting and an angry face emoji for conflict. Students worked in groups to determine

which strip identified each segment, and the teacher asked guiding questions to support understanding. As the students worked in groups, the teacher informed them of how much time they had remaining keeping the pace of the classroom moving fluidly with no waste of instructional time. Once the activity was completed, the teacher moved into another activity called "Keep It or Junk It" where the students had to read and answer questions as a group. Clear instructions were presented, a check for understanding of the instruction was conducted, and a time frame of seven minutes for each question was provided. The participants whose students engaged in test preparation had reading passages on their desks with assigned guided questions. The teachers used a timer to guide reading pace and when time was up, students conversed with their reading partners before discussing their answers in whole group discussion.

The implementations of the lessons were fluid. During the observations, the teachers clearly presented what the students were expected to learn and explained to the students how they would demonstrate their learning. The teachers knew their students' abilities and had purposefully homogenous groups. Checks for understanding were frequent and students were held accountable to the task assigned. There were very few times when students asked questions that focused on directions. The students were clear on their assignments.

Theme 10 - High expectations in a semi-structured environment. Although teachers desired their lessons to be engaging, relevant, and fun, each teacher spoke directly to high expectations and the importance of a structure in the classroom. A semi-structured classroom consisted of procedures but student freedom in movement and

discussion. Participant 3 explained, "I expect a lot. I have high expectations and I think it's okay to have high expectations and communicate those high expectations, stick to and demand that the students not just meet them but you need to go beyond those high expectations." Participant 4 stated that at the beginning of the school year, "You lay down the foundation of what you're expectations are and then you ask the students what they expect from you." Participant 6 shared, "I have four rules and 16 procedures." Participant 7 offered advice, "I would say you have to be firm. I mean you don't have to be an extremely strict teacher, that comes with time, but you have to be firm and you have to be consistent."

Theme 11 - Positive reinforcement and teacher-student relationships.

Participant 1, 3, and 5 conducted project-based learning centered on high-interest topics. There was greater freedom in these classrooms where students were allowed to move around without permission and talked freely across groups. The noise levels in these classes were loud, but the teachers rarely seemed to be affected. In fact, Participant 5 gave no redirection to her students. Instead, she used positive affirmation to motivate students to stay on task. For example, she walked past one student and began reading her paper. "I love it! You're working hard." She praised. For another student, she affirmed, "I'm proud of you. You're going to get an A this six weeks." The teacher smiled and spoke softly to each student always beginning with a positive affirmation before addressing how the students could improve their papers.

Based on my observation, the classroom environment for each participant was calm and easy-going. Positive affirmation was given rather than reprimand, and when

student behavior was directly addressed, there was a since of virtue and moral attached to the lecture. In Participant 5's classroom, students listened to music on their iPods and spoke with their teacher freely and jovially. Even when the teacher spoke with the students in whole group, it seemed very informal and conversational. She would climb onto a chair and addressed the students, holding a conversation as she guided them through their assignment. Participant 3 also used positive affirmation and spoke to each of her students with a smile. Logic was used as a form of redirection. "Is this the best use of time? You have 25 minutes to get your project completed," she asked one student who was off-task. For another student, she used morale to redirect. "I told you five minutes ago to spit out your gum," she said with a smile. "Integrity," she continued and walked away. When she wanted to address the entire class, she used a whistle to call the students to attention. There was freedom to talk, move, laugh, and play as long as work was being completed. There was also an establishment of peer monitoring to manage the class. Participant 3 told students to monitor each other, making sure that their classmates were on-task. She explained that if students became off task, their time would be cut short and the presentations would begin. Students respectfully told their peers to get on-task.

During most observations, students were smiling and laughing the entire time I was present. The environment seemed safe for students to learn from each other and critique one another. Although the teacher and students frequently engaged in students' dialect and street colloquialisms in Participant 3's classroom, students were extremely articulate and felt very comfortable code-switching. There was a sense of ownership and pride in the classroom, and also a sense of confidence. In fact, the students spoke to me

numerous times, sang for me as they completed their assignment, and asked my opinion during peer discussions. They appeared to genuinely enjoy the class and their teacher.

Participant 1 also appeared to have a good relationship with her students. When I entered her room, the students were extremely quiet. The participant was on duty in the hall. When I commented that they were so quiet, they responded, "We don't want to get into trouble." Upon Participant 1 entering the room, the atmosphere shifted. Students surrounded the teacher and joked with the teacher. Students talked freely in their groups and were free to move the room. I observed two incidences where the participant redirected the students. The first time she responded after students were not prepared. "Come on!" She said to one student. "Do that the first five minutes." The second time Participant 1gave redirection, it was for the entire class. She used a countdown to get the students quiet in order to remind them of her expectations and the goal of the assignment. The students played with each other as they worked and asked if they could listen to music. The participant explained, "You give me work, I'll decide whether to let you listen to your music." The teacher called her students names of adorations such as "Baby," and "Beautiful." The participant did appear to lose patience with students when they appeared not to comprehend what she was stating. "Do not give me general questions. Be specific. What do you not understand?" But students appeared to enjoy their teacher as observed through the hugs and dialogue. They also appeared to have some uneasiness that seemed related to her impatience when they did not understand or did not meet her expectation. However, some of the students seemed comfortable to express their feelings to Participant 1 stating, "Ms., please be patient."

Participant 8 also smiled and joked with her students. When students moved into groups, the engagement improved and students began to challenge the teacher academically. "Where are you trying to take us presenting us with the fun stuff that the Nazi's did with the youth?" One male student inquired. The teacher asked, "Why do you think the Nazi's did this?" Another male student responded, "To appeal to the youth." The teacher posed questions and explained content through the lens of a teenager. For example, when the students read about some teenagers turning in their parents to the Nazi's, she posed the question, "How many of you would do this to get back at your parents for something?" Some students raised their hands while others laughed. There was no redirection given within the 45-minute observation. Students were respectful and on-task. Participant 8 spoke to her students in a calming voice and with a smile. Her presence was nonauthoritative and friendly. Students were passionate during the discussion about their answers when the participant stated they were wrong, and once the teacher humorously responded, "Are you bitter?"

Post interview, Participant 8 explained, "I allow students to respectfully express themselves." She explained that she tries to make her students feel comfortable and shared that "discussion is where learning takes place." The students appeared to enjoy the classroom and laughter occurred often as well.

Participant 2's students also showed a strong, protective relationship with their teacher. Students were allowed to complete activities on the floor, in their desks, or standing. The students often corrected their own noise level. "Stop being loud," one student told a member of her group. The students appeared to enjoy the class and were

laughing and smiling throughout the observation. Discussion between groups and the teacher were observed. When a student shared a correct analysis, Participant 2 called on the students to give their classmate "two claps and a dab," to which the students responded. The teacher embedded cultural trends such as the "dab" into the lesson.

Participate 4, 6, and 7 were the veterans in the group. They were in test preparation and there was also no redirection in either class. While students smiled, there was less freedom and a sense of more strictly followed rules and procedures. The students spoke softly to each other and spoke to the teacher when directly addressed. The participants took more of an observatory role with their students and would say something jovial to the students on occasion. However, the relationship observed appeared more authoritative. The students would smile but would not engage in friendly banter back and forth with the teacher as observed in the more novice teachers' classrooms.

Though the atmosphere in Participant 4, 6, 7's classes felt more authoritative, there seemed to be a protective, motherly vibe in the room. Students were genuinely respectful and the participants appeared to have a genuine concern for the welfare of their students. Participant 4 stated to one student, "Don't do that." Participant 7 had one student beside her that she allowed to sleep. "This is not her norm, but I know what she is going through at home." In Participant 6's room, a student proudly showed her National Jr. Honor's Society metal to which the teacher responded, "I am so proud of you." Like the other participants, the moods in their classrooms were calming. The students were

articulate and self-monitoring. There was no redirection in either of the classrooms during the 45-minute observation.

   District administered student surveys. While I was in the process of collecting observational data, the district released to teachers their student surveys, which addressed the following categories:

   1. Classroom Environment

   2. Expectations and Rigor

   3. Pedagogical Effectiveness

   4. Student Engagement

   5. Supportive Relationships

   The participants each discussed and shared their overall student survey results in their post observation interviews. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers scored above the district's average of 69%. Only one teacher scored below 70%, which she attributed to being too tough and mean at the beginning of the year and she felt that caused the students to misinterpret her intentions for them. She expressed that the data were "a learning tool to help me understand what I need to work on within myself. I don't want my student to see me as a person that doesn't care. I love each and every one of them and it's important to me that they know that. This hurts my heart." The surveys corroborated what was observed in most classrooms and supported participant interview beliefs about the importance of teacher-student relationship.

Research Question 3

The third and final research question in the study was: What are the perceptions of teachers about the professional development they have received and need in regards to teaching ethnically diverse students? Based on the data obtained through the teacher interviews and observations of the professional development sessions from the professional development plans, on average, the teachers believed that professional development provided by their campus leaders were more effective than what they received district-wide or region-wide. However, many of the teachers expressed that professional development has not helped them to work in low-socioeconomic, high minority schools. The teachers expressed a need for more tailored professional development that meets the needs of both novice and veteran teachers as well as their instructional environments. The teachers believed that teachers in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools need professional data centered in culturally responsive pedagogy, socioemotional learning, and growth mindset.

Based on the teachers' professional development plans, the district offered courses that appeared to be helpful in meeting the needs of teachers. However, one of those training sessions, which contained elements of research-based approaches to build teacher capacity in working with ethnically diverse students, was not designed to train teachers how to become culturally responsive, but instead to inform the teachers of the district's educational framework and goals. In addition, the district expectation of culturally responsive instruction shifted the responsibility of cultural knowledge onto the

students where teachers focused on the students learning about other cultures instead of teachers understanding and using students' cultures to help the students learn.

In addition, many of the characteristics, strategies, and goals the district presented were characteristics the teachers in my study possessed both inward and outward. This explained the teachers' perspectives about a lack of differentiation of professional development received. Participant 8's explained, "I would go to sessions, but it would be stuff I already knew. It was kind of new 'teacherish'." This perspective was shared by several of the participants who reported that professional development was good for new teachers but did not meet their needs. Participant 6 shared, "I would say the district's professional development is good for new teachers, probably very beneficial." However, even teachers with 5 years or less teaching experience reported that professional development in the district had not helped them to be successful. They reported that either guidance from their colleagues, instructional coaches and administrators, or previous profession contributed more to their success with working with minority students and helping them to close the achievement gap.

In another session attended by the teachers, the professional development provided meaningful strategies to incorporate rigor. A new rigorous approach to building vocabulary was practiced and received good response from the attendants of the session. However, many attendants voiced concern about the academic level of the material, but the presenter failed to consider the challenges presented in certain schools or offer teachers ways to differentiate the strategies being presented for students that many of the participants in the session serve even when directly asked by the attending teachers.

Participant 2 reported in her interview that her issue with professional development was that "It's not tailored to working in high-minority schools." Thus, teachers believed that the district needed to provide more specific and tailored training to help teachers work with minority students in order to close the achievement gap.

Theme 12: Campus professional development meets the needs of the novice teacher. Many teachers identified campus-based professional development as supporting their needs instructionally, but those professional developments varied in context by schools. Some of the professional development included:

1. Writing

2. Growth-Mindset

3. Self-Reflection and Accountability

4. Building Vocabulary using Tier One and Tier Two Words

5. Critical Thinking

6. English as a Second Language (ESL)

7. Student Engagement

Novice teachers were more likely to acknowledge usefulness of campus-based professional development. Veteran teachers often mentioned a lack of tailoring of professional development for those teachers who were abreast of effective instructional practices common in literature. Participant 3 explained that her experience in social service prepared her more to work with diverse students than any professional development she has attended. "I worked with adult training and I was in social service. That is what prepared me to work with diverse students." Participant 4, who was also a

veteran teacher, explained that she gained more support through collaboration with her peers. "How are your students responding to what you're trying to teach them? Just collaborating with my teammates." Participant 6, a 32-year veteran in education, admitted professional development had not offered her much in support although she did clarify that she was open to learning. "It's like what else can I learn?" She explained. She stated that when she does encounter meaningful training, she has to tailor it to meet the needs and challenges of the students for whom she teaches.

Theme 13: District professional development does not support teachers in closing the achievement gap. When asked specifically about their perceptions of district professional development, participants were initially hesitant to share their opinions or criticize the district. Some whispered while some confirmed if I wanted honest opinions. Some praised the district, but clarified that professional development had to be altered to fit their needs. After allowing them to talk through their initial fears and doubts, the participants began to share. Participant 2 explained, "I think the district does a good job, but I think they have a lot of work to do. The district has given me things that are not necessarily common knowledge, but it's not tailored to this work." Participant 1 shared, "As far as the district wide PD, I don't really feel like they assisted me." Participant 3 shared, "I've been to a lot of trainings, and they try to talk about working with minority students, but I think they were way off basis. I was in a room full of, you know, nonminority people, and I was thinking oh my gosh. Where did they get this information?" Participant 7 expressed she had not participated in any professional development that focused on instruction specific to minority students. "There hasn't been

any PD on that because people think that it's taboo. You don't really want to talk about race. You don't want to isolate race." Participant 3 concluded, "I would give the district failing marks in preparing teachers to work in high-minority, low- socioeconomic areas."

In contrast, Participant 6 stated that she felt the district's professional development was good but clarified, "Well, for me, I'm a veteran teacher. So, for new teachers, (the professional development) is probably very beneficial, but for me only somewhat. I tweak it to fit my students." Participant 5 also stated that the district was pretty helpful, but discussed professional development only for the ESL population. Likewise, Participant 8 stated district professional development had been "pretty cool," but then added, "I would say I want a little bit different, a little more diverse."

Theme 14: Teachers need culturally responsive pedagogical training. When asked what professional development participants believed the district should provide that would prepare teachers for working in low-socioeconomic, high-minority areas that would support teachers in closing the achievement gap, participants overwhelmingly reported what I categorized as culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy consisted of the following keywords from the participants:

- Socioemotional training

- Educating the whole child

- Differentiated learning for minority students

- How to create a healthy and helpful cultural environment

- Adapting to different cultural environments

- Understanding minority students

- Student exposure

- How to use student culture to improve critical thinking

- How to advocate for the minority student

- Communicating with the minority student

- Strategies on how to work with minority students

- Understanding the minority student's mindset

Most participants felt that the district should have more trainings facilitated by individuals who actually work in environments that are similar to their schools. Participant 1 shared, "Have teachers that work in that particular environment that way I can truly relate to them because the district's professional development sometimes are not relatable. If we are talking about classroom management or diverse learning, then we need to be honest about the type of kids that we are serving and how to serve those types of kids." Participant 2 stated that growth mindset and social emotional professional development is needed in the district. She explained that these professional development training help teachers to understand the work they are doing. "It helps you to see I'm not just standing in front of a classroom teaching material. I'm here to educate people and I think that is what has been forgotten at the district level."

Participant 4 focused more on teaching teachers how to adapt to diverse areas. "You have to learn how to adjust and adapt to the environment you're teaching in and that training would make a huge difference because it's not only socioeconomic, it's also race." Participant 3 clarified that training is "not just about bringing stories about our culture or bringing our culture to our kids. It's not about just having pictures up, but how

do we help the students critically think about those questions that are genuine to their own experiences?" Participant 8 added that the district needs to add professional development that includes strategies on how to deal with minority populations personally. "I think it is something that is really lagging. How to build communication with the students, relationships with them, how to relate to them, verses just how to teach them because you need to understand their mindset first. You can't sometime phantom what these kids go through on a daily basis." Participant 6 concluded that there needs to be more real-time training where new or struggling teachers visit successful teachers in areas similar to theirs. "Go into classrooms like mine and like other teachers who are successful for observation. That way teachers can see the relationship that we have built with our students. There's nothing like seeing it for yourself." In response to managing the classroom, Participant 6 also added that teacher-on-teacher observation is important because these observations may help teachers learn how to de-escalate situations. "Instead of letting the situations escalate, extinguish it before it gets out of control."

Professional Development Plans

Professional development plans were requested to first identify what summer professional development the teachers planned to take after conferencing with their administrators during their summative conferences. The professional development plans were also requested to analyze if these trainings corresponded to the participants' perceptions of what the participants felt they needed to support them in their instructional settings as recorded during the interviews. I summarized the content to give an overview of the training the participants received during summer training.

All eight participants signed up for Academic Rigor through the Lens of the RLA TEKS. This was a required professional development session for all reading and language arts teachers. To understand what the professional development encompassed, I signed up and attended the professional development session. None of the participants in my study were in the session I attended. In this session, participants discussed the district's teacher evaluation rubric, received an alignment tool, and were given the districts educational plan. Precepts for the district's educational plan as presented in the PowerPoint included social emotional learning core competencies, which included:

1. Self-Management

2. Self-Awareness

3. Responsible Decision Making

4. Relationship Skills

5. Social Awareness

The presenter's PowerPoint listed these social emotional learning core competencies, but no strategies were provided during the professional development training session to build teacher capacity to achieve the competencies in students, which was an inner attribute of the participants in this study. The presenter also read a slide about the district's Portrait of Graduates. The district's stated goal was that the graduates be:

1. Problem-Solvers

2. Critical and Creative Thinkers

3. Culturally Responsive

    4. Able to Communicate and Work Collaboratively

    5. Resilient and Strong

    Both the district's core competencies and Portrait of Graduates aligned to my participants' expectations of students; however, the professional development did not show the teachers how to achieve such goals nor did all of the definitions, in particular #3 Culturally Responsive, correlate to what is considered culturally responsive in research. In fact, culturally responsive in the training focused more on educating students about specific cultures rather than tapping into the students' cultures to help them understand content.

    The primary focus on the professional development was rigor, which was incorporated into the title of the session. The teachers were assigned articles to read and share within their groups. The three articles, *Rigor/Relevance Framework*, *Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum*, and *The Characteristics of a Rigorous Classroom*, discussed the characteristics of a rigorous classroom, which included themes that emerged from the participants' interview transcripts and observation data; however, the presenter asked the teachers to focus on and compare the various definitions of rigor presented in the articles. The teachers were then told to develop a definition for rigor and list ways to achieve it. These lists were posted on the walls around the room and shared. No time was given to discuss how to create rigorous classrooms or the significance of each of the characteristics presented in the articles and their correlation to student achievement. In fact, once the teachers completed the tasks, the presenter moved on to the next activity.

During the session, the presenter discussed the district's instructional framework, which focused on four ideas. For this activity, the teachers were divided into four groups where each group was tasked with listing ways to achieve the assigned concept. The four concepts were as follows:

- Group 1: Design Clear Targeted Appropriate Lessons for Diverse Learners

- Group 2: Develop and Execute Highly Effective Instruction

- Group 3: Build Robust Learning Environments

- Group 4: Consummate Professionals Pursuing Continual Improvement

The presenter allowed each group to share their ideas before showing a slide with recommendations from the district, but due to time, the presenter encouraged teachers not to write the information down. He stated that they would receive a copy of the PowerPoint presentation via email. The information was not elaborated on and the presenter moved on to the next activity, which was for the teachers to unpack standards (TEKS) by identifying the verb, content, and context in each standard. Teachers were given a few minutes to complete the task and one group shared their work. The presenter then briefly discussed a new instructional tool the district would be using for the upcoming year before dismissing the group.

After the session, I requested a copy of the PowerPoint presentation from the district reading department. The learning objective for the session was:

1. To learn the district's education plan and instructional framework

2. To comprehend the district's definition of academic rigor

3. To understand how academic rigor is defined through the TEKS

4. To gain applicable knowledge of how the TEI rubric provides the district's instructional framework

5. To understand the main components of the *TEKS Resource System* and how to apply them for optimal student outcomes and effective planning

The presenter achieved the objectives of the session; however, the objectives only focused on informing teachers of the district's plan and framework not on how to achieve the educational plan, instructional framework, or academic rigor.

The PowerPoint contained slides that correlated to themes found in my study. Slide 12 was titled Growth Mindset and asked the following questions:

1. How is mindset connected to educational success?

2. How do these ideas compare to current practices in your school?

3. What one thing are you excited to try with your students?

This slide was presented as an anticipatory set, but elaboration on the definition of a growth mindset or the benefits of such a mindset was not discussed. Slide 13 focused on social emotional learning, which the participants in my study promoted in their students. Although the presenter shared the slide with the teachers during the professional development, he did not go into depth about the theory of social emotional learning or how it correlates to student achievement. Slide 18 presented the district's instructional framework and expectation of the teachers. The expectations of teachers were as follows:

Group 1: Design Clear Targeted Appropriate Lessons for Diverse Learners

- Demonstrate knowledge of content, concepts, and skills

- Utilizes formal and informal knowledge of students in lesson design

- Plans and selects formative and summative assessments

- Analyzes and integrates student performance data to inform instructional decisions

- Develops appropriately challenging standard-based units and lessons that accommodate prerequisite relationships among concept and skills

Group 2: Develop and Execute Highly Effective Instruction

- Structures well-organized objective driven lessons and content appropriate to standards for subject, grade, and level

- Ensures mastery of learning objective appropriate to the standard for subject and grade

- Explains instructional content clearly and cohesively

- Engages students in appropriately challenging content

Group 3: Build Robust Learning Environments

- Organizes classrooms for optimal on task instruction

- Establishes, communicates, and maintains clear expectations for student behavior

- Maintains a respectful academically accountable classroom

Group 4: Consummate Professionals Pursuing Continual Improvement

- Model good attendance for students

- Follows policies and procedures and maintain accurate student records

- Exhibit a commitment to continual professional growth

- Engages in collaborative relationships with colleagues to support learning community

- Establishes relationships with families and communities through meaningful ongoing communication

Each of the expectations and the overall framework complemented themes found in the interview and observational data. From the analysis of the interview transcripts, the observation protocol, and lesson plan analysis, the participants in my study possessed attributes aligned to the district's expectations. However, strategies were not provided to teachers during the PD on how to develop or implement these expectations.

Overall, my observation of the session enabled me understand why the participants believed district professional development was not useful, and it allowed me to witness missed opportunities in a district professional development. There were several opportunities for the professional development training to delve into characteristics that were needed to build and support teachers' ability to not only raise student achievement, but also close the achievement gap as perceived by the participants in my study. The resources provided in the session and the district's goals and framework complemented the interview and observation data. However, the presentation of the materials and activities lacked depth and thus, failed to give teachers the direction or implementation know-how to succeed at the day-to-day operations of a classroom and change instructional practices for success. The session also failed to correlate the ideas, concepts, competencies, and goals to student achievement. These factors could contribute to why my participants felt that district-provided professional development was not effective to

their needs. The professional development session was an information session informing teachers about the district's goals rather than a training of teachers on how to achieve those goals.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that this is a qualitative case study. The findings were strictly applicable to USISD. However, in similar cases within similar boundaries, these findings could be transferrable and generalized.

Another limitation of this study was the sample size. Only eight teachers who had demonstrated an ability to close the achievement gap and raise student achievement from five middle schools participated in the study. Their beliefs and perspectives may not reflect the perspectives and beliefs of the greater population in the district or nationally; however, their experiences and beliefs are considered valid sources of data. As the sole researcher and collector of data, the reliability and validity of the findings could be potentially compromised. However, my intention was to bring a holistic description and analysis of the characteristics of teachers who have been successful in closing the achievement gap while raising student achievement.

A final limitation of the study was the constraint of time. Data were collected during the last three weeks of the school year. Teachers had taught all of the skills and concepts over the course of the year and observations conducted occurred as teachers were closing out the year. Teachers and students had less constraints than would have been present during the school year before students had taken the state assessment. In

addition, due to the time of data collection, I was unable to observe the practices and strategies used to prepare students for the state reading assessment.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of teachers who close the achievement gap while raising overall student achievement in middle school reading. The data collection methods for this case study included a demographic survey, interviews, classroom observations, and archival documents consisting of a weekly lesson plan, professional planning guides, and summer professional development observations. There were 14 themes addressing the research questions that emerged from the rich, in-depth exploration of eight middle school reading teachers in USISD.

Through a data analysis process, it was found that the inner attributes of teachers who closed the achievement gap were genuine care for students, high expectations and student engagement, passion to work with marginalized students, a cultural awareness and responsiveness to ethnically diverse students, and a growth mindset or willingness to change personal beliefs and practices for the betterment of students. The outward attributes of teachers who closed the achievement gap were:

- well-organized and structured lessons with clear directions and explanations,
- the use of research-based reading strategies including graphic organizers, modeled instruction, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligence

strategies with specific attention to music to help students gain

understanding,

- and the consideration and integration of student interests and cultural

  background into instruction to support student engagement and

  comprehension.

Teachers had strong command of their classrooms while maintaining a high level

of respect from the students and towards the students. Teachers showed a genuine care

for their students where moral values and responsibility were taught alongside content.

The teachers established a classroom environment where high-expectations and positive

reinforcement guided student behavior and student achievement. The participants exuded

characteristics of culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2013)

Perceptions of professional development were mixed with teachers stating that

they believed PD was good for novice teachers and frequently offered some new ideas,

but did not meet the needs of experienced teachers and those working in high-minority,

low-socioeconomic areas. Participants believed that more training on cultural

responsiveness, social emotional learning, and growth-mindset would support teachers'

ability to close the achievement gap. Based on the analysis of the professional

development plans and observations of summer PD, the district offered classes that could

have provided the desired training teachers requested, but the objective in these trainings

were not to build teacher capacity but rather to inform them of expectation or framework.

Based on the findings presented within this study, there is a need for PD

specifically focusing on self-reflection and how beliefs manifest themselves in the

classroom, growth mindset, cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness. Dress (2016) explained that teachers who have a growth mindset see challenges as opportunities to learn and build their teaching capacity. Teachers who work in urban school districts often deal with students who have learned chronic behavior such as fighting, bullying, and often deal with traumatic emotional symptoms which not only threaten the academic and social emotional development of students, but also the well being of teachers (Maring & Koblinsky, 2013). In addition, teachers who work with minority students more often do not adequately address cultural differences or possess cultural understanding (Glickman et al., 2014).

The participants in this study attributed genuine care, cultural understanding, and incorporation of social and emotional learning into instruction as a significant factors in their ability to manage student behavior and raise student achievement. Chenowith (2014) argued that effective educators are aware, sensitive, and adaptive to students' ethnic and cultural heritages. In addition, growing research suggests that social and emotional learning laid the foundation for academic learning (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). The participants in this study were optimistic about their students, experimented with activities to develop relationships and motivate their students, and sought additional support to solve challenges. Helping teachers examine their own cultural identities, beliefs, and mindsets, may build competencies with working with diverse cultures, and create culturally responsive classrooms that address the social and emotional needs of students are progressive steps in closing the achievement gap and raising student achievement.

Conclusion

In Section 2, I discussed the methodology of the study, which included the research design, description of the participants, data collection methods, role of the researcher, data analysis, and the findings. To maintain alignment with the purpose of the study, a three-day PD was designed to help teachers' understand how their inner attributes and beliefs contribute to achievement gaps, build teachers' competency in working with diverse students through social and emotional learning, and develop culturally responsive reading classrooms. Building teachers' awareness of culture differences and competence in culturally responsive teaching might impact achievement gaps and student academic achievement.

In Section 3, I discuss the project, a three-day PD that I developed based on the findings in the study. In addition, I discuss the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, project evaluation, and implications including social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of middle school reading teachers who close the achievement gap while raising student achievement in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools. After analyzing the inner and outer attributes of teachers and their perceptions of PD and a review of literature, I developed a three-day PD program entitled *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students*, which is included in Appendix A. In this section, I discuss the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, and project evaluation. In addition, I discuss the implications for social change.

Description and Goals

I used an exploration of eight middle school reading teachers to triangulate interview, observational, and archival documents, identifying emerging themes about the characteristics, beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions of reading teachers who are able to close the achievement gap while raising student achievement. Analysis of the study's findings indicated a need for professional development (PD) designed to produce culturally responsive teachers; this process begins with helping teachers examine how their own cultural identifies, beliefs, and mindsets impact student academic achievement and contribute to achievement gaps.

The findings also indicated a need for PD that builds teachers' competencies in working with diverse cultures and helps teachers design culturally responsive reading

classrooms. Data on student suspension, academic performance, and dropout rates indicate a need for teachers to become competent in cultural behaviors, beliefs, emotional needs, and interests (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Chenowith, 2014; Conroy & Sutherland, 2012; Dress, 2016; Focus on Blacks, 2011; McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). This project is designed to inform teachers of inner attributes that affect student achievement, provide strategies for working with diverse students, and create culturally responsive reading classrooms in order to close the achievement gap.

USISD (pseudonym)'s educational plan (2016) on the district's website stated that the district is dedicated in providing a well-rounded education. Observing existing PD at USISD informed me that while the district informed teachers of this goal, the PD was a presentation of a framework and provided no actual training centered in how to develop competencies such social and emotional learning within the students. In addition, the district's educational plan highlighted significant achievement gaps and a need for growth mindset. However, the existing summer PD did not assess teachers' mindsets or provide strategies in how to develop competencies for working with diverse cultures. This three-day, face-to-face PD is designed to achieve this goal.

The PD has three goals:

- Goal 1: Teachers will examine their own cultural identities, cultural beliefs, values, biases, and mindsets and how these qualities reflect in behaviors that contribute to achievement gaps.

- Goal 2: Teachers will learn and apply strategies in working with diverse students.

- Goal 3: Teachers will learn strategies and develop lessons to create culturally responsive classrooms.

Rationale

USISD's educational plan (2016) stated a need for social and emotional learning. Referral and suspension data within the district indicated both a lack of teacher capacity to handle behaviorally challenging students and a lack of student control or desire to respect teacher rules and school policy (Betzen, 2014; USISD, 2016). In addition, observation of district PD indicated that although the district expected teachers to include social and emotional learning, there was no PD sessions designed to build teacher capacity in this area. The findings presented within this study showed that middle school reading teachers who were able to close the achievement gap not only cared about their students, but also showed a keen understanding of the cultural environments, beliefs, and values of their students. They frequently incorporated social and emotional learning as instructional content to help students cope with social norms that differed from their own and respond to obstacles that they encountered day to day. In addition, the teachers attributed their genuine affection for their students in their ability to build students' trust and improve motivation.

Participants in this study also possessed growth mindsets, an ability to self-reflect to make changes. The participants stated beliefs that their students were capable of learning at a high-level and actively sought new approaches to help them gain knowledge in how to support their students' needs. In addition, interviews and observations support that participants understood the importance of culturally responsive instruction and used

students' cultural norms to support learning. Although USISD's educational plan promoted developing a growth mindset in students, district PD did not help teachers understand the correlation of a growth mindset to academic achievement nor did the PD assess teachers' mindsets to determine if they possessed fixed or growth mindsets about their students. As a result, I developed a three-day PD program entitled *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students* to help teachers reflect on their own attributes and limitations in order to support teachers' ability to achieve these competencies within themselves as they seek to develop the competencies in their diverse students.

Review of Literature

Findings in this study indicated that the majority of the participants felt a need for PD opportunities that enforce social emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and growth mindset. They indicated that the lack of such PD has left many teachers unprepared to meet the challenges in working with diverse students who come from low-socioeconomic homes. Teachers who work in low-socioeconomic urban schools often deal directly with students who live in violent neighborhoods or have been victim to violence (Maring & Koblinsky, 2013). The emotional and behavioral challenges the students bring to the classroom often negatively affect teacher self-efficacy (Gutshall, 2013). However, research indicates that teachers have control of several factors that control behavior, motivation, and achievement (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). "Attitude, motivation, willingness to participate, valuing what is being learned, and ultimately incorporating the discipline values into real life" are also critical attributes in learning

(Kasilingam, Ramalingam, & Chinnavan, 2014, p. 29) Teachers must therefore have a level of dedication, resilience, commitment, and integrity to grow themselves professionally in the changing constructs of education, and PD should be tailored to the needs of an institution (Sharma, 2016).

In this section, I present a scholarly review of literature related to the genre of PD that includes face-to-face PD, mentoring and peer coaching, and professional learning communities (PLC). Additionally, literature related to content of an effective culturally responsive PD is presented. I conducted detail searches in Walden University library research database for current and peer-reviewed sources and web publications. These databases included EBSCO databases, SAGE Premier, Educational Research Complete, ProQuest, Thoreau, and Google Scholar. The key search terms and phrases were: *professional development, best practices*, *self-efficacy*, *cultural identity*, *socioemotional learning*, *social and emotional learning*, *culturally responsive pedagogy*, *culturally responsive teaching*, *growth mindset*, *social emotional learning strategies*, *motivation*, *student interest*, *self-monitoring*, *emotional vocabulary*, *growth mindset strategies*, *multicultural literature*, and *semantic maps*.

Conceptual Framework

The common characteristics of the participants in this study centered in culturally responsiveness. One issue that the participants shared with existing PD at the study site was a lack of PD tailored to meet the needs of teachers in particular neighborhoods and schools. The participants attributed this lack of PD to the low self-efficacy of teachers and wide achievement gaps. In order to support the development of these attributes in

other teachers, teachers must understand the importance of culture and how it impacts student learning and achievement. The project, a three-day PD, of my study draws from two frameworks: Schon's (1992) theory of reflective practice and Bandura (1977) social learning theory, which are both grounded in constructivism. Schon popularized the concept of reflective practice in professional practice and development (Ng, 2012). Applying Schon's (1992) theory of reflective practice maintained that teachers put their reflective knowledge into practice. Bandura (1977) argued that people learn through observing behaviors of others and that motivation was a significant component of learning through observation (Kretchmar, 2016). These theories are important in developing culturally responsive teachers.

Theory of reflective practice. Schon (2011) argued that a practitioner must make sense of the world that they confront in the educational setting. However, not every practitioner is able to acquire and continue to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in an evolving education system (Kayapinar, 2016). Reflections prompt practitioners to identify incidences in the field that may be problematic, which triggers considerations to alternative approaches and responses for future actions (Parra, Gutierrez, & Aldana, 2015). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's conviction of their own capabilities to successfully execute actions that lead to a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997; Kayainar, 2016). Gutshall (2013) argued that teachers' mindset affect their sense of efficacy and their instructional practices. The implications of teachers' sense of self-efficacy have paved the way to professional development that develops teachers' reflective abilities and self-efficacy beliefs (Kayapinar, 2016).

Social learning theory. Bandura (1977) argued that people learn from each other through observation, modeling, and imitation. However, he contended that one has to be motivated to learn from observation, modeling, and imitation (Bandura, 1986). Bandura argued that self-efficacy has a significant impact on motivation. Individuals work hard when there is a belief that success is achievable (Bandura, 1997; Kretchmar, 2016). During the PD, participants will be given opportunities to observe, model, and imitate. Through face-to-face PD, motivation is increased through social interaction.

Face-to-Face PD

While research indicates that both online and face-to-face PD are effective, face-to-face PD allows for social interaction (Fishman et al., 2013; Moon, Passmore, Reiser, & Michaels, 2014). One of Bandura's (1977) original concepts was that one of the primary sources of self-efficacy was social persuasion, which researchers have identified as feedback, sharing, and advice from a colleague (Siciliano, 2016). Research suggests that social interactions develop shared beliefs, and teachers self-efficacy may be influenced by their peers (Kayapinar, 2016). This suggests that creating authentic interaction through face-to-face PD may both influence participants to be more receptive to alternative beliefs and values and also provide them with peer support for implementing changes.

Mentoring and Peer Coaching

Critical mentoring conversations build a strong practice-theory base around classroom interactions for teachers (Edwards-Groves, 2014). Mentoring has shown positive results for teachers in high needs urban schools (Leon, 2014). Likewise, peer coaching has evolved as a recommended method for teacher development (Benson &

Cotabish, 2014). Teachers are receptive to mentoring, and both mentoring and peer coaching support teacher retention, higher satisfaction, and growth (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014). Conducting a PD where teachers are connected to their peers and with teachers who have been able to close the achievement gap may provide mentor and coaching opportunities to support retention and grow achievement.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities (PLC) have the potential to be as significant to the growth of a teacher as PD (Popp & Goldman, 2016). Empirical research indicates that well-developed PLCs have positive impact on teaching practice and student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). PLCs shift the culture of teaching in isolation to a culture of collaboration where teachers work interdependently and share mutual accountability (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). Teachers who engage in learning through PLCs show higher self-efficacy and willingness to reflect upon their instructional practices and methods (Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013). Incorporating a PLC component into teacher development has the potential to help improve teacher self-efficacy and support the development of a growth mindset.

Contents of Effective Culturally Responsive PD

Gay (2013) argued that education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school learning. Building bridges between cultures improves teaching and learning (Baldwin, 2015). In addition, education of diverse students should promote educational equity and excellence, empower students, and develop a community among individuals from different backgrounds (Gay, 2013).

When educators understand their students' beliefs, biases, values, and behaviors, they are more equipped to make informed decisions about how to make teaching and learning more effective (Chenowith, 2014). Gay (2013) argued, "Education cannot progress smoothly unless it is based upon and proceeds from the cultural perspectives of the group of people from whom it is designed" (p. 50). *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students* is therefore a PD designed to strengthen teachers' understanding of and appreciation for culturally responsive teaching. It is also designed to show teachers how to incorporate multiple racial, ethnical, and cultural background knowledge into lessons utilizing learning styles, multiple intelligences, reading resources, and real-world connections.

      Cultural identity. Culture is a significant factor in the construction of one's identity (Usborne & Sablonniere, 2014). Culture influences the way we see ourselves and how we perceive others. Cultural identity highlights a person's uniqueness, and strong cultural identity is associated with higher self-esteem and psychological well being (Dong, Lin, Li, Dou, Zhou, 2015). However, the preservation and difference in cultural identity in a multicultural society often brings about conflict and misunderstandings (Gupta & Bhugra, 2009). Miller, Jordan, Kaplan, Stiver, and Surrey (1997) argued that people fully develop only within relationships with other people, but when there is a societal system where one group has made itself dominant, the dominant group cannot create a system fostering empathy and empowerment of others.

      There are a number of societal constructs that impact the cultural and individual development of a person. Hammer, Crethar, and Cannon (2016) identified five constructs

which included (a) privilege; (b) social status; (c) agent and target status; (d) convergence; and (e) salience. Understanding cultural identity and how it shapes a person's beliefs is important in education because attitudinal beliefs are predictors of teaching behaviors and practices (Vazques-Montilla, Just, & Triscari, 2015).

Beliefs are powerful buffers that shape an individual's perceptions of the world, other people, and oneself (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Nelson and Guerra (2014) argued that even with lack of logic or reason, beliefs have a stronger influence on behavior than cognitive knowledge, and even in a professional environment, beliefs are a stronger predictor of a person's behavior than professional knowledge and expertise.

Culture is one factor that shapes a person's beliefs. Culture is the lens by which people understand each other and the world. Cultural norms guide the way individuals interact and interpret behaviors of others (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Usborne & Sablonniere, 2014; Vazques-Montilla et al., 2015). By teachers understanding how cultural norms shape their beliefs, teachers might become more cognitively aware of their behaviors, instructional planning and delivery, when interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, helping teachers develop multicultural beliefs, which is an acknowledgement and appreciation for cultural differences, rather than "colorblindness," a United States approach to diversity after the Civil Rights Movement by White Americans that is defined as downplaying cultural differences in order to find similarities and common ground between diverse cultural groups, may help teachers develop higher self-efficacy, enthusiasm in teaching, and willingness to adapt teaching practices to meet

the needs of economically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students (Hachfeld, Hahn,

Schroeder, Anders, & Kunter, 2015). Miller et al. (1998) maintained that people must

develop mutually empathic and empowering relationships if individuals are to reach their

full development.

Measuring cultural identity. The core components in measuring cultural identity

include attitudes, religious beliefs and rituals, clothes, dietary habits, and language

(Gupta & Bhugra, 2009). However, measuring an individual's cultural identity can be

challenging in a multicultural society because cultures within a multicultural society

influence each other (Boufoy-Bastick, 2001). Boufoy-Bastick (2001) argued that the

cultural index (CI) is an efficient tool to measure cultural identity in a multicultural

society. The CI uses Likert Scale responses where a respondent is asked to rate the

cultural attribute to himself then to a public object. Then, the self-rating is divided by the

public object. The scale is then grounded to any population of the category by

multiplying by the average public object of that category (Boufoy-Bastick, 2001).

Ibrahim and Heuer (2016) developed a series of CI tools that encompasses a Likert Scale

to help teachers examine their cultural identities and will be incorporated in this project.

Self-reflection. Self-reflection can have a strong impact on teacher effectiveness

and student achievement. Teachers' beliefs can aid or hinder the way students respond to

learning and their motivation, and their values can impact teacher-student relationships

(Richards, Brown, & Forbe, 2007; Weisman, 2012). Understanding personal beliefs and

experiences and how they shape behaviors allow teachers to take ownership of their

circumstances in order to grow and make changes (Sammaknejad & Marzban, 2016). By

reflecting on values and beliefs, educators analyze their role in students' academic success, become less reactive, and are open to new approaches that can improve their effectiveness in educating diverse students (Sammaknejad & Marzban, 2016; Zyngier, 2012). Encouraging teachers to reflect on their beliefs, values, and experiences will help them confront biases that they possess (Richards et al., 2007). Glickman et al. (2014) stated that culturally responsive teaching begins with a set of beliefs. Culturally responsive teachers:

- accept students for who they are and take responsibility for helping all students;

- accept and incorporate linguistic diversity into their lessons as they teach language codes of the dominant culture;

- validate knowledge that is not valued by the dominant culture while teaching standard knowledge;

- strive to maintain the integrity of each student's culture while fostering high expectations academically;

- learn as much as they can about their students, their families, and communities and use this knowledge in teaching;

- base teaching and learning on students' strengths and background knowledge;

- incorporate real-life experiences into the curriculum;

- help students realize their own academic potential;

- create caring and collaborative classroom environments that reflect the beliefs and values of their students;

- collaborate with their students to develop and enforce clear behavioral and academic guidelines;

- avoid power struggles with students;

- engage students in critiquing the status quo and do not ignore issues of race and culture; and

- teach students how to cope with prejudice and discrimination (Glickman et al., 2014, pp. 374-377).

Helping teachers understand their beliefs, values, and experiences and how they influence behaviors and practices will help teachers to become culturally responsive teachers.

Growth mindset strategies. Growth mindset is the belief that intelligence is not fixed and can be developed overtime (Dweck, 2006). Mohammad (2015) argued that the greatest issue related to closing the achievement gap is the wrong mindset of teachers. Getting students to believe that they can learn is one challenge; however, getting educators to also believe that all students can learn is yet another (Dweck, 2015; Sparks, 2013). NCLB (2002) and Race to the Top (2009) have produced lofty goals for teachers that are idealized rather than practical (Hall, 2013). Evaluations connected to high-stakes tests and pay for performance have contributed to teachers' distrust in constructive feedback, contributed to fixed mindsets in educators, and led to teachers feeling threatened by low-performing students, which has resulted in teachers blaming students for their failure rather than reflecting on themselves as practitioners (Dress, 2016; Dweck, 2015; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

When individuals work within a growth mindset, they are more likely to challenge themselves and less likely to be discouraged by failure (Sparks, 2013). Dweck (2015) argued that if teachers believe that they can grow in their efficacy, teachers would see that each child provides them with an opportunity to strengthen their craft. In addition, teacher disposition has been positively correlated to student academic achievement in reading, and other results have indicated that teacher growth mindset positively impacts the development of students' growth mindsets (Cox, Cheser, & Detwiler, 2016). In this section, I discuss strategies to build a growth mindset in teachers.

Trust building. Teachers alone cannot attain this first strategy. Administrators contribute to the trust level of teachers. Hall (2013) argued, "Trust will only exist if the supervisor gets into the teacher's classroom often, if he or she seeks to understand the teacher's goal and challenges in the context of the work, and if he or she makes time for more than one meaningful conversation during the year with the teacher" (p. 89). Teachers and administrators need multiple opportunities to engage in dialog (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). In addition, feedback from administrators, colleagues, and students should be provided frequently and consistently in a clear way as to provide varied perspectives for teachers to reflect on their craft (Hall, 2013; Range, 2013).

Self-reflection and self-assessment. Phi Delta Kappan (2015) explained a series of steps to developing a growth mindset. According to researchers, the first step in developing a growth mindset is to get in touch with the fixed mindset, listen to it while understanding the mindset for what it is. Next, respond to the fixed mindset with growth mindset thoughts. Then, recognize and understand that a growth mindset is a choice (Phi

Delta Kappan, 2015). Individuals choose to learn from mistakes and grow from them.
How much individuals grow as adults are dependent on their choice and willingness to
grow (Phi Delta Kappan, 2015). In addition to connecting with their fixed mindset to
grow themselves, teachers should also engage in self-assessments where they reflect on
their craft based on a set criteria and standards, and they should receive feedback from
peers about their craft for reflection (van Diggelen, den Brok, & Beijaard (2013).

Develop student's growth mindset. Much of the research about growth mindset
focuses on students. In fact, a growth mindset in students has shown implications of
higher student achievement (Dress, 2016; Dweck, 2015; Hall; 2013). Developing a
growth mindset in students can address the achievement gap by helping students take
ownership and responsibility of their own learning (National Center on Scaling Up
Effective Schools, 2014). Students with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be
developed and increased over time; mistakes are a necessary part of learning; success
comes from hard work and effort; resilience is important when facing challenges; and
constructive criticism and feedback allow for improvement (National Center of Scaling
Up Effective Schools, 2014). Learning how to develop a growth mindset in students will
help teachers to become aware of the characteristics of a growth mindset and help them
to develop their personal mindset.

One strategy in teaching students to have a growth mindset is by modeling
behaviors of a growth mindset such as embracing failures and having resilience (Elish-
Piper, 2014). Elish-Piper (2014) explained that thinking aloud through challenges could
develop perseverance in children. By purposefully modeling resilience and perseverance,

teachers will practice working through their own challenges and develop their personal mindsets. Another strategy in teaching students to have a growth mindset is goal setting. Growth goals may help students to clarify what they need to strive for in order to outperform previous outcomes, direct students' attention to relevant goals, and motivate and energize students to reach their goals to close any gaps (Martin, 2015). By helping students establish their growth goals, teachers can also work on developing their own goals that help them grow in their craft.

Social and emotional learning strategies. One characteristic of culturally responsive teachers is that culturally responsive teachers do not ignore cultural and racial issues but rather engage students in critiquing the status quo and teach them how to bring about change (Glickman, 2014). Teachers who work in low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban schools report that there is a lack of training and support that meets their needs specific to teaching in their environment and with their population of students (Maring, 2013). USISD (2016) instructional framework identified SEL as an important component in helping students grow in academic achievement. However, teachers need strategies in implementing SEL in the curriculum. This section provides a set of strategies in incorporating SEL into the classroom.

Metacognition. Metacognition is the awareness and understanding of one's own thoughts (Dimmit et al., 2012). Whetstone, Gilmore, and Schuster (2015) explained that metacognition supports interpersonal sensitivity, the ability to perceive what other people are thinking, feeling, or wanting. According to Whetstone et al. (2015), poor interpersonal sensitivity causes individuals to misinterpret other individuals' feelings,

thought, and desires causing them to behave inappropriately in social situations. "When students are able to manage their own behaviors, they do not need prompting from teachers" (Rafferty, 2010, p. 53). With training in metacognition self-monitoring, students can adjust their behavior if the behavior is not yielding the desired response from others.

Rafferty (2010) suggested having students who need training in self-monitoring to graph their behaviors. Having students to graph their behavior often serves as motivation tool that lead to students setting goals for their own behaviors and self-evaluating their performance (Rafferty, 2010). Concrete steps for teachers to implement self-monitoring into their classroom is to (a) identify the target behavior, (b) operationally define the target behavior, (c) collect baseline data of target behavior occurrence, (d) determine if it is an appropriate behavior to remediate, (e) design procedures and all materials, (f) teach the student how to self-monitor, (g) monitor student's progress, and (h) fade use of intervention (Rafferty, 2010).

Inferential comprehension via character perspective. Literature is important to social constraint because stories invite readers to envision and understand the social world differently (McTigue, Douglas, Wright, Hodges, Franks, 2015; Morrell & Morrell, 2012). By experiencing how characters react to conflicts in literature, McTigue et. al. (2015) argued that students learn new approaches to handling their own conflicts with peers. The approach referred to as Inferential Comprehension via Character Perspective (McTigue et al., 2015) involves both cognitive skills and emotional intelligence. However, teachers rarely emphasize the emotional contributions that support inferential

comprehension. Time constraints often cause teachers to overemphasize plot development rather than explore the complexities of characters (McTigue et al., 2015). In addition, story maps, which are excellent tools in helping students process information for meaningful connections and making inferences (McCollen & O'Shea, 2005), are used to depict story events rather than characters thoughts and feelings (Smolkin & McTigue, 2015). Incorporating more time to exploring characters thoughts and feelings and how characters overcome challenges provide a smooth transition of SEL into the reading classroom.

Emotional vocabulary. Language plays a critical role in social emotional and academic development (Bretherton, Prior, Bavin, Eadie, & Reilly, 2014). Children who have delayed language skills have trouble self-regulating and engaging in social relationships (Bretherton et al., 2014). Recent studies in developing neuropsychology have shown links in deficient self-regulation and executive functions (EF), a collection of cognitive functions that include inhibition of impulses, working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Duaric et al., 2013). Executive functions have been hypothesized to contribute significantly to social cognition and behavioral functions, which are linked to social emotional and academic learning and oral and written language (Duaric et al., 2013).

There are five competencies to social emotional learning: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Dauric et al., 2013; Dimmit et al., 2012). Dauric et al. (2013) encouraged teachers to select literature that address these competencies and specifically teach two to four vocabulary words associated with the SEL objective by pronouncing the words, connecting the

words to words students already know, using the words in multiple context, and developing activities that require students to use the words such as role play. Another approach is to develop games where students and teachers generate situations that would evoke emotional vocabulary (McTigue et al., 2015).

      Culturally responsive strategies. Key characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy includes acknowledging the cultural and ethnical background of students, connecting home and school experiences, using multicultural resources, and using explicit teaching strategies (Bui & Fagan, 2013). In order for teachers to incorporate culturally responsive instruction into their curriculum, teachers need to know explicit strategies. In this section, I provide current empirical research on culturally responsive strategies to help teachers move toward culturally responsive teaching in reading.

      Activating prior knowledge. Before delving into reading, teachers should provide opportunities for students to make connections to topics presented in a narrative. Bui and Fagan (2013) explained that activating and reflecting on prior knowledge is important because students from various cultures bring different worldviews and experiences about topics. Using the strategy of predictions simultaneously with activating prior knowledge helps students develop metacognition strategies and give students a purpose for reading, which can improve motivation and interest (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Kosten and Werf (2015) added that activating prior metacognition knowledge improves reading comprehension and is necessary to make sense of prior knowledge. Using a K-W-L chart to connect students prior knowledge to a theme or character's experience can help students make connections to what they already know, how they relate to a topic, and potential themes

they may encounter when reading about the topic (Messenger, 2015). Swiderski (2011) recommended also using the strategy of chunking, elaboration, and invoking of schema to strengthen students understanding of connections to emphasize the meaningfulness of this information.

Story grammar and story maps. Story grammar is the structure of elements within a story (Green & Klecan-Aker, 2012). A story map is the graphic tool used to represent the grammar, or structure, of a narrative story to enhance comprehensions (Narkon & Wells, 2013). Teaching story grammar components help students to build retelling skills and reading comprehension (Brown, Garzarek, and Donegan, 2014). In addition, story grammar can improve oral narrative ability (Green & Klecan-Aker, 2012). However, the structure or narrative of stories often varies among cultures (Bui & Fagan, 2013). For example, in American story narratives, the focus is usually on a structure that consists of the main character, the problem, attempts to solve the problem, and the sequence of events that lead to the resolution (Bui & Fagan, 2013). However, in Mexican story narratives, descriptive information about family and personal relationships rather than sequence of events is more prominent (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Urbach (2012) argued that it is important to consider the historical and social features that influence children and their stories. Considerations to characters and experiences is important when making cultural connections and building background. Personal themed stories that are developmentally and socially appropriate can improve language and students' ability to use story grammar to convey meanings in literature (Peterson & Spencer, 2016).

Semantic maps. Vocabulary is essential for reading comprehension (Lesuax, 2012, Jenson, 2009; Johnson & Rasmussen, 1998). Graphic organizers are good tools in increasing reading comprehension by helping students to process texts for meaningful connections and making inferences (Bui& Fagan, 2013; McCollen & O'Shea, 2005). One graphic organizer that helps students to process text for meaningful connections and builds vocabulary is a semantic map. Semantic maps are graphic organizers that help students process how ideas fit together (Jackson, Tripp, & Cox, 2011). Bui and Fagan (2013) explained that using semantic maps, or word webs, could help students activate background knowledge, make meaningful connections, learn new concepts, develop vocabulary, and incorporate cultural background experiences.

Multicultural literature. The International Literacy Association (ILA, 2010) *Standards for Reading Professionals* calls for literacy educators to "create and engage their students in literacy practices that develop awareness, understanding, respect, and a valuing of differences in our society." Therefore, literacy educators are expected to incorporate diversity in classroom curriculum to not only meet the needs of diverse students but to encourage an appreciation of cultural differences (Iwai, 2015). Multicultural literature is narrative stories, poems, and folktales that include characters, themes, and dialogue from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bui and Fagan, 2013). Use of multicultural literature can help students make sociocultural connections between their home and school experiences (McTigue, Douglas, Wright, Hodges, & Franks, 2015; Morrell & Morrell, 2012). In addition, the use of multicultural literature may help activate students' prior knowledge and increase motivation (Bui & Faga, 2013; Iwai,

2015). However, Richards (2015) argued that teachers need to recognize and become knowledgeable about the traditions, values, and customs in various cultures in order to make sound decisions about the authenticity of literature they select for students, in addition to time to select and collect rich, authentic multicultural literature. Morrell and Morrell (2012) argued that multicultural literature should not be marginalized into isolated classes but interwoven in literature classes.

Iwai (2015) suggested five steps to be considered when planning to incorporate multicultural literature. First, teachers must model positive attitudes towards diversity and diverse students. Teachers should understand and respect the differences students bring to the classroom including their experiences, languages, beliefs, values, ethnicity, and academic level. Second, teachers need to select high-quality multicultural texts. Iwai (2015) provided steps to selecting such text, which were authentic dialogue, images, culture, and the portrayal of people. Third, teachers should plan effective instruction where applicable and incorporate interpretative questions. Fourth, teachers need to use multicultural books across curriculum. Finally, teachers should partner with the community to expand their network and bring in potential guest speakers. Thein et al. (2012) utilized four principles from current empirical research in the implementation of effective multicultural literature instruction. Instruction in multicultural literature should encourage:

- students to consider alternative perspectives and value stances;
- students to see similarities, differences, and "differences within differences";
- students to "talk back" to problematic constructions of difference; and

- pragmatic as well as personal transformation (Thein et al., 2012).

Richards (2015) suggested that teachers and students create their own annotated bibliographies of multicultural literature and share their findings with each other. By researching literature and developing annotated bibliographies, teachers will gain an awareness of traditions, values, and customs of those cultures; and by sharing those sources, teachers will develop a library of titles to use in teaching multicultural literature. Lastly, Gibson & Parks (2015) argued that incorporating multicultural literature helps new teachers and teachers unfamiliar with diverse cultures conceptualize concrete methods to improve social justice issues facing their students.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this case study was to identify the characteristics of middle school reading teachers who close the achievement gap while raising student achievement. A three-day PD program entitled *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students* was developed after I gained insights on possible answers to the research questions that guided the study. The findings that were presented within this study helped me to determine that there is a need for PD that not only informs teachers of research-based theories and approaches to close the achievement gap, but also provides teachers with an understanding of the influence of culture on beliefs, behaviors, and student achievement and strategies in how to implement culturally responsive approaches in their classrooms in order to build teacher self-efficacy. Literature on the project's genre was presented in the literature review, such as: face-to-face PD, mentor and peer coaching, and professional learning communities. In addition, literature was presented on

the strategies that might be addressed within a culturally-based PD for reading teachers: metacognition, emotional vocabulary, inferential comprehension, story grammar and maps, semantic maps, multicultural literature, activating prior knowledge, trust building, self-reflection, and development of students' growth mindset. Through the PD, teachers will be able to learn about instructional and behavioral strategies that specifically motivate students from diverse cultures and ethnic groups (Dweck, 2015; Gay, 2013; Herrera, Holmes, & Kavimandan, 2012). The topics addressed in the literature review are designed to help teachers who work with low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban students implement practices that help close the achievement gap.

Project Description

This project will be a three-day face-to-face PD, entitled *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students*, designed to increase teachers' understanding of their own cultural identities, beliefs, values, biases, and mindsets that affect student achievement and achievement gaps. It is also designed to build teachers' competency in working with marginalized students in urban school districts and provide strategies to help teachers create culturally responsive classrooms. Low levels of academic achievement in low-socioeconomic, minority students are often due to cultural clashes and misunderstandings between ethnic cultures and the dominant culture (Glickman, 2014). When teachers understand how their cultural values and beliefs manifest in their behaviors towards other cultures and their instructional practices, they will be cognizant of such beliefs and behaviors. To help teachers examine their cultural identity, a cultural identity checklist and assessment will be administered. When

complete, teachers will view a series of pictures of individuals in cultural activities to help them examine how their cultural identity influences their beliefs and mindsets of others. Teachers will participate in journaling as a self-reflection tool to explain how their cultural identity shaped their beliefs and mindsets and brainstorm approaches to managing those beliefs and mindset. Best practices and strategies will be introduced and practiced in building teacher competency in working with marginalized students and creating culturally responsive classrooms.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The resources for this PD include existing campus-based reading instructional coaches who are required to monitor student data and know and understand shifts in instruction and research-based instructional methods that support student achievement and learning in reading. In addition, PLCs are embedded into the campus schedule where teachers share and collaborate instructional practices and data results, which will provide ongoing support through mentoring and peer collaboration and coaching. Additional support materials and resources necessary to support and monitor participants of the PD will be supported by the district and individual schools.

The support materials and resources that will assist the facilitator during the PD include access to the Internet, copy machine, copy paper, writing tools, Post-It chart paper, markers, manila paper, folders, audiovisual presentation device, notepads, PD handouts, and a district training room.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers for implementation of this PD includes the protocol and communication to offer independent PD within the district's summer PD schedule. The district usually creates its own summer PD using the department of Teaching and Learning. Communicating the need for and existence of the PD to all constituents who are responsible for district PD is essential to implementation. Another potential barrier for implementation of this PD also related to communication is identification and notification of teachers who should participate. There is PD that the district requires teachers to take during the summer. Communicating the need for, if not all, those middle school reading teachers who have not demonstrated an ability to close achievement gap to participant in the PD is important for the PD's success in closing the achievement gap for the district.

Additional potential barriers of this PD are resistance to change beliefs, mindsets, and instructional practices, resistance to spending time to build knowledge of students' cultures, lack of motivation to find culturally responsive resource materials, and meeting a wide range of students' needs in the classroom. Because beliefs are often formed through cultural identities, shape individuals' perception of the world, and are stronger than cognitive knowledge, the presentation of professional literature and strategies may not be sufficient in changing some teachers' beliefs and practices. Teachers with a fixed mindset rarely attend trainings unless required, blame the child or critique the parents when the child struggles, rarely change their own instructional methods, and meet new ideas with resistance (Dress, 2016). Teachers must be invested in growing (Boyd, 2014).

Growth comes from inspiration, motivation, and trust (Boyd, 2014; Hall, 2013).

Administrators must provide frequent opportunities for dialogue with teachers and

between teachers and their peers to build trust and inspire change (Roussin &

Zimmerman, 2014).

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The need for professional development focusing on cultural responsive pedagogy

was created based on the findings of this study. USISD's professional development is

generally organized by the department of Teaching and Learning or the administrative

staff at each school. It is not determined whether USISD's Teaching and Learning

department will accept the proposed project or if the superintendent of the department of

Teaching and Learning will mandate the proposed project derived from this study. The

project will be shared with the Director of Research as required for study approval, the

African American Success Initiative (AASI) director, the superintendent of Teaching and

Learning, and the principals who allowed their teachers to participate in the study. An

option is to offer the PD to teachers at those schools that were involved in the study and

collect the data to share with the superintendent of Teaching and Learning. If the

superintendent of Teaching and Learning decides to offer the PD, discussion will occur at

that time as to the delivery of the PD.

The proposed PD delivery recommendation is during summer PD with ongoing

campus support through mentoring and PLCs. It is recommended that all middle school

reading teachers are required to participate in training, and registration for the PD would

appear in the district's SchoolNet. USISD summer PD is offered in two parts: morning

sessions and evening sessions. This PD is written to extend across two sessions representing a full day. The PD will commence over three days and will begin at 8:00 am and conclude at 4:00 pm, for a total of 24 hours. Additionally, campus-based PLCs will also allow participants to share various experiences, such as successful or unsuccessful instructional methods, culturally responsive reading strategies within lesson plans, and reflections on thoughts, actions, and feelings about their instructional experiences and outcomes. The goals of the PD will be the following:

- Goal 1: Teachers will examine their own cultural identities, cultural beliefs, values, biases, and mindsets and how these qualities reflect in behaviors that contribute to achievement gaps.

- Goal 2: Teachers will learn and apply strategies in working with diverse students.

- Goal 3: Teachers will learn strategies and develop lessons to create culturally responsive classrooms

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

It is my intention that the PD will provide strategies to help teachers become culturally responsive in order to close the achievement gap. My role will be to present the findings and seek permission from the superintendent of Teaching and Learning or principals to implement the PD. In addition, I will facilitate the 3-day PD and support campus-based instructional coaches throughout the year during PLCs.

Campus-based reading instructional coaches are responsible for mentoring and coaching teachers using culturally responsive strategies throughout the year and to monitor student progress and the achievement gap throughout the year. Administrators'

role will provide ongoing observation and coaching to support and encourage trust in teachers. They will monitor teacher progress and development of culturally responsiveness. In addition, administrators will assist by evaluating the data collected through common assessments and the state assessment and make decisions related to program improvement.

Project Evaluation

Formative and summative evaluations will be used during the PD. Formative evaluations will be used to monitor participants' learning throughout each PD session. The insight gained from the formative assessments will help the facilitator determine if any modifications should be made to improve the PD. Summative evaluations will be used to evaluate whether the participants have met the goals of the PD.

Goal 1 will be evaluated through a formative evaluation and include observations of participation and reflection forms (See Appendix A). The PD session will be evaluated through a summative evaluation (See Appendix A) to determine the participants' perceptions of the value and effectiveness of the PD to meet their needs in educating marginalized students. Goal 2 will be evaluated through a formative evaluation. Participants will be asked to collaborate with each other to determine alternative methods to classroom removal for dealing with motivational and behavioral issues of students. The PD session will be evaluated through a summative evaluation (See Appendix A) to determine the perceptions of the participants of the effectiveness of the PD in addressing their needs in teaching marginalized students. Goal 3 will be evaluated through a formative evaluation. Participants will develop a lesson plan that incorporates culturally

responsive instruction. The overarching goal of the PD is to build teacher capacity by developing culturally responsive teachers to close the achievement gap, and a summative evaluation (See Appendix A) will be used to measure the PD's effectiveness in meeting this goal. The district is encouraged to use local and state assessment data, classroom observations, and suspension rate data to determine the overall effectiveness of the PD. If the PD is successful, the PD may be extended to include elementary and high school reading and English literature teachers.

Project Implications

Local Community

The project presented in this study, a three-day face-to-face PD, was designed to support teachers who work with low-socioeconomic, minority students in urban schools in becoming culturally responsive. This project is important to local stakeholders and is a possible implication for social change because it addresses the social needs of at-risk students living in an urban area and builds the capacity of teachers to empower marginalized students to change their realities. The target population for the PD is middle school reading teachers; however, it can easily be adapted across all content areas for elementary through high school grade levels.

Based on the findings in this study, the characteristics of teachers who close the achievement gap are those who possess culturally responsive attributes. Providing teachers with PD that address the needs of low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools and helping teachers examine how their cultural identities, beliefs, and mindset influence

their instructional practices and behaviors may increase teacher self-efficacy and shift teacher mindsets in order to close the achievement gap.

Far-Reaching

The overarching goal of the PD is to close the achievement gap. In a larger context, the three-day PD could be presented as a PD opportunity that expands beyond USISD. Developing a PD that specifically addresses the needs of teachers who work in low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban schools and caters to teachers' self-efficacy in those schools may be meaningful to urban districts throughout the state of Texas and beyond. The achievement gap is a national concern that continues to persist despite targeted initiatives, mandates, and laws (NAEP, 2013). Helping teachers reflect upon their own beliefs and practices that contribute to the achievement gap and providing teachers with tools and strategies to build their competency to work with minority students may help close the achievement gap. Thus, a possible implication to social change is a development of multicultural teachers who are able to empathize and empower marginalized students and who can be enlisted to build bridges between various cultures.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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In Section 3, I discussed the aspects of the project that were developed after gaining insight of middle school reading teachers' characteristics, behaviors, instructional practices, and perceptions of PD in teaching in low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban schools. I discussed the description and goals, rationale, literature review, implementation, project evaluation plan, and project implications. In Section 4, I discuss

the project's strengths in building middle school reading teachers' teaching capacity and competencies to close the achievement gap. Finally, I reflect on what I learned about scholarship, project development, leadership and change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to identify the characteristics, beliefs, instructional practices and behaviors, and perceptions of PD of middle school reading teachers who close the achievement gap while raising student achievement in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools. After analyzing the inner and outer attributes of teachers and their perceptions of PD and a review of literature, I developed a three-day PD program entitled *Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students*.

In this section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the doctoral project. I also include recommendations for alternative approaches. I conduct a self-analysis of what I learned about scholarship, project development, and leadership and change. I include a personal reflection on the importance of my work and what I learned through the process of completing my doctoral project study. Finally, I discuss my results' implications, applications, and suggested directions for future research.

Project Strengths

One strength of the project is that it was designed using feedback, observation, and analysis of teachers who have been successful in closing the achievement gap while raising student achievement. The teachers possessed common characteristics and performed similar behaviors that they attributed to their ability to academically grow students in low-socioeconomic, high-minority areas. In addition, the teachers also shared similar perceptions about PD and the types of support teachers who work with

marginalized students need. The project is designed using their feedback and characteristics. Therefore, the project is expected strengthen teachers' self-efficacy and competency in working with minority students from diverse backgrounds.

Another strength of this project is that it can be used as a resource for reading teachers to engage and motivate diverse students that may result in higher student achievement and closed achievement gaps. Connecting learning to students' culture and making students' real-life experiences part of the curriculum helps bridge knowledge for students, makes learning more relevant, and engages and motivates students (Baldwin, 2015; Gay, 2013). This project is designed to give teachers tools and strategies to bridge cultures and increase student engagement. Using this project as a resource for reading teachers is expected to both help close the achievement gap in standardized test scores and improve overall student achievement.

A third strength of this project is that it focuses on supporting not only the academic, but also the social and emotional needs of low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban students. This marginalized population of students is identified as at-risk and have a higher probability of going to prison than any other group of students (Stand for Children, 2013). Culturally responsive teachers help students realize their potential (Gay, 2013; Glickman, 2014). This project is designed to support teachers in helping students realize their potential for academic success by helping teachers first examine and reflect upon their own cultural identities, beliefs, mindsets, and practices and how those behaviors and practices impact learning. This is important because students are more

likely to realize their potential when they are treated as if they have potential (Glickman, 2014).

Project Limitations

One of the project's limitations in addressing the problem is low administrative support and dedication to building teaching efficacy. If the PD deliverable is optional, administrator support is needed to require teachers to participant in the PD as part of their professional development plan. In addition, administrators contribute to the trust level of teachers and trust will only exist if administrators understand the goals and challenges of their teachers, visit the teachers' classrooms often, and make time for meaningful conversations with the teachers throughout the year (Hall, 2013). This is important because when trust is not present, teachers are unlikely to take risks or acknowledge responsibility for students' actions and behaviors (Dress, 2016; Dweck, 2015; Hall, 2013; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014).

A second limitation in addressing the problem is time and commitment from all stakeholders. While summer PD is required, unless mandated, teachers have a choice of which PD to attend. If the PD deliverable is optional, teachers would need to see value in cultural responsive pedagogy before they would sign up to attend it. In addition, building solid relationships with diverse students take time and commitment. Not all students will have similar cultural backgrounds despite their racial and ethnic characteristics. Understanding each child's cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors and how they affect the child's learning, and also acknowledging, appreciating, and incorporating those cultures will take dedication and time.

A third limitation in addressing the problem includes teacher resistance. Culture shapes individuals' beliefs, and beliefs are more influential than logic, reason, and professional expertise (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). If teachers are not willing to change their beliefs and mindsets about marginalized students and their cultures, they will more than likely be unwilling to change their instructional practices (Dress, 2016). Likewise, if teachers change instructional practices but resist changing beliefs and mindset about marginalized students, it will be unlikely that their students will grow academically (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In order for teachers to become culturally responsive, they must understand that the purpose of culturally responsive teaching is to acknowledge and value the experiences and cultures of minority students. Simply reducing their pedagogical practices to what is suggested in this project study will not result in improved student achievement and closed achievement gaps (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). One alternative approach in helping teachers understand and value their students' experiences and building teacher competency in working with low-socioeconomic students is participation in a lesson study model, which provides "large-scale, sustainable professional development" (Doig & Groves, 2011, p. 78).

Another alternative recommendation for helping teachers to build their competency in working with low-socioeconomic students is through peer coaching. Peer coaching is an effective way of improving teachers' practice and allows teachers to get feedback and support from one another (Arslan, 2013). Participants in the study

suggested that teachers have opportunities to work with and observe colleagues as an option for PD. If teachers feel they have a support group in discussing the challenges and goals of becoming culturally responsive and support with the implementation process, change may not seem as daunting. Participants could be assigned to peers that have been successful in closing the achievement guide where live mentoring and coaching takes place over the course of the year.

Scholarship

Research is a systematic approach of increasing knowledge to devise new applications. When I began my project study, I inquired about the characteristics of teachers who were effective in closing the achievement gap after observing and personally experiencing success in raising student achievement with little to no gaps. As a 14-year veteran educator who had heard countless local and national discussions about the achievement gap and its persistence despite reform, I sought to understand what characteristics were shared by teachers who close the achievement gap and determine if and how these characteristics could be developed in others. I therefore began to read empirical research about effective teaching practices, characteristics, and theories. I learned about conceptual frameworks that frame research studies and began to understand the significance of such frameworks. By learning how to collect and analyze data, I developed as a researcher and teacher practitioner. My proficiency as an instructional leader to teachers improved, and I observed teachers under my leadership's instruction improve.

Throughout the process of developing the project, I gained a greater sense of urgency to affect change within school systems to improve equity in education. I am passionate about this project study and its potential to impact social change. My competency and craft also evolved, which positively drove change in my work environment. I encouraged teachers to use data as reference points of improvement and helped them to understand the importance and correlation of strong relationships and trust not only with students but also with their school leadership team in student achievement. My project was a result of peer-reviewed literature to exhaustion and data collection and analysis. As an educator, the process has inspired me to join local advocacy groups and to work to become part of the district's African American Success Initiative.

Project Development and Evaluation

After completing the review of literature, collecting and analyzing data, it was apparent that teachers who work in low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban schools need to become culturally responsive teachers. The inner and outer characteristics identified in the participants aligned to characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. These findings helped me to conclude that teachers who work with marginalized students need specific characteristics in order to successfully close the achievement gap. In order to help teachers develop these attributes, I had to create a process in which teachers examined and reflected upon their own identities, beliefs, and mindsets. It they were to become culturally responsive, understanding how their cultural identities contributed to gaps in achievement were paramount. However, I did not want to stop there.

The participants shared that PD often failed to address the needs of teachers who work in low-socioeconomic schools with high-minority populations. Observation of district PD supported their perceptions. I did not want to provide PD that only told teachers to reflect on themselves and their practices without also giving them tools and strategies to help them create culturally responsive classrooms. So, I designed a project that addressed teacher self-reflection to help teachers understand their role in student achievement, incorporated student social and emotional learning to help teachers build students' coping skills to deal with societal issues, and provided culturally responsive reading instructional strategies to increase student engagement and student achievement.

Leadership and Change

For me, leadership is humility and service. Change occurred as I read through peer-reviewed literature and conducted the collection of data. During this process, I began to self-reflect on my practices and examine how my cultural identity, beliefs, and values affected the way I led my team of teachers. Prior to this project study, I felt I understood the characteristics of teachers who successfully grew marginalized students academically. I felt that these characteristics were more likely innate and could not be developed. With this belief, my coaching was limited to instructional practices, and teachers whose inner attributes and beliefs were dissimilar to those I felt complemented effective teachers were thought to be misplaced and encouraged to go to schools that better suited their cultural backgrounds.

Since conducting this project study, my approach to coaching has changed. I help teachers examine their beliefs and mindsets. I intentionally guide teachers into

understanding the cultures of their students, and I support them in building competencies to work with students whose cultures differ from their own. I also work to build teachers' trust because I understand the importance of trust in risk-taking and change not only in teacher self-efficacy but also in student achievement.

Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer

As I reflect on my journey through the doctoral process, I recognize that I have progressed as a scholar. My ability to research, analyze and critique, and write has tremendously improved. I have a deeper understanding and appreciation for research and how research improves my work as a practitioner. This doctoral process presented opportunities for me to collaborate with administrators and fellow educators across the country and helped me to explore educational issues in a systematic approach. As I converse with educators, I hear scholarly thinking and dialogue and can see my scholarly approach to solving problems.

As a practitioner, I have grown in my ability to improve instructional methods and behaviors to promote change in the classroom. Throughout the project study, I read and reflected on new literature and often incorporated the best practices into my approach. I grew in my ability to ask the right questions, analyze data and provide solutions, and coach teachers in improving their instructional practices. I have also shared insight as a practitioner to colleagues on issues of behavior and ways to close the reading achievement gap. In addition, I have joined advocacy organizations that I came across in my research to help promote change.

Part of my job description is to develop PD for teachers that improve instruction. This doctoral experience has helped me to become more effective in being a project developer. As I have learned to ask the right questions, I have grown in addressing the right issues. Data were the basis of the project study and the analysis of the data, along with a second review of literature in Section 3, helped me to develop a research-based PD to meet the needs of teachers who work in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools in order to meet the challenge of closing the achievement gap.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The project developed was based on the findings of the study and has the potential to close the achievement and create social change for an urban school community. Educators, politicians, and reformers have attempted to close the achievement gap for decades with minimal results. While mandates have been placed on school districts and teacher pay tied to test scores, this project is designed to cultivate the characteristics of effective teachers in teachers who educate students in low-socioeconomic, high-minority schools.

The participants within this study felt that PD, though proficient for novice teachers, failed to address the needs or challenges of teachers who work in high-minority, low-socioeconomic schools. This project is important because it is designed to specifically address the needs and challenges of teachers who work in environments of poverty and marginalized students in order to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap. Those who participate in the PD will build their competency in

working with diverse students and learn targeted strategies to create culturally responsive classrooms.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Impact on Social Change

This project is designed to build the efficacy and competency of teachers who work in high-minority, low-socioeconomic urban schools. At the local level, the project offers teachers an opportunity to examine their own cultural identity and beliefs to understand how their beliefs and behaviors impede student achievement and contribute to achievement gaps. The goal of the project is to develop culturally responsive teachers who have a competency to work with diverse children in low-socioeconomic, high-minority areas in order to close the achievement gap in reading. A characteristic of culturally responsive teachers is transformational teaching that engages students in learning how to cope with societal issues such as prejudice and discrimination and helping students work to bring change (Glickman, 2014).

In the district where this study was conducted, only 4 out of every 100 Black and Hispanic students were graduating college ready (Stand for Children, 2016). Even more, 10 zips codes located in the local district accounted for 3,100 prisoners in the state prison (Stand for Children, 2013). When compared to high school graduation data in 2011, of the 3,000 freshmen in those 10 zip codes who began high school in 2007, only 26 graduated college-ready in 2011 (Stand for Children, 2013). My study targeted teachers who worked in those zip codes and the participants accounted for 4 of the 10 zip codes. Building teachers efficacy and competency in working with marginalized students,

helping students not only cope with society's injustices and inequity, but also helping students realize their own potential has a tremendous potential impact on society.

Directions for Future Research and Applications

Future research can be conducted to include more teachers across the district that have been successful in closing the achievement gap. Future research may also expand the scope of this project to determine whether the PD increased the number of culturally responsive teachers in the district. Follow up research is recommended to assess if the PD successfully helped close the achievement gap. Research can be expanded across multiple core content areas to close achievement gaps and improve student achievement in math and science. Finally, research can be conducted to determine if having culturally responsive teachers helps impact social change by lowering the pipeline to prison and raising the number of students who graduate college ready.

Conclusion

Achievement gaps have persisted for decades and with grave affects on the lives and potentials of children who grow up in low-socioeconomic areas. While debates about standardized testing, pay for performance, Common Core, funding, and social stereotypes dominant national conversations, poor and minority students are left to attend schools where their cultural experiences are devalued and where they are often asked to reject their culture in favor of the dominant culture all together (Glickman, 2014). President Obama said, "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else," (Office of the Press

Secretary, 2013). Yet, students have teachers who have beliefs, mindsets, and behavioral practices that perpetuate stereotypes and lower students' beliefs in their potential.

There are several factors that contribute to the achievement gap. However, the findings in this project study supported that one of the most important factors in students' academic success and potential is the teacher with whom students interact. Cultural identities, beliefs, mindsets, and lack of awareness and responsiveness of other cultures are key contributors in persistent gaps in achievement. Findings within this qualitative study showed that participants who closed the achievement gap within the local district shared characteristics that have been identified as those of culturally responsive teachers. The teachers were caring and accepting of all their students. They maintained high expectations and strived to maintain the culture of each of their students. The teachers were multicultural and approached teaching and learning using their students' strengths. They also worked with a greater purpose. They sought to not only help students realize their potential, but also help students learn the codes of the dominant culture while learning to be a change agent for their own. The teachers were assertive in their craft, firm but caring.

In addition, findings indicted a need for PD that was specific and targeted for teachers who work with marginalized students in urban schools. Therefore, I developed a three-day PD program entitled Building Teacher Capacity: A Round Map in Teaching Minority Students, which could be used to address teacher efficacy and inability to close the achievement gap. This project incorporated step by step development of teaching capacity from inner attributes to outer behaviors. The potential impact on social change is

evident. Through the process of developing the project study, I grew as a scholar, a

practitioner, and advocate. Though this project concludes my doctoral journey, my work

with social advocacy is just beginning.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session for Teachers

Purpose and Goals

Achievement gaps in reading persist in the district despite targeted initiatives. District PD has focused on generalized best practices and district research-based frameworks presented; however, PD fails to address specific needs and concerns for teachers who work in high-minority areas with economically and racially marginalized students. The recent study on teacher characteristic attributes and perceptions revealed that teachers who close the achievement gap in the southeastern section of the district possess culturally responsive characteristics and indicated the need for PD that addressed culturally responsive pedagogical practices in order to support teachers who work in high-minority, low-socioeconomic urban schools. In addition, the teachers' perceptions about district PD was that more targeted training to address the needs of teachers who work with marginalized students is needed in order to prepare and sustain teachers who work in these schools. Therefore, I developed a three-day PD with an overarching goal of developing culturally responsive teachers.

There are four characteristics that are necessary for culturally responsive pedagogy to be fully effective: caring and empathy, personal reflection about attitudes and beliefs, personal reflection about one's own cultural frames of reference, and teacher knowledge about other cultures (Rychly and Graves, 2012). In culturally responsive pedagogy, "caring" is not associated with being "nice" or "kind," but is referenced as a state of unwillingness to tolerate underachievement. *Building Teacher Capacity: A*

Raodmap in Teaching Minority Students is designed to help teachers personally reflect in order to increase teachers' understanding of their own cultural identities, beliefs, and mindsets that affect student achievement and achievement gaps. It is also designed to build teachers' competency in working with marginalized students in urban school districts and provide strategies to help teachers create culturally responsive classrooms. The goals for the PD will be the following: (a) teachers will examine their own cultural identities, cultural beliefs, values, biases, and mindsets and how these qualities reflect in behaviors that contribute to achievement gaps; (b) teachers will learn and apply strategies in working with diverse students; and (c) teachers will learn strategies and develop lessons to create culturally responsive classrooms.

Target Audience

The primary target audience for this PD will be middle school reading teachers employed within USISD. As the PD develops, the audience may be broadened to include all reading teachers employed within the district and surrounding districts who may see a need for their teachers to attend a PD that focuses on developing culturally responsive teachers in order to close the achievement gap.

Timeline

The proposed PD will be implemented during summer PD over the course of three days. Session 1 will focus on Goal 1 and developing the inner attributes of teachers who successfully close the achievement gap. Over the course of 8 hours, attention will be placed on teacher self-reflection of their cultural identity, beliefs, biases, values, behaviors, and mindsets and how these qualities influence instructional practice and

contribute to the achievement gap. Session 2 will focus on Goal 2 and developing behaviors (classroom management) that help marginalized students cope with issues within their cultures that inhibit student achievement. Over the course of 8 hours, teachers will learn social and emotional learning strategies that help teachers exert high-expectations (care) while showing empathy and help teachers manage the diverse issues within the classrooms. Session 3 will focus on Goal 3 and focus on content-based approaches in culturally responsive classrooms. Over 8 hours, teachers will identify best practices around teaching reading to culturally and ethnically diverse students, design culturally responsive lesson plans, and practice implementation. The agenda for Session 1 is presented first with the supporting documents followed by Session 2 and Session 3's agenda and supporting documents.

Materials and Equipment

- Audio visual presentation device

- Internet access

- Manila paper for name tents

- Markers and highlighters

- Pocket folders

- Post-it chart paper

- Pens and notepads

- Handouts and presentation articles

- PowerPoint presentation

- Laptop

Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students

Session 1 Agenda

Goal 1: Teachers will examine their own cultural identities, cultural beliefs, values, biases, and mindsets and how these qualities reflect in behaviors that contribute to achievement gaps.

Objectives	
1. Identify cultural identity 2. Examine beliefs, values, biases, mindset, and behaviors towards other cultures 3. Reflect on how cultural identity, beliefs, etc...impact the achievement gap	
8:00 - 8:30 am	Introduction and Ice-breaker: Create a name tent. Use the four corners of the tent to write a word or phrase explaining the following: greatest fear, greatest strength, greatest motivation, and what brings your happiness During introductions, begin with name, school assignment, and years in education. Then read the tent corners. Introduce the goal and objectives for today's PD session.
8:30 - 8:50 am	Participants will complete the Cultural Identity Check List and Scale to Access World View to examine their cultural identity. (20 minutes)
8:50 - 9:15	Reflection - Participants will reflect using the Cultural and Behavioral Reflection handout (15 minutes) Turn and Talk - Share with an elbow partner your findings about yourself and how your identity may shape your beliefs, values, and biases. (5 minutes) Whole group discussion (5 minutes)
9:15 - 9:30 am	Observation and Analysis Feedback Form (Beliefs and Bias Check) Participants will analyze a series of pictures and record the first word or phrase that comes to mind. Then, identify in order of comfort level from most to least comfortable (PowerPoint Slides)

9:30 - 9:50 am	Reflection - Participants will reflect on their descriptions of the images, why they associated their first thoughts with the images, and their comfort levels. What resonates most to them about what brings them comfort? What biases are revealed?
	Discussion - What did this process tell you about yourself?
9:50 - 10:15 am	Observation and Feedback - Bridging Cultural Behaviors (Case Study #1)
	Participants will view an African American church service at https://youtu.be/rGzW6pJ4oEI (PowerPoint slide 18)
10:15 - 10:30 am	Break
10:30 – 11:10 am	Agent and Target Status Checklist Activity (PowerPoint Slide 21)
	Participants will read over the agent and target status checklist, highlighting any agents that describe them and circling any targets that describe them and discuss their findings (10 minutes)
	Participants will read "Current concepts of identity" and "Applying relational-cultural theory," excerpts. Hammer, T. R., Crethar, H. C., & Cannon, K. (2016). Convergence of identities through the lens of relational-cultural theory. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 11*(2), 126-141. doi:10.1080/15401383.2016.1181596 (15 minutes)
	In groups, participants will discuss and record on chart paper key points, post, and share in whole group discussion. (15 minutes)
11:10 - 11:15 am	Reflection - How does your Agent status demonstrate privilege, status quo, convergence, and salience? What approach can you take to understand the Target status of others or someone whose cultural experiences are different from you? (PowerPoint Slide 23)
11:15 – 12:30 pm	Lunch
12:30-1:30 pm	Observation and Feedback - Bridging Cultural Responses (PowerPoint Slides 24-30)
	"Freedom Writers" Analysis
	https://youtu.be/bENwM8IiCsQ
	Clip 1 - For this clip (4 minutes, 6 seconds), participants will analyze students' behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, and responses

	individually and collectively throughout the class. What do the students' thoughts and actions tell you about their cultural identity and perceptions? Why do they respond as they do?
	https://youtu.be/dPoi4hktrJQ
	Clip 2 - For this video (2 minutes, 21 seconds.), participants will explore how target status influences beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors.
	https://youtu.be/jFNJib8MpT0
	Clip 3 - For this video (3 minutes, 55 seconds), participants will analyze the steps Mrs. G takes to change perceptions. Participants will analyze the thoughts and behaviors of various minor and major characters and examine the impact the experience has on student behavior. What characteristic does Mrs. G possess?
	https://youtu.be/AjGIJPE8B8I
	Clip 4 - For this video (2 minutes, 34 seconds), participants will analyze the effect of the Holocaust survivors' words on the student-efficacy.
	https://youtu.be/84iTxSpAv1o
	Clip 5 - For this video (4 minutes, 59 seconds), participants will explore the significance of Mrs. G's toast and its effect on the students.
	https://youtu.be/1JauH_EKpaY
	Clip 6 - For this video (2 minutes, 4 seconds), participants will examine Mrs. G's actions and words in order to analyze the characteristics she possesses and its affect on the learner.
	https://youtu.be/G0rXUr-msX0
	Clip 7 - For this video (2 minutes, 35 seconds), participants will examine the effect that Mrs. G had on her students and why.
1:30 - 1:40 pm	Reflection - What were Mrs. G's beliefs and values? How did her cultural identity initially influence her beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors? How did she use and build upon her identity? What characteristics did she possess that made her effective in teaching her marginalized students? How can you apply Ms. G's attributes to

	close the achievement gap? (PowerPoint Slide 31)
1:40 - 2:20 pm	Participants will read " She's strict for a good reason: Highly effective teachers." (10 minutes)
	Participants will discuss in groups the implications of the findings in the article. (5 minutes)
	Reflect on how your beliefs and characteristics resemble and differ for the characteristics discussed in the study? Do you believe that you possess characteristics that may contribute to gaps in achievement? (10 minutes)
	Whole group discussion about the article and implications (5 minutes)
	Based on the article, participants will analyze and discuss with a partner ways in which their cultural identity, beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors may contribute to the persistent achievement gap in reading. (5 minutes)
	Using a chart, the participants will identify characteristics within themselves that they feel stifle learning. The participants will discuss how these characteristics stifle student achievement. Then, in the last column, write how they will address this characteristic. (10 minutes)
2:20 - 2:30	Reflection - Participants will reflect on their reason for teaching where they teach and to whom they teach.
2:30 – 2:45	Break
2:45 - 3:30 pm	Implementation (The Action Plan) – Think about your various learners and challenges that you have encountered or could possibly encounter. Develop action steps to better understand the students, their values, beliefs, and identity. Analyze how your cultural identity may contribute to the challenges. Brainstorm how you can lower your identity's affect negatively on the student(s).
3:30 – 4:00 pm	Participants will recap and reflect on the day's PD training. The facilitator will distribute and allow time for participants to complete the evaluation forms.

Cultural Identity and Behavioral Reflections

Cultural Identity:

What is my cultural identity and how may it shape my beliefs and values? How may it influence bias and behaviors? Cite evidence from your assessment to support your understanding.

Cultural Values and Beliefs Reflections

Images:

Reflect on your initial descriptions of the images. Why was this your first thought? Look at your order of comfort. What resonates most with you about what brings you comfort? What biases are revealed?

Cultural and Behavioral Bias Reflections

Agent and Target Status:

How does your agent status demonstrate privilege, status quo, convergence, and salience? What approach can you take to understand the target status of others or someone whose cultural experiences are different from yours? Do you ignore them or do you acknowledge them?

Reflections of Teacher Beliefs, Values, Mindset, and Behavior

What were Ms. G's beliefs and values? How did her cultural identity initially influence her beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors? How did she use and build upon her identity? What characteristics did she possess that made her effective in teaching her marginalized students? How can you apply Ms. G's attributes to close the achievement gap?

Self Reflection

Effective Teachers:

How do your beliefs and characteristics resemble and differ from the characteristics discussed in the study? What are your thoughts about the findings in the study of effective teachers? Do you believe that you possess characteristics that may contribute to gaps in achievement?

Teaching Reflection

Purpose Statement:

Reflect on your goals and what brings you joy in your career. Why do you teach? Why do you choose to teach in the district? What do you hope to offer?

CULTURAL IDENTITY IMAGES

Analyze each picture as it is displayed and record the first word or phrase that comes to mind. Then, to the right, order your comfort level in engagement with the images from 1-10, where 1 is the greatest comfort.

Image 1   Rating

_____   _____

Image 2

_____   _____

Image 3

_____   _____

Image 4

_____   _____

Image 5

_____   _____

Image 6

_____   _____

Image 7

_____   _____

Image 8

_____   _____

Image 9

_____   _____

Image 10

_____   _____

BRIDGING CULTURAL BEHAVIORS

CASE STUDY #1

Evidence:

Cultural Difference:
What are the cultural differences in the Black church verses your church?

Reflection in School:
How do these cultural behaviors possibly reflect in the classroom? How can I use this information to bridge cultural gaps?

AGENT AND TARGET STATUS

On the chart below, highlight each Agent status in the status category that classifies you. Circle each Target status that classifies you.

Status Category	Agent Status	Target Status	Associated Bias
Race and ethnicity	People who are White	People of color	Racism
Class	People who are middle class or higher	People who are poor or working class	Classism
Gender	Male	Female	Sexism
Education	People with a Bachelor's degree or higher	People with some college or below	Education bias
Relationship Status	People who are married	People who are single or divorced	Relational bias
Native Language	People whose native language is English	People whose native language is something other than English	Linguicism
Religion	People who are Christian	People who are Jewish, Muslim, and other religious minorities	Religious bias, Secular Privilege
Beauty	People who are perceived as "attractive"	People who are perceived as "ugly" or "unattractive"	Physical attractiveness bias
Age	People who are middle age/adults	People who are young or elderly	Ageism, Adultism

Hammer, T. R., Crethar, H. C., & Cannon, K. (2016). Convergence of identities through the lens of relational-cultural theory. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 11*(2), 126-141. doi:10.1080/15401383.2016.1181596

Observation and Feedback for "Freedom Writer" Clips

Clip	Effective Actions:
Clip 1	Analyze the students' behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, and responses individually and collectively throughout the class. What do the students thoughts and actions tell you about their cultural identity and perceptions? Why do they respond as they do?
Clip 2	How does target status influences the students' beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors.
Clip 3	What steps does Ms. G take to change perceptions? Analyze the thoughts and behaviors of various minor and major characters. What is the impact of the experience on the students' perceptions and behaviors? What characteristic does Ms. G possess?
Clip 4	What effect does the Holocaust survivor's words have on student-efficacy?

Clip	Effective Actions:
Clip 5	What is the significance of Ms. G's toast and its effect on the students?
Clip 6	Examine Ms. G's actions and words. What characteristics does she possess and what impact do these characteristics have on the students?
Clip 7	What effect does Ms. G have on her students? Why?

Self Reflection

Goal-Setting:

Using a chart, identify characteristics in yourself that you feel may stifle learning outcomes for minority students. Discuss how you feel these characteristics stifle student achievement. Then, in the last column, write how you will address this characteristic.

Personal Belief, Bias, Behavior	Effect on Student Achievement	Modification to Characteristic

Session 1

Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The professional development objectives were clearly stated.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development objectives were met.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activity helped me better understand my cultural identity, beliefs, values, and biases.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activities helped me better understand the role my beliefs, values, biases, and behaviors have on student behavior and achievement gaps.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activities helped me evolve my thinking as a teacher.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development helped me to see authentic cultural differences and that these differences are viable alternatives to the dominant culture.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

As a result of this professional development, I will learn more about the experiences and cultures of my students.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

As a result of this professional development, I am able to shift from my own culture's frame of reference to other cultural frames allowing me empathize and modify my teaching.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
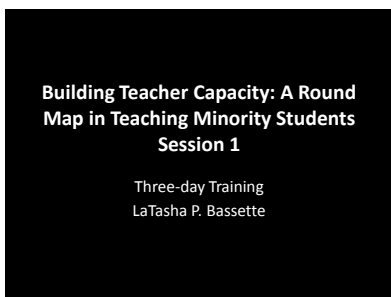   5   4   3   2   1

Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.
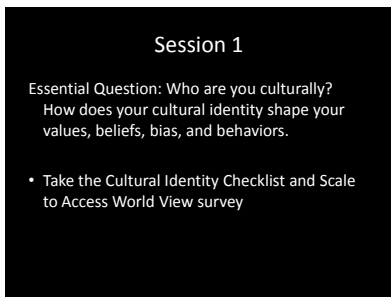
PowerPoint Slides
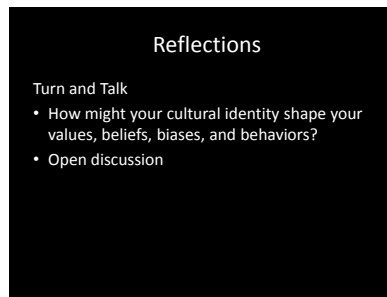
Professional Development Training for Teachers

Building Teacher Capacity: A Round Map in Teaching Minority Students Session 1

Three-day Training
LaTasha P. Bassette

Slide 1

Objectives

- Identify your cultural identity
- Examine how your cultural identity - beliefs, values, biases, mindset influence your behaviors
- Reflect on how cultural identity, beliefs, etc...impact the achievement gap

Slide 2

Session 1

Essential Question: Who are you culturally? How does your cultural identity shape your values, beliefs, bias, and behaviors.

- Take the Cultural Identity Checklist and Scale to Access World View survey

Slide 3

Reflections

Turn and Talk
- How might your cultural identity shape your values, beliefs, biases, and behaviors?
- Open discussion

Slide 4

Exploration

- Let delve deeper into your cultural identify, beliefs, values, and biases.
- What makes us comfortable and uncomfortable tells us a lot about ourselves.
- In the next seven slides, you will analyze a series of pictures.
- Record the first thought that comes to mind as you view each image.

Slide 5

Image 1

Slide 6

Image 2

Slide 7

Image 3

Slide 8

Image 4

Slide 9

Image 5

Slide 10

From greatest to least , which image represents your comfort in engagement?

Slide 16

Reflection

- Reflect on your initial descriptions of the images.
- Why did you associate your first thoughts with the images?
- How did those perceptions affect your comfort level?
- What resonates most to you about what brings you comfort?
- What biases are revealed?

Discussion - What did this process tell you about yourself?

Slide 17

Social Constructs

- How does your status category: race/ethnicity, gender, social class, education, etc… empower you while disempowering others?
- Read through the status categories in your folder. Highlight anywhere you have an Agent status. Circle anywhere you have a Target Status.
- Read the article excerpts "Current concepts of identity" and "Applying relational-cultural theory."
- What are the key points in the article? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Slide 21

Social Status – Key Points

Status Category	Agent Status	Target Status	Associated Bias
Race and ethnicity	People who are White	People of color	Racism
Class	People who are middle class or higher	People who are poor or working class	Classism
Gender	Male	Female	Sexism
Education	People with a Bachelor's degree or higher	People with some college or below	Education bias
Relationship Status	People who are married	People who are single or divorced	Relational bias
Native Language	People whose native language is English	People whose native language is something other than English	Linguicism
Religion	People who are Christian	People who are Jewish, Muslim, and other religious minorities	Religious bias, Secular Privilege
Beauty	People who are perceived as "attractive"	People who are perceived as "ugly" or "unattractive"	Physical attractiveness bias

Hanson, T. E., Czerlas, N. C., & Saxon, K. (2010). *Convergence I dentities through the lens of relational-cultural theory. Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 5 (2), 126-141. doi: 10.1080/15401383.2018.1183706*

Slide 22

Reflection

- How does your agent status demonstrate privilege, status quo, convergence, and salience?
- What approach can you take to understand the target status of others or someone whose cultural experiences are different from yours?
- Do you ignore status or do you acknowledge it? Why or why not?

Slide 23

Observation and Feedback – Clip 1

- View the video clip *Mrs. G First Day* from the movie "Freedom Writers"

- Video courtesy of YouTube https://youtu.be/bENwM8IiCsQ

Slide 24

Effective Teachers

- What does research say about effective teachers?
- Read " She's strict for a good reason: Highly effective teachers."
- Discuss in groups the implications of the findings in the article.
- Reflect on how your beliefs and characteristics resemble and differ for the characteristics discussed in the study? Do you believe that you possess characteristics that may contribute to gaps in achievement?

Slide 33

Wrap Up

- Recap highlights from today's training session.
- Professional Development Evaluation

Slide 36

Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students

Session 2 Agenda

Goal 2: Teachers will learn and apply strategies in working with diverse students.

Objectives
1. Connect the cultural beliefs, values, biases, experiences and mindsets of students to student behavior and achievement
2. Understand the framework of social and emotional learning and its significance in

	closing the achievement gap
	3. Incorporate social and emotional learning into lessons alongside content

8:00 - 8:30 am	Participants will read and discuss the article "Editorial: ZIP codes are tied to a Dallas child's destiny"
	Group Discussion
8:30 - 9:00 am	Participants will explore current issues facing minority youth and how these issues, beliefs, and biases impact behavior.
	Essential Question: How do beliefs, biases, and experiences influence behaviors?
	Build Background - Recap the "Freedom Writers" clip where the young girl explains why she hates white people. Why did the students not want to listen to the teacher?
	https://youtu.be/dPoi4hktrJQ (PowerPoint Slide #40)
	How valid is the argument that she presented? Think about issues that are happening today.
	The Power of a Response - https://youtu.be/My59DS3aCGo
	What do you observe? What does the senator understand that her critics and Geraldo do not? How did beliefs and biases affect response?
9:00 - 9:15 am	Reflection - Think about a child that you have written a referral on or had suspended. What do you remember about this child and his/her background? Why might the child have behaved or responded as he/she did? How would change your approach today?
9:15 - 9:50	Essential Question: How do we foster better responses in students to maximize learning?
	Participants will watch an clip of an overview of SEL https://youtu.be/DqNn9qWoO1M (5 minutes) (PowerPoint Slide #44)
	Participants will delve into literature about the framework of social and emotional learning. In groups, half will read the literature on SEL Competencies and half will read the literature on SEL Outcomes.
	Participants will share the key points for each assigned reading and

	using chart paper by developing an overview of SEL, the benefits, and how they could incorporate the competencies in their classrooms/schools. (20 minutes) (PowerPoint Slide #45)
	Participants will post their charts and share. (10 minutes)
	Casel (2015). SEL Competencies. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning
	Casel (2015). SEL Outcomes. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning
9:50 - 10:10 am	Participants will view SEL in Practice and identify implementation practices (PowerPoint Slide #46)
	Clip 1: https://youtu.be/d6vS0UBGSW4 (5 minutes)
	Clip 2: https://youtu.be/MZ1kDWv-uv0 (Stop at 5:06 marker)
	Clip 3: https://youtu.be/4w06gVinBhc (6:51 minutes)
10:10 - 10:25 am	Reflection - What are my thoughts and feelings about SEL? Do I believe incorporating SEL will improve student achievement? What roadblocks do you feel may obstruct your ability to implement SEL?
	Discussion
10:25 - 10:40 am	Break
10:40 - 11:40 am	Role-play Activity - Participant groups will receive one of the five scenarios. They will receive 10 minutes to plan out their scenario, answering the guiding questions. Each group will then pair with a group that has a different scenario and role-play, giving feedback (10 minutes). Rotations will continue until each group has moved through all the scenarios.
	Scenario 1 - You have noticed that several of your students do not participate in class discussion and are defensive when you try to engage them. Their grades are not good and you feel participation has a lot to do with it. What SEL core competency could you

	embed to help build student-efficacy? What might this look like in a classroom lesson?
	Scenario 2 - Mary and a few more students across your class periods are very talkative and are constantly off-task. When you try to address the behavior, they accuse you of picking on them and become irate. What SEL core competency might you incorporate? How would this look in the classroom?
	Scenario 3 - Several of your students are just angry. They are disrespectful towards each other and you. They are aggressive, have cussed at you, and have even attempted to approach you with violence. What SEL core competency might you incorporate? How would this look in the classroom?
	Scenario 4 - You notice that many of your students are afraid to try tasks in school because they are afraid of failure. They do not participate willingly in class discussion and are extremely hard on themselves when they get an answer wrong. What SEL core competency might you incorporate? What might this look like in the classroom?
	Scenario 5 - You have a number of students who have complained of being bullied. The bullies are not bad people, but want to promote themselves, so they put down others. What SEL core competency might you incorporate that would support both the bullied and the bully? How would this look in the classroom?
11:40 - 12:00 pm	Reflection - "OK but..." What were the challenges for you in implementing SEL in these scenarios?
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 - 1:10 pm	Group Discussion about roadblocks and other concerns.
	Participants will watch a video of a district where SEL is in progress.
	View the Video *Social Emotional Learning in the Atlanta Public Schools* https://youtu.be/F8hJGjYrs1E - Concluding Video (5:14)
1:10 - 1:30 pm	Participants will learn and engage in SEL strategies to incorporate in the reading curriculum.

	Metacognition:
	Literature: "Self-Monitoring Strategies for Use in the Classroom: A Promising Practice to Support Productive Behavior for Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders"
	Menzies, H. M, Lane, K. L., & Lee, J. M. (2009). Self-monitoring strategies for use in the classroom: A promising practice to support productive behavior for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Beyond Behavior, 18*(2), 27-35.
	Self-monitoring steps (PowerPoint Slide #52)
1:30 - 1:50 pm	Activity: In groups, participants will think back on their experience with students. Develop a self-monitoring metacognition intervention plan for a specific child that would have benefited from such a plan.
1:50 - 2:10 pm	Emotional vocabulary:
	Purpose: To help children identify and name a variety of emotions
	Skills Targeted: emotional intelligence, verbal communication, social skills
	(Participants will receive copies of the Feeling Journals)
	PowerPoint Slides #54-57
2:10 - 2:30 pm	Activity: In groups, participants will develop one of the emotional vocabulary activities and role-play with a partner.
2:30 - 3:00 pm	Inferential comprehension via character perspective (PowerPoint Slide #59)
3:00 - 3:30 pm	Activity: Using "Thank you Ma'am" create a lesson that would infuse inferential comprehension via character perspective.
3:30 - 4:00 pm	Participants will recap and reflect on the day's PD training. The facilitator will distribute and allow time for participants to complete the evaluation forms.

SEL in Practice

Clip 1	How did the teachers in Chicago Public School implement SEL? What were some of the practices and behavioral expectations?
Clip 2	What was the teachers' behavior? What were the results? How do the steps in the school shown reflect the ideas of SEL?
Clip 3	How did the educational community incorporate SEL? What were the benefits?

Reflection

SEL in Practice

What are my thoughts and feelings about SEL? Do I believe incorporating SEL will improve student achievement? What barriers or obstacles do you feel may obstruct your ability to implement SEL?

SEL Role-Play

What were the roadblocks for you in implementing SEL in these scenarios? How did you overcome those challenges or did you?

Reflection

Disciplinary Actions

Think about a child that you have written a referral on and had suspended. What do you remember about this child and his/her background? Why might the child have behaved or responded as he/she did? Did they child have high student achievement? How would change your approach today?

SEL

What are my thoughts and feelings about SEL? Do I believe incorporating SEL with improve student achievement? Why or why not?

Frustrated

Embarrassed

Sad

Mad

Scared

Nervous

Happy

Loved

Proud

Lonely

Session 2

Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The professional development objectives were clearly stated.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development objectives were met.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activity helped me better understand the framework of SEL and how to implement SEL into practice.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activities helped me better understand how incorporating social and emotional learning can impact student achievement.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activities helped me evolve my thinking as a teacher.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development helped me understand how to better engage with diverse students.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

As a result of this professional development, I will first take an empathetic approach that focuses on teaching behavioral responses when dealing with inappropriate responses of students.
Strongly agree Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
    5   4   3   2   1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.

PowerPoint Slides

Professional Development Training for Teachers

Building Teacher Capacity: A Round Map in Teaching Minority Students Session 2

Three-Day Training
LaTasha P. Bassette

Slide 37

- What is the school-to-prison pipeline? How does our district contribute?

- Participants will read an editorial about the school-to-prison pipeline in the district.

  The school-to-prison pipeline is a metaphor used to describe the amount of contact students have with juvenile and adult criminal justice systems as a result of zero-tolerance policies and the use of police in schools.

Slide 38

The Power of a Response

- What do you observe? What does the senator understand that her critics and Geraldo do not? How did beliefs and biases affect response?

*Video courtesy of YouTube
https://youtu.be/My59DS3aCGo

Slide 41

- What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

- Participants will watch an clip of an overview of SEL https://youtu.be/DqNn9qWoO1M

Slide 44

SEL

- Participants will delve into literature about the framework of social and emotional learning.
- SEL Competencies and SEL Outcomes
- using chart paper, develop an overview of SEL listing key points from the literature, explain the benefits, and identify possibilities of incorporating the competencies in your classrooms and schools.

Slide 45

SEL in Practice

- Clip 1: View the video *Chicago Public Schools* https://youtu.be/d6vS0UBGSW4

- Clip 2: View the video *Positive Behavior Supports* https://youtu.be/MZ1kDWv-uv0

- Clip 3: View the video *Chicago: Pioneers in Social Emotional Learning* https://youtu.be/4w06gVinBhc

Slide 46

Role-Play Activity

- Participant groups will receive one of the five scenarios. They will receive 10 minutes to plan out their scenario, answering the guiding questions. Each group will then pair with a group that has a different scenario and role-play, giving feedback (10 minutes). Rotations will continue until each group has moved through all the scenarios.

Slide 48

Reflection

- "OK but..." What were the challenges for you in implementing SEL in these scenarios?

- Open group discussion

- View the Video *Social Emotional Learning in Atlanta Public Schools* https://youtu.be/F8hJGjYrs1E

Slide 49

Metacognition

- Literature: "Self-Monitoring Strategies for Use in the Classroom: A Promising Practice to Support Productive Behavior for Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders"

Menzies, H. M, Lane, K. L., & Lee, J. M. (2009). Self-monitoring strategies for use in the classroom: A promising practice to support productive behavior for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Beyond Behavior, 18*(2), 27-35.

Slide 51

Metacognition

Steps for implementing self-monitoring into the classroom:

- identify the target behavior
- operationally define the target behavior
- collect baseline data of target behavior occurrence
- determine if it is an appropriate behavior to remediate
- design procedures and all materials
- teach the student how to self-monitor
- monitor student's progress
- fade use of intervention

Rafferty, L. A. (2010). Step-by-step: Teaching students to self-monitor. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 43*(2), 50-58.

Slide 52

Activity

- In groups, participants will think back on their experience with students. Develop a self-monitoring metacognition intervention plan for a specific child that would have benefited from such a plan.

Slide 53

Emotional Vocabulary

- Strategies:
- Make a list of feelings – See Emotional Dictionary
- Play emotional charades - One of you picks an emotion to convey to the other, using either your whole body or just your face. If your child is having trouble making sense of the faces, give her a mirror, ask her to make the same face as you and look in the mirror. She may be able to see the feeling on her face better than on yours.

Slide 54

Emotional Vocabulary

Strategies (cont.)
- Feelings Journaling
- **Goal of the Activity:** To teach your child how to use written communication to express a wide variety of emotions and as a tool to explore, examine and master difficult social situations.
- **Skills Targeted:** written communication, emotional intelligence, emotional vocabulary, social problem solving

- A feelings journal is used to help children understand his/her emotions and give them voice. It gives younger children a chance to recognize the span of emotions they experience and older children can use a feelings journal as an outlet to work through anger, frustration, social problems and decision-making.

Slide 56

Inferential comprehension via character perspective

- Literacy and emotional literacy don't have to be taught separately. There are many great books that specifically explore emotions, but you can find feelings in any story you read.
- In inferential comprehension via character perspective, the teacher incorporates more time exploring characters thoughts and feelings and how characters overcome challenges rather than simply the story's plot.

Slide 59

Building Teacher Capacity: A Roadmap in Teaching Minority Students

Session 3 Agenda

Goal 3: Teachers will learn strategies and develop lessons to create culturally responsive classrooms.

Objectives	
1. Understand culturally responsive pedagogy 2. Become familiar with strategies and practices that are culturally responsive 3. Develop a culturally responsive reading lesson plan that facilitate learning	
8:00 - 8:10 am	Reflection - How do cultural identity and SEL help teachers close the achievement gap? Open group discussion
8:10 - 8:30 am	Introduction to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Participants will read *Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Elizabeth Kozleski Discussion about article and key features of culturally responsive teaching. Kozleski, E. B. (2010). Culturally responsive teaching matters! Retrieved from www.equityallianceatasu.org
8:30 - 9:00 am	Culturally Responsive Teaching - Activating Prior Knowledge TEK: Make inferences and draw conclusions about literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding Lesson Model - Introduction into *The Diary of Anne Frank* Word of the day - Perseverance Essential Question - How do you persevere in times of injustice, racism and bigotry, and inequality? KWL - What do you *know* about injustice, racism, bigotry, and inequality? What might you *learn* from exploring how others handle or confront such injustices? Analysis - Participants will discuss how the introductory lesson taps

	into prior knowledge and experiences of their diverse students.
9:00 - 9:30 am	Activity #1 - TEK: 7F19D Make inferences and draw conclusions about literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. TEK: F19F Make intertextual links among and across texts.
	Participants will work in a group to activate students' prior knowledge given the standards above and the text selections below. They will post their plans on chart paper and display around the room for group discussion.
	Text Selections - from *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* and, *What to a Slave is the 4th of July*?
	Tasks:
	• Develop an essential question
	• Activate students' prior knowledge
9:30 - 10:30 am	Culturally Responsive Teaching - Story Grammar and Story Maps using inferential comprehension via character perspective
	Walk participants through a lesson using story grammar, story maps and inferential comprehension via character perspective
	TEK: 8.6B Analyze how the central characters' qualities influence the resolution of the central conflict 8.6A Determine if and how the central conflict is resolved
	Modeled Lesson - *The Medicine Bag* by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (p. 248-255 in Holt-McDougal)
	Walk participants through lesson as though they were the students.
	Word of the day - Assimilate
	Essential Question - In a society where we are expected to assimilate, how do you show your cultural pride?
	Quickwrite: What is your cultural heritage and what about your culture brings you the most pride?
	Summary: "In *The Medicine Bag*, Martin comes to appreciate his Sioux grandfather and feels honored when his grandpa gives him an important heirloom." (Taken from Holt-McDougal textbook)

	Set a Purpose: "Let's explore Martin's conflicts of living among the dominant culture while being a member of a very marginalized culture."
	Guided questions: Why did the Martin and his sister exaggerate when they talked about their grandfather? What conclusions can you draw about Martin's neighborhood? What is Martin's central conflict? How does Martin's conflict grow?
	What can you conclude about Martin from lines 49-50, "I wanted to sink right through the pavement,"
	Students will continue reading using the following organizer.
	Story Map: Plot the significant events of the plot. How is Martin's conflict resolved?
	Analysis - Look back at the article *Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters!* Key features on p. 4. How does this lesson reflect culturally responsive teaching?
10:30 - 10:45	Break
10:45 - 11:50 am	Activity #2 - TEK: 7F19D Make inferences and draw conclusions about literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. TEK: F19F Make intertextual links among and across texts.
	Participants will create a cultural lesson that uses story grammar, a story map, and inferential comprehension via character perspective.
	Text Selection *Who Are You Today, Maria?* By Judith Ortiz Cofer

The organizer referenced above:

Question	Martin	Cheryl	Another Character	Self-Reflection
How does his or her environment affect him or her?				
What is his or her attitude toward cultural heritage?				
What lessons can be learned from cultural heritage?				

	(p. 256 in Holt-McDougal 8th Grade text)
	Share lessons with groups and Role-play
11:50 - 12:00 am	Reflection
12:00 - 1:00 am	Lunch
1:00 - 1:30 am	Culturally Responsive Teaching - Semantic Maps
	Lesson on Semantic Maps
	http://www.azed.gov/english-language-learners/files/2014/02/semantic-mapping-lesson.pdf
	Group discussion - How can a semantic map help to build students' vocabulary while being culturally responsive?
1:30 - 1:45 pm	Activity #3 - Look back at one of the model assignments or activities you completed. Create a semantic map to accompany the lesson.
1:45 - 2:45 pm	Culturally Responsive Teaching - Multicultural Literature
	Participants will learn five steps to consider when planning to incorporate multicultural literature
	Five Steps:
	• Model positive attitudes towards diversity and diverse students
	• Understand and respect the differences students bring to the classroom including their experiences, languages, beliefs, values, ethnicity, and academic level
	• Select high-quality multicultural texts (authentic dialogue, images, culture, and the portrayal of people)
	• Plan effective instruction where applicable and incorporate interpretative questions
	• Use multicultural literature across curriculum
	• Partner with the community to expand their network and bring in potential guest speakers
	Instruction in multicultural literature should encourage:

	- students to consider alternative perspectives and value stances; - students to see similarities, differences, and "differences within differences"; - students to "talk back" to problematic constructions of difference; and - pragmatic as well as personal transformation (Thein et al., 2012) Facilitator: "Let's look back at *The Medicine Bag* and *Who Are You Today, Maria?* How does each character's environment affect his or her beliefs and behaviors? How are their cultures similar or different? How do their cultural heritage align to the dominant culture? What is each character's attitude towards cultural heritage?" Analysis: How do the questions align to multicultural literature frameworks? Participate in discussion on ways to find authentic multicultural literature: - Research - Community leaders - Students - Colleagues
2:45 - 3:30 pm	Research internet for multicultural literature and make reference lists to share with colleagues Establish plans to find and incorporate more multicultural literature into classrooms
3:30 - 4:00 pm	Reflection - Participants will recap and reflect on the day's PD training. The facilitator will distribute and allow time for participants to complete the evaluation forms.

Reflections
Culturally Responsive Teaching

What key points about culturally responsive teaching resonated with me that I plan to take back to my reading classroom? What are my strengths and limitations in developing a culturally responsive classroom?

Reflection Sheet for Teachers

Date_____

Topic _____

Analyze the information presented over the three-day professional development. Based on your analysis, answer the following question.

3
What are three things you've learned?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2
What are two new things you are going to try?

_____
_____

1
What is one question you still have?

_____

Building Teacher Capacity: A Round Map in Teaching Minority Students
Three-Day Training Session

Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development 3-Day Training Sessions. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The professional development objectives were clearly stated.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
    5   4   3   2   1

The professional development objectives were met.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
    5   4   3   2   1

The professional development activities helped me better understand how to embed culture into my classroom.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
    5   4   3   2   1

The professional development sessions helped me better understand my responsibility as a teacher in urban, high-minority schools.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
    5   4   3   2   1

The professional development sessions have taught me my role in helping to close the achievement gap.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development sessions have taught me how to implement culturally responsive teaching in my classroom.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

The professional development sessions have influenced a change in my teaching practices.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

Overall, this professional development series was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity

Appendix B: USISD Principal's Permission for Research (Form F)

I. Research Background (to be completed by researcher)

Title of the Study_____

Name of Researcher _____ Organization_____

Street address: _____ City: _____ State: _____Zip: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone _____

II. Description of Research Proposal

Researcher is to provide the principal with a copy of the Executive Summary and the Time Requirement Form.

III. Agreement (to be completed by principal)

I, _____, principal of _____school, understand

- ❖ the study and what it requires of the staff, students, and/or parents in my school,

- ❖ that the privacy and confidentiality of any staff or student will be protected,

- ❖ that I have the right to allow or reject this research study to take place in my school,

- ❖ that I have the right to terminate the research study at any time,

- ❖ that I have the right to review all consent forms and research documents at any time during the study and up to three years after the completion of the study.

___ I grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research in my school as described in the proposal.

___ I DO NOT grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research in my school as described in the proposal.

 ___ I understand that data should be released only by the departments that maintain them. My staff and I will not release data to the researcher without prior approval from the Dallas ISD Research Review Board.

_____ Signature of Principal

Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

TEACHER / STAFF CONSENT FORM

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to participate in the project titled, "Characteristics of Effective Reading Language Arts Teachers in Closing the Achievement Gap".

 The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions, characteristics, and instructional practices of middle school reading teachers who are effective in closing the achievement gap while raising overall student achievement.

You are eligible to participate in the study because you are a teacher who has been identified as being effective in raising student achievement. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named LaTasha Bassette, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. This study is being performed as part of an EdD doctoral study examining the characteristics of teachers who are effective in closing the achievement gap in reading. LaTasha Bassette is employed as an instructional coach within the District. However, LaTasha Bassette is assuming the role of the researcher within this study, and this role is separate and unrelated to the instructional coach position within the school district. The questions you will be asked as part of this study are opinion-based. There will be no repercussions for your answers, and the information will be gathered with confidentiality and used for educational purposes.

I agree to the conditions listed below with the understanding that I may withdraw my participation from the project at any time, and that I may choose not to answer any questions that I do not want to answer. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.

1. If you agree to participant, you will be asked to spend 5-10 minutes completing the online questionnaire assessed at www.esurv.org to gather demographic information, spend 30 to 60 minutes in a one-time face-to-face audio-recording interview, supply me with aggregated STAAR data by student population for the past three years if applicable in which we will discuss together during the interview, allow for a 45 minute observation during one class period, provide a previous taught lesson plan, and provide a copy of your professional development plan.

2. I am the sole researcher in this project study. The identity of the participants, as well as any identifying factors, will be kept confidential. All data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer in my home office and will not be accessible to any additional individuals. In addition, all electronic data collected from you will be stored in encrypted files. Encrypting the files will ensure that in the unlikely event that my computer is lost or stolen at any time, no third party will be able to read the data. I will store these data for 5-years, per Walden University protocol. After 5-years, I will destroy all electronic and nonelectronic data.

3. The data collected from you will be reported in the form of a summary evaluation through charts and graphs.

4. There are minimal projected risks associated in participation in this project study, and vulnerable participants are not included. The minimal risks include unintended disclosure of personal information. Steps have been implemented to minimize the risk of unintended disclosure. The survey is designed to be anonymous so that all identities are protected except from me, the researcher. For the interview and observation, I will be the only person who knows the recipients who are participating and will keep identities confidential taking measures to keep confidentiality by informally observing other classrooms as an instructional coach. All data will be de-identified. This study focuses on teachers who have shown an ability to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps. Your participation in this study is voluntary and may inform professional development, teacher preparation training, and hiring practices in schools that service high-minority, low-socioeconomic students.

5. My consent is optional and voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice my present or future relations with Walden University or Dallas Independent School District. If I decide to participate, I am free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. To the extent that my identity may be identified, if I withdraw from the project, my information will be removed from the project results.

6. If I participate in the project, I can get information about the project and copies of any surveys or tests given by contacting LaTasha Bassette at latasha.bassette@waldenu.edu.

7. I understand that I am obligated to comply with all confidentiality requirements, including but not limited to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). In the event that student data is required for me to participate in this project, I will verify that the appropriate parental consent forms have been obtained for all students whose information will be used.

8. **I understand that, while this project has been reviewed by the Dallas Independent School District, USISD is not conducting the project activities**.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. If you later decide to withdraw your consent for participation in the study, you should contact the Project Director/Researcher. You may discontinue participation at any time. The Teacher / Staff Member should keep a copy of this form for his/her records.

Signature: _____ Date
             Teacher / Staff Member

Signature: _____ Date: _____
             Project Director / Researcher

Identification of Researcher

LaTasha Bassette, M. Ed   latasha.bassette@waldenu.edu

Committee Chair

Cathryn White, Ph. D   cathryn.white@waldenu.edu

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What does effective teaching look like in a classroom?

2. What qualities in a person do you think are needed to teach effectively in a high minority, low-socioeconomic urban school district?

3. What are some attributes that you possess that you feel have supported you in being effective in reaching your students academically?

4. What drives you to teach students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in urban schools?

5. What is your greatest challenge in working in a low-socioeconomic, high-minority urban school?

6. How do you go about overcoming your greatest challenge?

7. How do you plan lessons to meet the needs of all your students?

8. How do you get your students engaged in your lessons?

9. Please share examples of reading strategies and methodologies you use when planning and implementing a lesson.

10. How important are teacher-student relationships in your classroom?

11. How do you establish positive teacher-student relationships?

12. How do you maintain teacher-student relationships throughout challenges such as undesired behavior, frustration, and apathy?

13. What professional development have you attended that you believe prepared or supported you in teaching your diverse group of students?

14. How effective has district professional development been for you as it relates to your needs as a teacher?

15. What professional development do you believe would be useful but has not provided by the district for teachers who work with the diverse students in our district?

Appendix E: Observation Checklist

Observation Protocol Checklist

Date of Observation: _____

Duration of Observation: _____

Total Length of Class Period: _____

Number of Students: _____

Demographics of Students:

Black: _____   Hispanic: _____   White: _____

Other: _____

Seating Arrangement:

Rows: _____   Groups: _____   Semi-Circle: _____

Description of the Room Décor:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Lesson Objective: _____

_____

Demonstration of Learning: _____

_____

Description of the Instructional Resources Provided (Texts, Graphic Organizers, Videos,

Images, etc): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Description of Student Activities: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Participant's Questions and Feedback to Students: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Student Behaviors (Engagement, Participation, Questions): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher Redirection Techniques (Rules and Procedures): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F: District Chair of Research Review Board

December 15, 2015

Ms. LaTasha Bassette
Walden University
1203 Eulane Drive
Mesquite, TX 75149

RE: Characteristics of Effective Teachers in Closing the Achievement Gap

Dear Ms. Bassette:

The Research Review Board (RRB) of the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) has reviewed and approved your proposal to conduct the above-referenced study. Based on the information provided, the committee concludes that the study serves a worthwhile purpose and will benefit the district.

It is our understanding that you have read and agreed to the terms described in the *Procedures and Policies for Conducting Extra-District Research in the Dallas Independent School District*. Please note that all school and district information, wherever applicable, should remain confidential within the limits of the law. In addition, any data collected from Dallas ISD may be used solely for the purposes of the approved study.

Approval by the RRB does not guarantee that any Dallas ISD department, school, or employee will comply with data requests for the study. If the study involves collection of primary data at a school or schools, the permission of the building principal(s) must be obtained separately from this approval.

Please provide the RRB with a copy of any data file constructed using Dallas ISD student or personnel information, and a copy of your final report, within 30 days following the completion of the study. **In all future communications, please use the study's reference number (15-0803)**.

On behalf of the committee, I wish you the best of luck with your study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anduamlak Meharie, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Review Board
Office of Applied Research
Department of Evaluation and Assessment
Dallas Independent School District

Appendix G: Survey

Background

* What is your highest degree?
Bachelors
Masters
Doctorate

* What is your race or ethnicity?
White/European American decent
Black/African American decent
Hispanic
Asian American
Native American
Other

* What college/university did you attend for your undergraduate degree?

* What was your overall G.P.A.?

* What was your major in undergraduate school?

* Did you attend an alternative certification program?
Yes
No

* What is your certification(s)? Example: Reading/LA 4-8

Where did you attend graduate school?

What was your postgraduate major(s)?

* What grade levels have you taught? Check all that apply.
Elementary K-2
Elementary 3-5
6th grade
7th grade
8th grade
High school

* What grade level do you currently teach?
6th
7th
8th
6-8th

* How many years have you taught?
1-5 years
6-10 years
11-15 years
More than 15 years

* How long have you taught in middle school?

What other levels have you taught?
Elementary
High School
College

* How many years have you taught Reading/Language Arts?

* Are you National Board certified?
Yes
No

* In what other districts have you taught?

* How would you classify your childhood household?
Lower Socioeconomic
Middle Class
Upper Middle Class
Upper Class/Affluent

* What type of high school did you attend?
Urban
Suburban
Rural
Private
Charter