

**A CASE STUDY OF FIVE URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS INVOLVED
IN A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING TEACHER STUDY GROUP**

A Dissertation

by

ALICIA ANN KERR

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2010

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

A Case Study of Five Urban Middle School Teachers Involved in a Culturally Responsive Teaching Teacher Study Group. (May 2010)

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This qualitative study examined urban middle school teachers' participation in a teacher study group (TSG) focused on culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content. Specifically, the researcher investigated the professional development experiences of five urban middle school teachers participating in a TSG on CRT and examined how these urban middle school teachers described their learning experiences of the CRT content.

A purposeful sample of five teachers was used. Data collection was done with open-ended surveys, semi-structured interviews and field notes during the interviews and TSG sessions. The data were transcribed and analyzed using constant comparison. Data were continuously shuffled, sorted and re-organized as part of the constant comparative method. Through this method, key themes about TSGs and teachers' learning experiences emerged and were reported.

The data analysis for research question one produced three overarching themes: changes in perception of staff development, building relationships and impact on

instruction. Each theme had descriptors that further explain more specific aspects of the data results. The second research question was designed so the researcher could report descriptions of each participant's learning experiences of CRT content from the TSG experience. Two major themes emerged for research question two: personal and professional development.

The discussion offers considerable support for the findings of existing research on TSGs and the positive attitude towards this design of professional development. The importance of building relationships in TSGs and the impact this TSG had on instruction are contributed to the literature. In this study the findings are reported in the voices of the participants, which is lacking in the current literature. Also, two major themes of the participants' learning of CRT are presented, personal and professional responsibilities, which are new to the existing literature.

In conclusion, this research produced two important results for the educational realm: 1) the tremendous need for schools and school districts to offer our current practitioners better and more meaningful staff development, 2) Trained and certified teachers have little to no understanding of the tenets of culturally responsive teaching methods. CRT practices that are proving meaningful, validating and effective need to be further studied and reported.

I am thankful to God that I am alive and capable of completing this process. Things could have gone differently that November night, so I am grateful for my “second chance.” The aftermath of the accident was the hardest thing I have ever had to face, yet it taught me about struggle and persistence, and for that I am eternally grateful.

I would like to dedicate this work to Otis and Terrence. These two young men will never know what an impact they had on me. You were the epitome of why I needed to change my teaching methods. You helped ignite the fire and passion I have for multiculturalism, and most of all, you taught me the most valuable lesson of acceptance. This work is also dedicated to all teachers that devote their lives to making a difference in the lives of children. Thank you for your time and commitment and know you are appreciated.

Finally, I could not have made it through this without the help, support and love of my mom, Alice. Your investment in me, in numerous ways, is more than any child deserves or should ever ask for. I am thankful and lucky to have a wonderful mother like you. This degree is for both of us. I am forever grateful to my best friend Amanda, my should be sister Nikki, as well as my local support system, Colleen and Sara, and my out-of-town savior Rhonda. Your never ending encouragement, patience and love will never be forgotten.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

The educational community is searching for more meaningful professional development that will actively involve teachers in meaningful activities (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Teacher collaboration on campus has become a means of investigating the specific needs of teachers and acknowledges their voices. As an alternative to traditional staff development, teacher study groups (TSGs) are driven by teachers and incite the power of teachers' voices as they collaborate and work together to solve problems. "TSGs represent a radical change from teacher as receiver to teacher as creator of information" (Clair, 1998, p. 470). Teachers utilize professional development as a means to expand their knowledge and skill and to gain specific and practical information on ideas that relate directly to their daily routines (Guskey, 1991).

With current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in effect, all children in the classrooms, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, have become a focal point for accountability. However, while schools are expected to ensure that teachers successfully teach these various student populations, not all teachers have a knowledge base for how to best achieve the academic potential of CLD learners, particularly in urban schools. Teachers require professional development in culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in order to meet the massive demands of accountability of the diverse student population in classrooms. The population inside of the classroom is changing; yet, the teaching force continues to be predominately White (NCES, 2007). In

This dissertation follows the style of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

2004, eighty-three percent of teachers in the United States were White. Increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students in our public school classrooms are creating a significant transformation in our educational system (Gay & Howard, 2000).

This array of cultural and linguistic diversity can be overwhelming to teachers, particularly those who have not had meaningful interactions with people different from themselves and for those who have not had preparation in meeting the needs of such learners (Arias & Poyner, 2001). When meaningful, personal experiences and interactions with people of other cultures and languages are limited, teachers will not be knowledgeable in how best to relate to and teach diverse learners (Milner, 2005; Ukpokodu, 2004). Unfamiliar groups, cultures, traditions and languages can produce anxiety and prejudicial behaviors to those who do not understand them or to those that perceive them as a threat (Gay, 2003).

Pang (2001) argues that teachers are often unaware of the cultural orientation from which they operate. When they come into contact with CLD students and parents, conflict can arise due to the differences in expectations, cultural backgrounds, values, or behaviors. Thus, conflict between teacher and student arises when the traditional mode of instruction (often targeted to White, middle class students) is implemented in classrooms with CLD students. Therefore, an examination of how to better educate culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children is necessary. Without embedding these needs in professional development, teachers who are not conditioned to work with children of color will continue to contribute to the disparity in achievement between

CLD students and their White counterparts. It is imperative that professional development focusing on CRT be offered in a meaningful manner through a TSG.

Statement of Problem

Delivery of multicultural education content has become increasingly more popular in teacher education programs and in public schools over the past few years. However, its conceptualization and implementation are still lacking (Banks & Banks, 2004). As a major underlying tenet of multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching enables culturally and linguistically diverse children the opportunities to achieve academic success. It is imperative to reach current teacher practitioners, especially those in urban settings, through meaningful staff development in order to provide them with an appropriate understanding of the concept of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) if the academic potential of CLD students is to be unleashed.

Professional development providing in-service teachers with a knowledge base of CRT must be offered in an alternative manner, as opposed to the common short, intensively focused workshop, if presentation of this material is to be effective (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Guskey, 2002). Therefore, this qualitative case study was designed to capture the essence and voices of teachers participating in a TSG with a focus on CRT to share if this design of professional development with this content is a viable process for educating teachers for diverse classrooms.

Significance of Study

My introduction to CRT came at a time when I was experiencing tremendous discipline problems with two fifth grade African American boys in my classroom. I was

concurrently enrolled in a graduate class focusing on strategies for teaching in a pluralistic society. One of the required texts was Geneva Gay's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. For my class research paper, I examined the disproportion of discipline among African Americans in public school classrooms. Through action research in the classroom, I was able to take to heart the explanations Gay (2000) offered for cultural behaviors and learning styles of children of color. At that point, I knew I had to examine my personal values and beliefs. Something I was doing was contributing to the discipline problems and lack of success in my classroom. It was apparent that I had to make a change in myself if these two African American boys were to be successful that school year. The idea of culturally responsive teaching altered my entire concept of education and teaching, so I was passionate to share it with others. While going through with this study, I had to consider that the participants might not respond as positively nor as passionately as I had to the tenets of CRT. Interacting with and observing my co-workers showed me it is vital that in-service teachers are exposed to information regarding culturally responsive teaching.

After graduating with my Master's and leaving this small-town fifth grade setting, I returned to the school where I began my teaching career. I originally quit teaching after two years, feeling overwhelmed and under-prepared to face the many challenges a diverse, inner-city campus offered me. The new and culturally responsive me finally felt prepared to teach at this campus and I eagerly applied much of my newfound knowledge and began sharing it with my peers. Yet, as I traveled down the hallways listening to interactions between teachers and students and examined the

underachievement of CLD students at my campus, it was obvious the knowledge I possessed had either never been shared with my colleagues, or the information was not retained.

When deciding on a focus for my dissertation, it occurred to me that I was not alone in feeling overwhelmed and unprepared to deal with CLD students. I had so much knowledge to share, but there was no way to convince my colleagues to sign up for a M.Ed. in CRT. While sitting through eight hours of irrelevant content during a professional development session and watching the participants disengage from the presenter and complain about the design, it occurred to me that more pertinent and relevant material could be delivered through professional development in a more meaningful manner. There had to be a different approach to professional development; one that involved teachers as creators of knowledge. Therefore, I decided to investigate a TSG focused on a CRT content, and this study is my journey. While I report the results of this study, I will also share my reflections, understanding and learning made along the way.

In every field, the professional knowledge base is rapidly expanding; technological advancements and consultants, both imperative to the professional development process, have aided in the changing face of professional staff development (Guskey, 1991). Yet, we know more about why professional staff development programs fail than what makes them successful (Guskey, 1991). Clair (1998) reiterates that addressing complex educational problems cannot be done through simple transmission of information, but rather new approaches to staff development must be

explored. Teacher study groups hold promise, but more research examples are needed; “genuine, sustained teacher collaboration that produces continuous reflection on practice and constructive action is still rare” (Brownwell, Yeager, Rennells & Riley, 1997, p. 341). Clair encourages those with experiences with TSGs to come forward and contribute to the conversation about this alternative design and its impact.

Richard Milner (2005) wrote,

Never before have public school teachers in the US been faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of so many diverse learners. The teaching force in the US is increasingly White, monolingual, middle class, and female, while the student population is increasingly diverse (p. 767).

Although multicultural education has become more prominent in schools and universities over the past few years, it must be conceptualized and implemented extensively if we are to see significant and meaningful change in the educational arena (Banks & Banks, 2004). Gay (2004) also stresses educational equity and excellence is unattainable without the incorporation of cultural diversity in education. Knowing the importance of utilizing CRT, it is essential that its tenets be transferred to and maintained by those that can implement it in public school classrooms. Thus, providing CRT content to current teacher practitioners through professional development is necessary.

In order to add to the literature on TSGs and explore the idea of CRT it was necessary to qualitatively examine a teacher study group that focused on culturally responsive teaching. This collaborative TSG on CRT offered urban middle school

teachers an opportunity to share their voices in this area which are often omitted from the literature. This particular case study focused on the description of teachers' experiences while participating in the TSG, as well as the descriptions of their learning experiences of developing their knowledge base in CRT.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate urban middle school teachers' professional development experiences in a culturally responsive teaching TSG and examine their descriptions of the learning experiences of CRT content in a TSG. As a non-participant observer, the researcher sought to capture the essence of the TSG staff development design and the participants' learning experiences about the CRT content with the voices of the teacher participants.

Research Questions

1. What are the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?
2. How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

Definition of Terms

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) – A teaching practice, encompassing many factors, that empowers students by using cultural knowledge, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students in order to advance academic achievement (Hollins and Spencer, 1990; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Multicultural education – a field of study aimed to increase educational equity and opportunity for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. Its goal is to help students acquire the knowledge and skills to function in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact with all peoples to work for the common good (Banks & Banks, 2001).

Professional development – (used interchangeably in this study with staff development) a systematic effort “to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcome of students” (Guskey, 2002, p. 381).

Teacher study group (TSG) - a collaborative group organized and sustained by teachers to help them strengthen their professional development in areas of common interests. In these groups, teachers remain in charge of their own learning but seek to reach personal goals through interaction with others (Cramer, 1996).

Organization of Study

There are six chapters in this study. Chapter I presents the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the research questions that guided this study. Chapter II is a review of the literature that provides more in-depth information about professional development and culturally responsive teaching. It also offers the theoretical framework for the study design. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology. It includes a description of the research setting, the data gathering and data analysis process. Chapter IV provides thick description of the participants and information regarding their backgrounds and educational experiences. In Chapters V and VI the findings of the research are presented; each research question is discussed in its own

chapter. Chapter V encompasses the emergent themes from the TSG, and the description of the participants' learning experiences of CRT content from the TSG is presented in Chapter VI. Chapter VII concludes the dissertation with the discussion, implications and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to gain a better understanding of the evolution and current state of professional development and the necessity for utilizing culturally responsive teaching methods in classrooms, this chapter provides a review of literature on professional development and culturally responsive teaching. This chapter is divided into three sections: professional development, culturally responsive teaching and the theoretical frameworks. The first section examines the history of professional development in public schools followed by a presentation of research on various important studies on professional development programs. It includes a review of the literature of teacher study groups, followed by a description of some major research studies involving TSGs. The second section is a review of literature on culturally responsive teaching beginning with its history. A few of the leading scholars in the field are discussed and notable studies utilizing culturally responsive teaching complete the section. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the theoretical frameworks of the research study.

Professional Development

The majority of teachers currently working in public schools continue to be White, middle class, monolingual females yet the numbers of children of color and second language learners are steadily increasing in the mainstream classroom (Arias & Poyner, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003). Traditional teacher preparation has verified the long-established education of predominantly White, middle-class

females to work with students that share their similar beliefs, class and language, while ignoring the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse children (Arias & Poyner, 2001; Milner, 2005; Ukpokdo, 2004). While recent graduates of Colleges of Education are being prepared to meet some of the demands of classrooms with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, there is little being offered through professional development to educate and help retain knowledge for current in-service teachers that may not have had such concentrated training on CLD learners (Gay, 2003).

Teachers are attracted to professional development because of their beliefs that “it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with students” (Guskey, 1991, p. 382). They hope to gain specific, concrete and practical ideas that relate directly to their daily routines in the classroom (Guskey, 1991). With current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in effect, ensuring that teachers have a good knowledge base for successfully educating all children in their classrooms, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, has become a focal point. School administrators are increasingly looking at staff development as a way to enhance student achievement (McCarthy, 2005), yet NCLB defines professional development in broad terms, allowing schools and districts to reflect upon and improve their goals.

Educators require professional development in order to meet the massive demands of accountability and changing student populations (Clair, 1998). Professional development is viewed as a way to enhance teachers understanding of helping students increase achievement (McCarthy, 2005). However, there is little evidence to support the

effectiveness of professional development as it commonly occurs, as a short, intensively focused workshop (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Guskey, 2002).

According to Richardson & Anders (2005), professional development is defined: Any action taken by practicing teachers to develop their knowledge, skills, or habits of mind toward the purpose of improving instruction. It may also be defined in relation to a purposeful educational program designed to engage teachers in developing their knowledge, skills, or habits of mind (p. 206).

It is a systematic effort “to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcome of students” (Guskey, 2002, p. 381) and high-quality staff development is a vital part of improving education.

“Professional development must not only be rich in ideas and materials, but also provide teachers with the opportunity to engage with, modify, and incorporate those ideas into their own teaching” (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez & Polovsky, 2005, p. 415). In order to fulfill its promise, an elegant and comprehensive design of professional development is required (Rodgers, Fullerton & DeFord, 2002).

History of Professional Development

Inservice

Sparks (1983) deemed that “staff development offers one of the most promising roads to the improvement of instruction” (p. 65). Professional development is a systematic effort “to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcome of students” (Guskey, 2002, p. 381) and staff development of a high-quality is a vital part of improving education. While

professional development has taken on a variety of formats throughout its existence the one thing that has remained consistent is the intended outcome: the altering of teacher behavior to benefit students in all aspects of education.

In the 1970s, professional development as we know it took on the form of what was called inservice. Teachers became seen as adult learners and “this ‘revolutionary’ insight coincided with an increase in knowledge about adult learning” (Lambert, 1989, p. 78). Based on knowledge of adult learning during the 1970s, inservice was delivered to teachers as one time experiences. Often times these experiences included inspirational speakers or occasional conferences in a subject matter. However, this means of helping teachers fell short of addressing teachers’ needs for systematic learning about teaching (Lambert, 1989). Thus, inservice gave way to staff development.

Staff Development

According to Lambert (1989), staff development consisted of teachers becoming experts in skills that could be taught to their colleagues. This new form of aiding teachers in learning did not function without difficulty; these expert teachers lacked an articulate knowledge base and were forced to turn to research to answer their questions. Thus gave the rise to expert researchers, like Madeline Hunter and David Berliner, that provided teacher experts with information and direction on how to deliver information to adults (Lambert, 1989). Bruce Joyce also provided new knowledge to expert teachers with the idea of coaching.

Coaching

Coaching, defined by Joyce & Showers (1981) is “hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom” (p. 300). Coaching also incorporated other aspects such as companionship, the giving of technical feedback, analysis, adaptation and support when a teacher applied their newfound knowledge in their classroom (Sparks, 1983). Overall, coaching appeared to serve as an effective model of staff development for teachers; various research supports use of it in the classroom as a useful means of improving practice. Joyce, as cited by Lambert (1989), believed that if skills were to be transferred to the classroom, modeling, practice and feedback were necessary, not simply telling and showing. This new definition of staff development, learning about a new skill and transferring it to the classroom, included presentation of theory, demonstration of skill, protected practice, practice, feedback and coaching, inspired by Joyce and Showers, as referred to by Lambert (1989).

This model of staff development is often still commonly used in many districts around the country. Direct instruction served as a hot topic for staff development. However, after a ten-year push for this topic, careful evaluation and a decrease in achievement scores confirmed the drawbacks of this model of instruction for children. Therefore, the premiere model of staff development for adults, which paralleled the direct instruction model for students, also needed revision (Lambert, 1989). Many misconceptions about adult learning were reflected in this model of staff development and had been endured for many years however, it was necessary for a new promise of collegiality to surface (Lambert, 1989). During the 1990s, some experts suggested that

traditional forms of staff development were inadequate for enabling teachers to meet the educational needs of their children; staff development lacked the focus, intensity and continuity needed to change classroom practices (Choy, Chen & Bugarin, 2006).

Therefore, scholars began to establish literature on “best practices” for staff development and various experts established guidelines for high-quality professional development (Choy, Chen & Bugarin, 2006). Included in this were characteristics that aligned with teacher collaboration: school based and integrated with school operations, involves teachers in defining their needs and developing opportunities for staff development, meets individual teachers’ needs but is primarily collaborative, is continuous and ongoing with follow-up and support for further learning and incorporates an evaluation of the effect on teaching practice and student outcomes (Choy, Chen & Bugarin, 2006).

Collaboration

Lambert (1989) believes that “the merits of collegiality have been well established” (p. 79). It leads to “thoughtful planning and reflective practice, and increases teachers’ satisfaction with their work” (Lambert, 1989, p. 79). Teachers are attracted to staff development that offers the opportunity to talk to other teachers. Rather than telling teachers how to improve their practices, teachers needed to be encouraged to collaborate with their peers and develop professionally while helping one another.

Lambert (1989) encouraged the progression of staff development with some of the following ideas: teachers talking about their own thinking, initiating change in the school environment, contributing to the knowledge base of the profession and sharing in

the leadership of schools. Engaging teachers in reflective practice and collegiality would enable them to understand themselves and work differently, thus sparking a shift in their beliefs in norms (Lambert, 1989). Little's 1981 study, as cited by Sparks (1983), found successful staff development efforts to include a norm of experimentation and collegiality states, "simply put, in schools where staff development had the greatest influence on teaching, teachers shared their ideas about instruction and tried new techniques in their classroom (p. 66). Through traditional professional development teachers have been forced to be "passive consumers rather than active participants" (Cramer, 1996, p. 14) as an outside source transmits the pertinent information.

Collaboration offers teachers opportunities for interaction on relevant and pertinent topics to their classrooms (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). This new vision of staff development helped spark the discussion and evolution of how we have come to know professional development today.

Professional Development Today

A survey of public school teachers that participated in professional development activities in 2000 revealed that public school teachers were most likely to participate in professional development focusing on curriculum and performance standards rather than activities that address the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and with limited English proficiency. This study also reported that the amount of time teachers spent in professional development activities related to the degree to which they felt that participation improved their teaching. Those that spent more than eight hours in professional development activities were more likely than those who spent less to report

that their teaching was improved a lot (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter & Orlofsky, 2006).

Literature suggests effective staff development has been linked to campus-based study, including teacher collaboration (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003), rather than the common method of delivery, a short, intensively focused workshop (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Guskey, 2002). Firestone, Mangin, Martinez & Polovsky (2005) suggest teachers are able to strengthen their knowledge base with professional development that is focused on relevant content matter and coherently organized. Areas such as knowledge about subject matter, teaching methods and understanding children's special needs are examples of content that can be included in district professional development programs. However, the amount of content covered in a given year depends largely upon the coherence of the program.

Professional development that focuses on a variety of topics will not allow teachers to accrue sufficient in-depth knowledge to facilitate change in teaching practices. "Unlike the typical 'one-shot' workshops, the preferred mode offers a threaded set of activities that introduce teachers to new materials and ideas and then offer opportunities to try those same ideas with time to reflect on and refine them (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez & Polovsky, 2005, p. 416). Goldenberg & Gallimore (1991) believe a solution to genuinely improving teaching is to say goodbye to one-shot workshops. They feel that instead we must "create contexts in teachers' work lives that assist and sustain meaningful changes" (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991, p. 69). The context should include the engagement of teachers in rigorous examination of teaching,

the daily contextual challenges teachers face, probable solutions to these challenges, and most importantly, close examination of any progress in addressing these challenges (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991). Professional development must be grounded in actual experiences of teachers and in a manner that engages them and allows for collegiality. Allowing for collegiality, or “instructional conversations” (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991), is essential for a new and productive framework of staff development.

Overall, the literature on professional development is lacking sufficient information on how to better meet the needs of teacher participants. Most professional development research is outdated and focused on the problems associated with it, rather than solutions or effective staff development programs. The existing literature has traditionally been collected using quantitative data, usually consisting of surveys about opinions, which allows a glimpse at professional development programs, but fails to acknowledge the voices of teachers

Major Studies on Professional Development

There have been many studies conducted on professional development, however four pieces of literature stand out as leading studies that present information on the design and effectiveness of professional development as it has and continues to occur. The first is a report by Choy, Chen & Bugarin (2006), published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) that offers an overview of professional development in the United States. Second, Wilson & Berne’s (1999) literature review of research on contemporary staff development conducted in response to the standards movement that has called for higher standards for teachers, offers insight into various means of

professional development and what appears to be successful. The third and fourth pieces of research were conducted by Guskey (2003) and offer information about effective characteristics of professional development. The final study presented in this section was conducted by Hollins (1990) which presents a comprehensive plan for professional development for teachers of [children of color]. The section concludes with an overall summary of professional development and what the literature deems to be successful at this time.

Choy, Chen and Bugarin

A 2006 report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) used the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to describe professional development activities for the 1999-2000 school year. This is the fourth study in a series that began in 1987-1988, yet the 1993-1994 study was the first to begin examining data on the ways in which school districts and schools organize and manage staff development programs and describe teacher participation in various professional development activities. This quantitative study involved data solicited from approximately 4,700 public school districts and 12,000 public and private schools. Included within these schools were 12,300 principals and 52,000 teachers.

This study offers a comprehensive picture of what staff development looks like in U.S. schools. Nearly all teachers reported participation in some sort of professional development during the year. About 90% of those teachers attended workshops, conferences or training sessions. Less than half of the teachers reported collaborating with teachers and did so in an innovative type of staff development activity. Most

teachers (about two-thirds) participated in activities related to school reform, such as content and performance standards in their content area and use of technology for instruction, consistent with improving teacher knowledge of their subject. While over half of the teachers rated their professional development experiences as very useful, the ones that participated in the more in-depth studies within their fields were more likely to judge their experience as very useful. This statistic also held true for those that spent more time in their professional development activities. This report offers an ample amount of valuable information that can aid scholars and professional development designers in preparing effective programs for participants.

Wilson and Berne

Wilson & Berne (1999) conducted a review of research on contemporary staff development in response to the standards movement that has called for higher standards for teachers. “New measures of student performance would entail new ways of teaching. Professional development was touted as the ticket to reform” (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p, 173). However, the information about teacher learning is puzzling, and research on effective professional development is incomplete. Wilson & Berne (1999) question existing professional development research because it lacks empirical evidence about what professional knowledge teachers do or do not learn during traditional professional development activities.

This literature was conducted through wide reading of selections of literature guided by three principles: high-quality examples of professional development, professional development projects that focused on the what and how of teacher learning

and acknowledging that professional teacher knowledge included at least some understanding of various concepts. The collected research then fell into three knowledge categories: opportunities to talk about subject matter, opportunity to talk about students and learning and opportunity to talk about teaching. From this the authors chose to focus on two exemplary instances within each of the categories rather than exhaustively reviewing literature relevant to each domain.

The literature review found support for the following activities as common means of professional development: mandatory part-day or day-long workshops sponsored by school districts and pursuit of individual learning opportunities (i.e. signing up for master's courses, summer and weekend workshops and joining professional organizations). In conclusion, teacher learning has traditionally been “a patchwork of opportunities – formal and informal, mandatory and voluntary, serendipitous and planned” (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p, 174). The authors also cited the following characteristics to be common features in effective staff development: ensures collaboration and interaction with peers, focuses on student-learning and crucial issues of curriculum and instruction, provides adequate time for learning and follow-up and recognizes teachers as professionals and adult learners.

Wilson and Berne (1999) examined alternative approaches to teacher learning. Of note in this literature review was a book club, created by Grossman and Wineburg. It was a three year project that allowed for English and social studies teachers to meet monthly and select, read and discuss fiction and history; the discussions were intended to create a community of teacher-learners who could then develop integrated curriculum.

After analyzing data with a system of discourse analysis, the researchers had evidence which supported that the offerings to the groups from the participants varied due to their nature as an English or social studies teacher. This too became apparent to the group over time. This eventually led to the participants' ability to notice and value that these substantive differences hold true for their learners as well. Participants took various strategies used by their colleagues and the researchers back to their classrooms, which is often not the case with traditional staff development.

Continuing their research on alternative modes of professional development, and paying close attention to the study by Grossman and Weinburg, Wilson and Berne (1999) note the following patterns that emerge in the literature:

Teachers enjoy the chance to talk about their work, that it takes time to develop a community, that teachers have very little experience engaging in professional discourse that is public and critical of their work and the work of their colleagues (p. 181).

Other essential ideas explored by Wilson & Berne (1999) include opportunities to talk about students and learning and opportunities to talk about teaching.

Overall, several themes emerged from this literature review in regards to exploring the research on contemporary professional development and teacher learning. They are: communities of learners redefining teaching practice, teacher learning ought to be activated rather than bound and delivered and privileging of teachers' interaction with one another (Wilson & Berne, 1999). This literature review confirms the notion that one-shot workshops are not an effective means of professional development and more

research on professional learning contexts is needed. Researchers also have an obligation to move beyond reporting what teachers say they know and begin analyzing what professional knowledge is required and how that affects student achievement.

Guskey's Characteristics of Effective Staff Development

In this literature review Guskey (2003) analyzed 13 different lists of characteristics of effective professional development, and upon completion of the analysis recorded 21 characteristics distinguished in the literature. Guskey (2003) mentioned the following as the most frequently cited characteristics of the 21 distinguished characteristics in the literature: enhancement of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge, provision of sufficient time and resources as essential to effective professional development, promotion of collegiality and exchange, inclusion of evaluation procedures and professional development should be school or site-based. Despite these findings he found difficulty deciphering an appropriate definition of effective staff development.

While most of the literature reviewed is considered to be research-based, it was apparent that the research rarely included rigorous investigations but rather they typically involved surveys and opinions. This is a common critique of professional development research. This review caused Guskey (2003) to arrive at the overall conclusion that "characteristics that influence the effectiveness of professional development are multiple and highly complex" (p. 750). Thus, it is most likely unreasonable to assume that a single list of characteristics leading to policy and guidelines for effective professional development will emerge. However, agreeing on

some criteria for effectiveness and offering clear descriptions of important contextual elements can guarantee progress of quality professional development programs which is necessary to improve student learning outcomes.

Hollins' Comprehensive Professional Development for Teachers of Children of Color

Hollins (1990) presented a comprehensive plan for professional development for teachers of [children of color]. Recognizing the need for public school teachers to familiarize themselves with the “discrepancy between the school curriculum (content and pedagogy) and the experiences and competencies of the youngsters taught” (Hollins, 1990, p. 1), she conducted research on a program that placed interns from California State University in inner-city classrooms. While this research was conducted using pre-service teachers, the ideas presented in the study can also be utilized with in-service teachers. Hollins (1990) points out that teachers of [children of color] need to examine a variety of things in order to better teach them. Some of these ideas include: examining their own cultural origins that could cause conflict with students that are different from them, understanding the home culture and community of students, listening to the voices of [children of color] and rethinking the school curriculum and redesigning it in a way to use student experiences and strengths. Hollins (1990) deems that these issues can be examined through staff development when teachers act as scholars, attend seminars about issues regarding [children of color] observing master teachers of such students and creating portfolios of their teaching accomplishments.

In this study, conducted during the 1989-1990 school year, interns worked at an elementary school in the Oakland Unified School District. Professional collaboration

was available for the interns with school faculty and administration and university professors. Interns attended monthly seminars where they shared classroom experiences. They also developed portfolios consisting of lesson plans, student work and a reflective journal. The results showed that the interns progressed throughout the year, and the researcher was confident such a model of professional development would enable teachers to improve their practice.

Summary

In general, the literature suggests effective staff development has been linked to campus-based study, including teacher collaboration (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003), rather than the common delivery of a short, intensively focused workshop (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Guskey, 2002). Through traditional professional development, teachers have been forced to be “passive consumers rather than active participants” (Cramer, 1996, p. 14) as an outside source transmits the prescribed information. Collaboration offers teachers opportunities for interaction on relevant and pertinent topics to their classrooms (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Figure 2.1 illustrates common characteristics of effective staff development according to the research.

If teachers are going to increase learning opportunities for all students, they need to be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of learning (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, and Stephan, 2001), and this can be accomplished through effective professional development. This professional development must also include “the experiences and voices of teachers in environments where they are

encouraged to collaborate” (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003, p. 500), and further research on this is necessary.

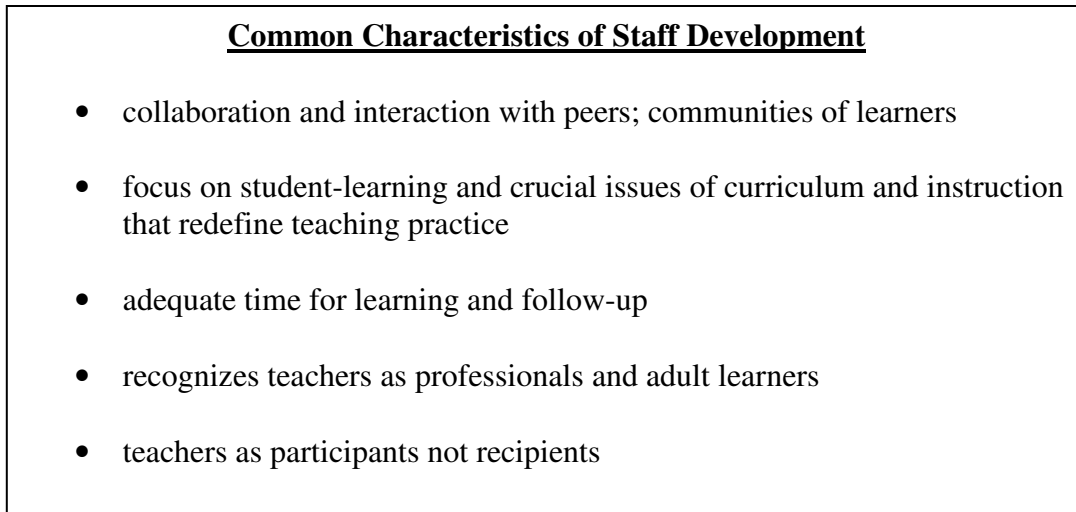


Figure 2.1: Common Characteristics of Staff Development – Synthesis of Research

Teacher Study Groups

The literature on teacher study groups is presented in this section under two major headings: research on TSGs and major TSG studies. The first section provides an overview of the characteristics and developments of TSGs. In the second section four studies are reviewed, including two doctoral dissertations. The focus of each TSG varies. Topics include English Language Learners, teacher perceptions of study groups and multicultural education. The section concludes with confirmation of the positive effects of TSGs as a means of professional development.

Research on TSGs

One collaborative approach to staff development consistent with what is known about teaching and learning is teacher study groups (TSGs), which are “sustained opportunities for teachers to explore together issues and challenges that have a direct impact on their lives and the lives of their students” (Clair, 1998, p. 469). As staff development evolved throughout the 1980s, the notion of teacher study groups continued to emerge and become a means of offering opportunities to teachers to explore their teaching practices and beliefs. Sparks’ (1983) evaluation of various staff development programs found that many programs deemed effective in aiding teachers in adopting new teaching practices allotted time for discussion.

Teachers are encouraged to talk about how the new techniques are working for them, their problems and successes, and their concerns. The discussion is most productive when guided by a facilitator or workshop leader who keeps the group focused on finding solutions and sharing ideas rather than allowing the group to get sidetracked into talk about school policies or individual students (Sparks, 1983, p. 68).

The notion of facilitating discussion and reflection in small support groups also appeared to be a productive training activity (Sparks, 1983). It is necessary and important to note the significance of discussion occurring in a small group of eight people or less, for this allows for equal opportunity for participation in discussion, and helps develop camaraderie when teachers met regularly in these small groups.

Borko & Putnam (1995) make the point:

There is substantial evidence that professional development programs for experienced teachers *can* make a difference – that teachers who participate in these programs can, and often do, experience significant changes in their professional knowledge base and instructional practices. When professional development programs create an environment that facilitates and supports teacher learning, and when they continue to support teachers in their endeavors to integrate new conceptions and instructional strategies into their ongoing educational programs, then teachers can expand and elaborate their professional knowledge base and can begin to teach fundamentally in different ways (pp. 60-61).

Therefore, the study group approach holds promise for substantive professional development (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001) by using a format that recognizes teachers' voices as professionals and builds support for reflection and dialogue (Birchak, et.al., 1998).

A teacher study group (TSG) is:

A collaborative group organized and sustained by teachers to help them strengthen their professional development in areas of common interests. In these groups, teachers remain in charge of their own learning but seek to reach personal goals through interaction with others" (Cramer, 1996, p. 7)

There is a negotiated content, a facilitator that responds to teachers' needs, learning by doing and involvement of real-life classroom experiences (Robb, 2000). These groups

can have a designated facilitator, or the role can alternate among group members (Saavedra, 1996). TSGs involve teachers choosing to collaborate in learning and are concerned primarily with cognitive growth. Collaboration is viewed as an integral component so that through interaction with others, teachers are able to get new ideas and encouragement (Cramer, 1996).

In teacher study groups (TSGs), teachers acquire knowledge together rather than receiving it from an outside source. Active involvement of teachers in action research can create relevant and meaningful knowledge as well as a valuable form of reflection (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Collaborative methods also provide teachers time to interact professionally on topics that are relevant and applicable (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). They also provide,

A social context for critical dialogue, presents teachers with opportunities to learn about current teaching theories and practices, permits collaboration and planning with peers, provides a supportive context for teachers to experiment with ideas and innovative practices and to share these experiences, and allows teachers to become actively responsible for their own learning and change (Saavedra, 1996, p. 273)

With a collaborative school culture, the teachers' ideas can have an impact on an entire school. Allowing them to take ownership and experience success and failure first hand, contributes to a collaborative culture. The study group approach holds promise for substantive professional development (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001).

As an alternative to traditional staff development, teacher study groups (TSGs) are designed and driven by teachers and incite the power of teachers as they collaborate and work together to solve problems. “TSGs represent a radical change from teacher as receiver to teacher as creator of information” (Clair, 1998, p. 470).

“In the long run, environments developed by and for teachers that facilitate their professional development benefit students’ learning” (Saavedra, 1996).

Major Studies of TSGs

While teacher study groups have been in existence for over twenty years, there is a scarce amount of research available about their effectiveness, results and use. A few major studies are examined in this literature review to gather more information about them in order to effectively examine the teacher study group designed for this experiment.

Clair’s Study of ELL Study Groups

Clair (1998) reports on her study of two one-year long teacher study groups (TSGs) that were designed to “illuminate the complexities of working with teachers in new ways regarding the education of English language learners” (p. 465). Playing two roles in the TSGs, she served as a group member with an expertise in ELLs, and as a participant researcher, exploring teacher study groups as a mode of professional development. Both of the TSGs began with the presentation of an initial knowledge base on ELLs to generate awareness and interest.

TSG 1 met over the course of the school year, from November to May. Each session was two hours, allotting for 14 hours of professional development credit. It was held at a large middle school in a small city; the district included 5,000 students and 10.6% of them were labeled Limited English Proficient. About 25% of the population were children of color and 36% were low income. Designed to create an awareness and interest in ELLs and the TSG, there was an initial presentation to the faculty on the basics of L2 development. Following this presentation, 17 people committed: 15 teachers, a curriculum specialist and a bilingual counselor. They represented grades 6-8 and various context areas including language arts, social studies, math, science, ESL and special education.

The context for the TSG was negotiated during the first meeting, and revisited throughout the seven other sessions. Topics decided upon for the sessions were: discussion of the concepts of second language acquisition, the creation of authentic case-studies based on personal teaching situations, review of student work and the sharing of teaching strategies.

TSG 2 met at a school district administration office in a large district, serving 12,000 students, of which 90% were White, from second or third generation Portuguese working class families. The district served few ELLs, but was experiencing an influx of Hmong, Puerto Rican, Dominican and Central American families. This presented many challenges for the majority White teaching staff.

Initially, the district's Title I Director requested an introduction to various ELL issues for the Title I staff. Three workshops were held in September to address these

issues and generate an interest in other ELL issues and about the TSG. The three initial, traditional workshops focused on: second language acquisition, content-based instruction and assessment. From the introductory presentations, seven Title I staff joined the TSG: 5 teachers and 2 coordinators. The teachers came from two elementary schools in the district and taught reading and math to K-5 Title I students. The TSG met for 14 hours, during the months of December through January. Like TSG 1, the group negotiated content and decided upon exploring the Hmong culture and its relationship to teaching and learning. They also looked at student work and charted growth over time, kept journals and shared reflections with partners and discussed strategies and portfolio organization.

Clair (1998) collected data qualitatively through field notes, used artifacts from the study groups, participants' written journals, her own written journal, mid-term and final written evaluations and follow up interviews and phone calls. Through the coding of data, Clair found five themes and designed a conceptual map. The themes that emerged from the data were: tensions about knowledge, alliances with traditional professional structures, ways of working with one another and understanding the critical needs of ELLs. She also reported on her experience as a participant.

Clair's (1998) findings are important to understanding the effectiveness of a TSG. Overall, the analysis of the two TSGs proved them to be successful and promising as an option of staff development. Teachers felt they were better able to expand and deepen their knowledge, a collaborative culture was developed and teachers were held responsible for their learning and development in the TSG. Clair (1998) claims that this

TSG offered “ESL and content teachers the sustained opportunities they need to critically reflect on schooling issues that have a direct impact on their day-to-day lives” (p. 490). While the TSGs in this study were found effective, a few challenges that arose during the study support the need for TSGs to be further researched. Some participants disliked the TSG because they struggled with the break from the traditional mode of staff development and were looking to an expert to provide the answers and information rather than collaboratively constructing new knowledge. Participants did not trust their own abilities and desired more structure. In conclusion, it appears that most participants gained new knowledge and benefited from their respective TSGs, but the biggest struggle appeared to be with the structure and the straying from the traditional mode of delivery.

Emery – TSGs as Alternative Staff Development

Emery (1998) studied teacher study groups that had been in place for two years in a major metropolitan area of the southwest as part of a doctoral dissertation. Her purpose was to assess the attitudes of teachers and principals towards the use of TSGs as an alternative form of staff development as well as to generate a deeper understanding of the essential elements of a TSG. In this qualitative study, she found that ten out of fifteen teachers studied left this professional development experience with a positive feeling. Over half of the participants enjoyed the TSG experience, as it appealed to their specific learning style, versus previous forms of staff development. Participants voiced concern that they wanted to choose their topic, and showed disappointment if they were not able to participate within a group on a certain topic, yet the administrator expressed

frustration with the staff for not offering suggestions. The regular feedback given to the subjects was received well also and considered a “valuable component to the model and toward their professional growth” (Emery, 1998, p. 102) as well as the collaboration and building of staff relationships. Overall, Emery (1998) validated the use of study groups as a form of professional development, but recognized the need for further research and review.

Hefty – TSG on Differentiated Instruction

Hefty (2005) examined teachers’ perceptions toward the use of teacher study groups and the change in practice with differentiated instruction in their classrooms for a doctoral dissertation. This TSG was held in an urban elementary school. The six grade-level study groups demonstrated differences in “unity, participation, ability to stay on task, interest in reflecting upon teaching, and willingness to move out of their comfort zones” (Hefty, 2005, p. 72). Both positive and negative feedback was reported. Positive responses about the TSG were: a visible administrator, active and supportive group members, opportunity for reflection on teaching practices and the sharing of valued ideas and opinions. Negative feedback from the TSG included, taken from the lowest scoring responses were: a focus on collaborative problem solving, insufficient time set aside for meaningful learning to occur and affect on student achievement as a result of participation in the study group. Themes that emerged from the research included: acquiring knowledge about the content, time for reflection, collaboration with other professionals, time constraints and stress about assignment completion, and frustration

regarding group dynamics. Overall, the majority of participants felt their participation was valuable and a positive experience.

Sleeter – Multicultural Staff Development Program

One of the most prominent studies on TSGs incorporating a multicultural education focus is by Sleeter (1992, 1997) which examined the impact of a two-year multicultural education staff development program that was conducted between 1987 and 1989. Thirty teachers from eighteen schools participated in this privately funded project focusing on multicultural education. The sessions were planned by an advisory council and included input from participants. During the first year, teachers were released to attend nine all-day sessions and encouraged to attend three after-school sessions. These sessions addressed issues such as working with low-income and racial-minority parents, gender equity, ethnic learning styles, bilingual education, community resources, cooperative learning, motivation and developing a multicultural curriculum. During the second year of the study, teachers attended five all-day sessions, in which they chose from a variety of topics they helped to identify.

Sleeter (1997) studied the staff-development program to determine the impact it had on classroom teaching. By taking notes at the staff development sessions, observing each teacher in their classroom for an hour at a time, three to five times each, and interviewing, she was able to report on the impact of the staff development sessions. Typically the participants reported that they were “becoming more aware” (Sleeter, 1997, p. 688). Generally the awareness that was reported concerned “differences among students, student learning styles, racism in society, cooperative learning, curriculum, and

school problems” (Sleeter, 1997, p. 688). Teacher responses to the perception of multicultural education differed; seven White teachers saw multicultural education as irrelevant to their work, six White teachers defined it as good human relations, eight teachers (one African American and seven White) were interested in developing self-esteem among their students and preparing them for survival in a hostile society – where multicultural education fostered empathy for that, and five teachers (three White and two African American) had more complex ways of describing multicultural education and showed much interest in the study (Sleeter, 1997).

Sleeter’s (1997) report demonstrates that this study did little to impact mathematics instruction. Even after reporting they had learned a great deal after each session, there was little evidence to support that this translated into their teaching. It was also apparent that the way the participants understood multicultural education limited how they might apply it to mathematics.

According to the National Education Association (2003) the median age of public school teachers in the United States is 46 years. This means that the majority of public school teachers, if coming out of traditional teacher preparation programs, have most likely not received sufficient university training on CLD students. With the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in effect, it is essential that teachers have a good knowledge base for successfully educating the diverse students in their classrooms. Therefore, promoting an alternative form of staff development, such as a teacher study group, focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, can prove an effective means of bringing veteran teachers up to date on current culturally responsive teaching practices.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

This section of the literature review includes a history of culturally responsive teaching and its development over the past 30 years. It is followed by an overview of four leading scholars in the area of culturally responsive teaching and concludes with a review of three major studies that have involved culturally responsive teaching methods.

Multicultural education originated out of concerns for racial and ethnic inequities that were prevalent and apparent in the 1970s; it includes a variety of dimensions including content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks and Banks, 2004; 2005) that are necessary to make improvements in the educational realm. However, each component must be attended to in order for it to be implemented effectively. Culturally responsive teaching, initiated by researchers in the 1970s, has since been furthered in the past four decades with the works of Kathryn Au, Roland G. Tharp, A. Wade Boykin, Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Jacqueline Irvine, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay (Gay, 2000).

In 1972, Abrahams and Troike argued that in order for [children of color] to be taught effectively, teachers had to examine the cultural differences that existed and capitalize on them rather than disregarding those differences. They also called into question the cultural attitudes, assumptions and regulations of teachers that made it difficult to instruct such children and encouraged analysis of these ideas (Gay, 2000). Gay (2000) cites Chun-Hoon (1973) who also suggested that teaching cultural diversity

in schools offered benefits for mainstream students and Asian Americans, and benefited students of color when teaching from their cultural perspectives.

In 1975, James Banks “admonished teachers of racial-minority students to stop conducting business as usual, or using traditional instruction conventions” (Gay, 2000, p. 27). Rather he wished them to respect cultural and linguistic characteristics of minority youth and change the curriculum to reflect their learning and cultural styles in order to enhance their achievement (Gay, 2000). Gay then identified ways to develop multicultural curriculum content as well as some important dimensions of achievement other than basic skills and academic subjects.

Her conception of achievement encompassed ethnic identity development, citizenship skills for pluralistic societies, knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity, and cross-cultural interactional competence as well as academic success. She suggested that content about cultural diversity has both intrinsic and instrumental value for classroom instruction. The instrumental value includes improving interest and motivation for learning for diverse students, relevance of school learning, and establishing linkages among school, home, and community. (Gay, 2000, p. 28)

Therefore, culturally responsive teaching evolved out of a need to “make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). The culture of public schools and different ethnic groups are often not synchronized, causing a discontinuity that interferes with the academic success of CLD students. Unless teachers can identify what is hindering academic

performance, the obstacles blocking high achievement cannot be removed (Gay, 2000). If teachers are going to increase learning opportunities for all students, they need to be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of learning (Banks, et al., 2001) and employ culturally responsive teaching (CRT) methods to increase the achievement of CLD students.

Culturally responsive teaching uses cultural characteristics, experiences and diverse perspectives to teach CLD students more effectively and is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within and meaningful to the real life experiences of students, they are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2001; Gay, 2000). “Culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities” (Gay, 2000, p. 20).

Leading Scholars in CRT

While a precise definition of CRT is difficult to ascertain, the tenets of it are designed to yield better education for CLD students. Gay (2000) reported, “culturally responsive pedagogy represents a compilation of ideas and explanations from a wide variety of scholars.” Many scholars have contributed to the literature on culturally responsive teaching, which evolved from studies in multicultural education. Prominent scholars include: Four leading scholars in the field of culturally responsive teaching, Etta Hollins, Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine are focused upon in this study, as their research has aided in the development of the conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching. The researcher felt that

establishing a culturally responsive framework for this study could best be developed using research from these four scholars. Their information is clearly presented through readily available articles and books. Gay offers a big picture for a CRT framework that can be followed by teachers, and Ladson-Billings uses language that is friendly to teachers and offers practical suggestions for educators. Cultural relevance and culturally responsive teaching methods move beyond a student's language and incorporates various other aspects of school and student culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Etta Hollins

While her work is not titled culturally responsive teaching, Etta Hollins did groundbreaking research on school restructuring that exposed a lack of focus on the specific needs of children of color in the classroom. Entitled "cultural inclusion," Hollins (1990) insisted on "incorporating the culture of the learner into the academic and social context of schooling in ways that facilitate and support academic learning and cultural identity and promote personal, human, and social development" (Hollins & Spencer, 1990, p. 90). In their research Hollins and Spencer (1990) provide:

Cultural inclusion is aimed at helping learners become competent participants and socially responsible members of a culturally diverse society where group identity is valued and preserved. Cultural inclusion emphasizes changing schools to make them culturally consistent, relevant, and meaningful to diverse populations of learners. This would eliminate bias toward a white middle class standard of behavior and performance, create a new measure of excellence, and provide an equitable basis for curriculum design and pedagogical practice (p. 90).

While the focus of cultural inclusion was initially presented with a focus on African Americans, the ideas are transmittable to all children of color. Hollins and Spencer (1990) report on the means by which to create a supportive attitude and atmosphere for schooling. Having schools respond positively to the home culture, including the native culture in pedagogical processes in a manner that facilitates the academic and social learning for a dual existence within society, including cultural content and perspective in the curriculum, and focusing on the experiences of people of color and emphasizing responsible action or eliminating inhumanity in the world are the key components of cultural inclusion.

Through evaluation of other studies, Hollins (1993) identified consistent teaching behaviors used with children of color and deemed them competencies teachers must acquire to be effective in multicultural settings and was able to comprise a knowledge base for teaching culturally diverse populations. The competencies include: communicating with diverse learners, knowing subject and students, reflective teaching, identifying resources, creating a supportive context, developing interpersonal relationships and promoting learner performance (Hollins, 1993).

Teachers should be able to communicate ideas to their diverse learners in effective and various ways according to competency one. Communication is most effective when cultural meanings are shared, therefore teachers need to recognize the need to make adjustments in communication strategies and modes of presentation. Competency two is knowing the teaching subject and your students. “Teachers need to know the subject matter to be taught and the students in their charge well enough to

present information in ways that make meaningful connections between the knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of the learner and the new content” (Hollins, 1993, p. 95).

It is imperative for teachers to make adjustments in instruction and curriculum to facilitate students’ understanding of their unique history and life experiences. Subject matter needs to be presented in ways that respond to different learning styles and preferences. Hollins believes in the importance of reflective teaching, the third competency. Engaging in a type of reflection that extends their understanding and recognition of new approaches that can aid in teaching culturally diverse populations is encouraged for their own professional growth.

The fourth competency is identifying resources that are culturally responsive for the students being taught and being able to incorporate important aspects of the learners’ culture into instruction. Teachers that create a supportive context maintain the fifth competency. Creating a classroom environment that is comfortable and supportive for every child regardless of background experiences is critical. This also includes developing supportive and collaborative relationships within the classroom and getting children to take pride in their accomplishments, getting children to be kind, helpful, and respectful toward each other, and building self-confidence and positive interpersonal relationships. The sixth competency Hollins lists is developing interpersonal relationships. Being sensitive to students’ needs and involving the parents is critical. Finally, the seventh competency is promoting learner performance which entails the planning and monitoring of instruction to ensure that students are achieving at appropriate levels in each subject matter and/or related skill. Formative assessment must

take place at regular intervals to determine progress and if there is a need for re-teaching, the teacher must be prepared to use alternative approaches. As a part of cultural inclusion and culturally responsive teaching, Hollins (1993) believes these competencies are essential for teaching culturally diverse populations.

Geneva Gay

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as:

Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students.

It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 29)

Along with developing academic achievement, it also expands social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring. It is also anchored on a foundation of four pillars of practice: teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies (Gay, 2000). It is imperative that classroom teachers provide the education and instruction which will increase the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Gay (2000) writes in her book,

However important they are, good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the changes needed in educational programs and procedures to prevent academic inequities among diverse students. Good will must be

accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and skills as well as the courage to dismantle the status quo” (p. 13).

Gay’s awareness of the needs of students of color improves the process of providing them with a quality and meaningful education. Her framework for culturally responsive teaching is clearly laid out and supported in the research. Gay’s assessment of the state of public education over the years, particularly the means by which African, Asian, Latino and Native American students are educated, obviously contributed to the production of culturally responsive teaching methods, a suggested means for reversing the underachievement of students of color (Gay, 2000). Her focus on culturally responsive teaching uses cultural characteristics, experiences and diverse perspectives to teach culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within and meaningful to the real life experiences of students, they will learn with greater ease (Gay, 2001; Gay, 2000). “Culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities” (Gay, 2000, p. 20).

Gloria Ladson-Billings

Gloria Ladson-Billings’ passion for researching the pedagogical practices of teachers who are successful with African American students has helped many pre-service and in-service teachers find a manner in which to better educate diverse students. In her 1994 book, *The Dreamkeepers*, she spotlights the inequity of the education of African Americans. Ladson-Billings (1994) offers a practical model for improving

teacher practice and meaningfully discusses the notion of culturally relevant teaching rather than offering a prescription.

Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001) reflects on research and her own personal experiences as an African-American female to present pertinent information to educators. She professes the importance of cultural relevance and a culturally responsive pedagogy that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to input knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). She demonstrates the importance of this imperative through stories of how diverse students have been discriminated against and unjustly harmed by the educational system. She posts that the tenets of being a culturally relevant teacher include: having high self-esteem and a high regard for others, seeing themselves as part of a community that they give back to (and encourage their students to as well), believing all students can succeed, helping students make connections between their community and the world, discovering the knowledge within their students and creating a caring classroom community. Culturally responsive teaching supports the achievement of all students and requires teachers to create a learning environment where all students are welcomed and supported and provided optimum opportunities to learn regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Barnes, 2006).

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine’s research specialization is multicultural education and urban teacher education, with a particular emphasis on African Americans. She specifically addresses the concern that teachers utilize a colorblind approach to teaching

rather than seeing CLD students as cultural beings (2003). She attacks the notion that if teachers recognize the race and ethnicity of their students and openly discuss issues regarding this, teachers will be labeled as insensitive or racist; “however, when teachers ignore their students’ ethnic identities and their unique cultural beliefs, perceptions, values and worldviews, they fail as culturally responsive pedagogists” (Irvine, 2003, p. xvii). Teachers that claim to treat all children the same usually suggest that students are being treated as White, middle class students.

Irvine has tied most of her research into CULTURES (The Center on Urban Learning/Teaching and Urban Research in Education and Schools), a professional development center for experienced teachers, which she founded and directs. CULTURES has served over 150 teachers of CLD learners in the metropolitan Atlanta area; many of these teachers taught elementary or middle school, were African American and were teaching veterans of 16 years (Irvine, 2003). Here she was able to investigate complex issues of the influence of ethnicity and culture on the teaching and learning process. Throughout her research, Irvine addresses the necessary characteristics of effective teachers for culturally and racially diverse schools and describes reform that must occur in teacher education programs in order to produce teachers that are essential for today’s diverse public school classrooms.

Although these four scholars come from different perspectives and research agendas, several common patterns about the characteristics of CRT emerged. Common characteristics include: examining the specific needs of children of color, the incorporation of learners’ cultures in the content, valuing the native culture,

communicating high expectations and caring for all students. Many of the CRT attributes are similar, but have various names and meanings according to each scholar.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the work of the four major scholars in the area of CRT chosen for this study.

Table 2.1: Summary of CRT Research by Leading Scholars

	Hollins	Ladson-Billings	Gay	Irvine
Leading Scholars and their Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School restructuring - The lack of focus on the specific needs of children of color in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pedagogical practices of teachers who are successful with African American students - A practical model for improving teacher practice rather than a prescriptive model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The means in which African, Asian, Latino and Native American students are educated - Culturally responsive teaching methods as a means for reversing the underachievement of students of color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Characteristics of effective teachers for culturally and racially diverse schools - seeing CLD students as cultural beings

Table 2.2 names the scholars and their associated CRT strategies in relationship to the findings of this study, emergent themes of CRT.

Table 2.2: Names and Characteristics of CRT Strategies

	Hollins	Ladson-Billings	Gay	Irvine
Name of Strategy	Cultural inclusion	Culturally relevant teaching	Culturally responsive teaching	Seeing with a Cultural eye
Characteristics				
Caring		- creating a caring classroom community	- promotes an ethic of caring	- synonymous with teaching - essential quality of effective teachers
Building Relationships with Students		- discover the knowledge within their students	- incorporates community building and personal connections - recognizes the importance of cultural communication	- cares for students; caring comes in many forms
Being Accomodating				-culture affects individuals in different ways
Offering Stability				-seamlessness between home and school visions, values and beliefs
Respecting Students		- help students do the best to their ability		- advocates for their students
Upholding High Expectations	- facilitates academic and social learning by including native culture	- having high self-esteem and a high regard for others	- promotes individual self-worth and abilities	- teaching is believing in your students ability

Major Studies on CRT

Various researchers have recorded the success that culturally responsive teaching has had on culturally and linguistically diverse students. While each researcher contributes unique characteristics to the meaning of CRT, various characteristics remain consistent throughout the research.

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg – Comprehensive Model of CRT

Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995) note the importance of “teaching content to the cultural backgrounds of their students” (p. 17). Their comprehensive model of culturally responsive teaching “crosses disciplines and cultures to engage learners while respecting their cultural integrity” and accommodates the dynamic mix of race, ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and family that contributes to every student’s cultural identity” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 17). The foundation of their approach lies in the intrinsic motivation that teachers need to help build in their students and the authors believe that culture and motivation have a strong relationship. Educators can influence the motivation of students by learning and understanding their perspectives, seeing them as unique and utilizing their cultural characteristics.

An example offered by Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995) occurs in an urban high school, in a classroom of diverse learners and an experienced teacher. She builds on the previous experiences and knowledge of the students and utilizes a repertoire of methods, including small groups, small group discussion and problem-solving, and lively class discussions. The teacher also allows for hands-on learning but ensures that the activity is meaningful and relevant. In this instance, she uses the students as subjects and has

them investigate real life problems (such as predicting sleep of classmates), giving the students choice and motivation. Students in this experiment also utilize collaborative learning, hypothesis testing, critical-questioning and follow up with written evaluation and self-assessment. In this instance of culturally responsive teaching, four motivational conditions constantly interact and influence one another, making learning engaging and helping intrinsic motivation occur in CLD students.

Howard – CRT Methods in Urban Contexts

Tyrone Howard (2001) reports on African American elementary student perceptions and interpretations of culturally responsive teaching methods in urban contexts. He found teachers that students described as culturally relevant were so “because of their ability to incorporate features of the students’ cultural capital into their pedagogical practices” (Howard, 2001, p. 145). The three main characteristics from this study aligned with CRT practices were caring, establishing community and engaging classroom environments.

Students noted teachers who were willing to care about them and established a bond with them; they recognized teachers who wanted their students to perform well academically and socially. Students also described caring teachers as those who showed them respect and were willing to follow the directions because the teacher held them to high expectations (Howard, 2001). Teachers’ abilities to structure their classrooms in a way that valued home and community were the second most frequently mentioned characteristic by students. This was accomplished through daily rituals and teachers who resembled mothers or other family members. Finally, the third attribute described

by students was the teachers' abilities to make learning enjoyable and engaging. Students admitted they were not bored and teachers made learning personable and meaningful (Howard, 2001). Howard's (2001) study gives voice to students and allows us to see the characteristics that stand out in CLD students' minds and causes teachers to rethink their teaching practices in order to improve the academic achievement of CLD students.

Cruzando el Puente: Building Bridges to Funds of Knowledge – Gonzalez and Moll

Luis Moll's research, the Funds of Knowledge, advocates for ELLs and students of color. Investigating students within their social circumstances and in their full complexity will enable teachers to get rid of the deficit model currently practiced in schools, and hence tap into the strengths from the students' home lives. The concept of funds of knowledge is based on a premise "that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 625). Existing classroom practices underestimate what students of color are able to intellectually display. Therefore Moll deems it necessary for educators to utilize home and community resources of their students.

Gonzalez & Moll (2002) claimed that through first-hand research experiences with families, the researched competence, knowledge and engagement leads to positive possibilities for pedagogical actions. "Instruction must be linked to students' lives" and "the details of effective pedagogy should be linked to local histories and community contexts" (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 624). Learning is a social process that encompasses historical, political and ideological frameworks that impact students' lives.

Therefore it is necessary for teachers to become researchers of their own cultural capital, as well as of their students.

This study incorporated mostly elementary school teachers and some middle school teachers that voluntarily participated. They were from diverse backgrounds and ranges of teaching experience. The study utilized ethnographic research methods such as: participant observation, interviewing, life history narratives and reflection on field notes in order to discover the comprehensive student experience. Through home visits, teachers/ethnographers ventured into their students' households and communities seeking an understanding of the ways in which they made sense of their everyday lives. The researchers felt that there was no better way to engage students than to draw them in with knowledge that is already familiar to them and to use that as a basis for promoting academic success.

The participants operated under the premise that the more they could engage and identify with the topic matter, the more interest and motivation is generated. Prior to accomplishing this, the participants were asked to: read ethnographic literature, role-play or discuss the fieldwork they would be conducting, learn to be a good observer and pay attention to detail (by watching two videos and participating in discussion) and ask respectful questions and learn to listen to answers. The participants were encouraged to treat the interviews like a conversation rather than a research format. Questionnaires were used as a guide, suggesting possible areas to explore. They could also incorporate previous information as a means of formulating new questions.

Three interviews were conducted. The first was based on family and labor history, with open-ended questions and invited storytelling. These answers help conceptualize the networks within which the family operates. The second interview is based on regular household activities and the third is about how parents view and construct their roles as parents and caretakers. After the interviews the researchers transcribe tape-recorded sessions and visit their field notes to reconstruct the experience and derive meaning. Results were then taken into teacher study groups to share and discuss. Teachers remarked on the time-consuming nature of this process but felt it was worthwhile in the end. The narratives that emerged from the interviews were powerful and deeply impacted the teachers. Participants found that “from birth, one is socialized by others into particular cultural practices, ways of using language(s), and ways of using artifacts, especially symbol systems such as writing, that become the ‘mediational tools’ through which to interact with one’s social world” (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 633).

The premise of this research was that people have knowledge acquired through their life experiences. However, some people’s knowledge is considered more valid than others in public schools, so it is up to teachers to gather that knowledge and positively utilize it. The findings from this study suggest that funds of knowledge are generated through the social and labor history of families and communicated to others through daily life activities in the home. Funds of knowledge are cultural resources for teachers. Long-term collaborations about research are necessary and teachers’ access to the resources of the study group are imperative.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks guiding this study are multicultural education theory, culturally responsive teaching and constructivism. Literature about professional development is also significant to understanding the nature and importance of this study.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has deep historical roots, and evolved out of various social reforms throughout United States history (Banks and Banks, 2004). Its appearance is closely linked to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the appearance of ethnic studies and multiethnic education. These movements inspired other marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities and feminists, to challenge academic institutions to reflect their cultures and experience (Banks and Banks, 2004).

Multicultural education “draws upon, reflects, and echoes concerns in ethnic studies, multiethnic education, women’s studies, and to a lesser extent research and scholarship in exceptionality” and “incorporates concepts, paradigms, theories, assumptions, and pedagogy rooted in each of these interdisciplinary fields and applies them to practical education settings” (Banks and Banks, 2004, p. xii). A major goal is to reform schools so that students, with all types of diversity, can experience educational equality (Banks and Banks, 2004). In order for multicultural education to be successful, its conception as curriculum reform must be eliminated and transformed into its understanding as a pedagogical practice. The dimensions of it must be better understood. Multicultural education includes the following dimensions: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy,

and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks and Banks, 2004). Nieto (2004) includes the following seven basic characteristics of multicultural education: antiracist education, basic education, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process and critical pedagogy.

Evidence increasingly indicates that multicultural education makes schooling more relevant and effective for all students, including Latino American, Native American, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian students as well. When more congruence between their cultural heritage and instruction exists, students are more successful (Gay, 2004). Multicultural education may be the solution to problems that currently appear insolvable: closing the achievement gap; genuinely not leaving any children behind academically; revitalizing faith and trust in the promises of democracy, equality, and justice; building education systems that reflect the diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, and social contributions that forge society; and providing better opportunities for all students. Multicultural education is crucial (Gay, 2004, p. 34) and can be accomplished through culturally responsive teaching methods.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

While many scholars have been instrumental in creating and advancing the field of multicultural education and the components of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), four scholars enhance the framework of culturally responsive teaching in this study: Etta Hollins, Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine.

Etta Hollins contributes to the framework of culturally responsive teaching with school restructuring research that exposed a lack of focus on the specific needs of

children of color in the classroom. Entitled “cultural inclusion,” Hollins (1990) insisted on “incorporating the culture of the learner into the academic and social context of schooling in ways that facilitate and support academic learning and cultural identity and promote personal, human, and social development” (Hollins & Spencer, 1990, p. 90).

Hollins and Spencer (1990) explain:

Cultural inclusion is aimed at helping learners become competent participants and socially responsible members of a culturally diverse society where group identity is valued and preserved. Cultural inclusion emphasizes changing schools to make them culturally consistent, relevant, and meaningful to diverse populations of learners. This would eliminate bias toward a white middle class standard of behavior and performance, create a new measure of excellence, and provide an equitable basis for curriculum design and pedagogical practice (p. 90).

While the focus of cultural inclusion was initially presented with a focus on African Americans, the ideas are transmittable to all children of color. Hollins and Spencer (1990) report on methods to create a supportive attitude and atmosphere for schooling. Schools responding positively to the home culture and including the native culture in pedagogical processes in a way that facilitates the academic and social learning for a dual existence within society are ways to accomplish this. Also including cultural content and perspective in the curriculum, focusing on the experiences of people of color and emphasizing responsible action or eliminating inhumanity in the world are the key components of cultural inclusion as well. This aligns with the premise of culturally responsive teaching.

Cultural relevance and culturally responsive teaching methods move beyond a student's language and incorporates various other aspects of school and student culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). While a precise definition of CRT is difficult to attain, the numerous tenets of it are designed to yield better education for CLD students. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as:

Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (p. 29)

Culturally responsive teaching is also: comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory. Along with developing academic achievement, it also expands social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring. It is anchored on a foundation of four pillars of practice: teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies (Gay, 2000).

Ladson-Billings (1994) offers a practical model for improving teacher practice and discusses the notion of culturally relevant teaching in a meaningful manner, rather than as a prescription. She professes the importance of cultural relevance and a culturally responsive pedagogy that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to input knowledge, skills, and

attitudes” (p. 18). The tenets of being a culturally relevant teacher include: having high self-esteem and a high regard for others, seeing themselves as part of a community that they give back to (and encourage their students to as well), believe all students can succeed, help students make connections between their community and the world and discover the knowledge within their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching involves creating a caring classroom community; this entails connecting with students, taking responsibility for one another and encouraging each other and closely resembles a family.

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine maintains that culturally responsive teachers are more than effective educators; they contextualize teaching and recognize the needs and cultural experiences of their students (Irvine, 2003). Irvine describes multiple characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. They are: spending ample time building relationships with their students (in and out of the classroom), allowing students to share personal stories or anecdotes in class without passing judgment, offering sufficient wait time for their students to answer questions, encourage more abundantly than their professional peers, vary activities, work closely with the school, community and home to get insight about students’ motivation and interests and utilize and respect students’ prior cultural experiences and background knowledge and utilize them to bridge the gap between home and school (Irvine, 2003).

Constructivism

Qualitative methodology was used in this study to observe “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning

people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The constructivist paradigm allowed the researcher to reconstruct understanding of the social world through the multiple realities and voices of the participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Constructivism was used in this study so the researcher could construct meaning of the participants’ experiences in a TSG and describe their learning experiences of the culturally responsive teaching content.

With the use of a variety of naturalistic inquiry methods including, non-participant observation and field notes (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), audio recording (Perakyla, 2005), artifacts (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005), open-ended questions (Fontana & Frey, 2005) semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Freebody, 2004) and the case study method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nieto, 2004, Stake, 2005), the researcher will deduce emergent themes from the participants’ dialogue of this experience.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative case study methodology. A case study focuses on “one particular instance of educational experience and attempt[s] to gain theoretical and professional insights from a full documentation of that instance” (Freebody, 2004, p. 81). In this instance, the case study was a teacher study group, comprised of five middle school teachers in an urban district. According to Freebody (2004), “the goal of a case study, in its most general form, is to put in place an inquiry in which both researchers and educators can reflect upon particular instances of educational practice” (P. 81). Using qualitative methods, such as field notes, interviews and discussion sessions (Freebody, 2004), the researcher was able to examine the professional development experiences of teachers participating in a teacher study group focused on CRT, and examine how teachers in a TSG describe their learning experiences about CRT content.

Study Design

This case study documented the experiences of five 7th and 8th grade urban middle school teachers participating in a teacher study group focused on culturally responsive teaching through a qualitative approach, using the constructivist paradigm. Various qualitative methods were employed to investigate the design and process of the TSG and the participants’ experiences while learning the TSG content.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contend that the constructivist paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent concrete understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of

methodological procedures (p. 24). This paradigm was necessary to understand each participant's construction of meaning of the TSG process and the CRT content, while situated in their natural surroundings.

Certain qualitative methods were considered and used after synthesizing research about TSGs from Clair (1998) and Sleeter (1992). After carefully evaluating these studies, the researcher incorporated some of the same qualitative methods used in those studies into this research. Similar to Clair's (1998) study, the researcher collected data qualitatively through a variety of methods: field notes, artifacts from the study groups (participant journals) and final written evaluations. The researcher also collected data by conducting follow-up phone calls. Similar methods that were used in Sleeter's (1997) study included participant interviews and taking field notes during the TSG sessions. Using these methods allowed the researcher to gain insight into the participants' constructed reports of their experiences in the TSG and experiences learning the CRT content, and allowed her to interpret this data.

Data Collection Instruments

Open-ended Surveys

An initial open-ended survey (Appendix B) was issued to the participants at the first session, the Informational Session. The Teacher Information Survey asked for general information from the participants such as: gender, ethnicity, educational attainment and from what universities, certification (state and type) and total years of teaching experience (including all subjects taught, in what district and for how long) and grade levels taught. There were also five open-ended questions posed:

1. What are your thoughts on staff development as it currently occurs at your school and in your district?
2. What is the most meaningful staff development you have ever experienced?
3. What is your worst staff development experience?
4. What does the term culturally responsive teaching mean to you?
5. What do you hope to gain from the teacher study group experience on culturally responsive teaching methods?

The purpose of this survey was to gather background information and participants' initial feelings and understanding towards the TSG and CRT. It also aided the researcher in structuring interview questions and reporting data for the study.

A final open-ended survey was issued to the participants after completion of the final session (Appendix C). The following nine questions were posed in the final evaluation:

1. What caused you to miss a session (if any)?
2. Would you want to participate in another study group again? Why or why not?
3. Compare the TSG to other types of staff development. Which do you prefer and why?
4. What concepts of CRT stuck with you after the study group?
5. Would you have acted or treated this differently if you were given time during the work day to have the TSG?

6. How did you feel in the sessions ... were you looking for someone to tell you what to do, to guide you or did you feel that you had the control?
7. Has your opinion of staff development changed after participating in the study group?
8. Did the TSG meet your original expectations?
9. Define a culturally responsive teacher.

This final open-ended survey allowed the researcher to gather participants' reflections on the TSG design and its process and the CRT content.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured or unstructured interviewing is a qualitative data gathering technique that allows opportunities for clarification and discussion, unlike traditional positivist survey research (Reinharz, 1992). This type of interviewing aims to “have something of the best of both worlds by establishing a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time leaving the sequence and the relevances of the interviewee free to vary, around and about from that core (Freebody, 2004, p. 133).

One interview was conducted with each participant in the middle of the study, following the third TSG session. The researcher decided to interview the participants after some participation in the TSG in order to allow them time to develop thoughts on their experiences in the TSG as well as gain some knowledge on CRT. The initial open-ended survey provided initial information about professional development experiences and prior knowledge of CRT. The final follow-up survey offered the researcher information from the participants when their experience ended. The interview in the

middle of the study allowed the researcher to gain deeper understanding of each participant's perception of staff development and the TSG process, as well as gauge any understanding and application of the CRT content. Follow-up questions to the interview were addressed individually to the participants in person, via the telephone or through email.

Audio-tape Recording

Each session of the TSG and each interview was audio-tape recorded. The recordings were then transcribed for reliability. It was important to record each session so the researcher could develop a record of the interactions that occurred (Freebody, 2004). Additionally, audio-tape recording provided a reasonably accurate record, which is crucial according to Freebody (2004). The transcriptions of the audio-tape recordings provided useful, thick data that were combined with extensive field notes taken during each TSG session and interview.

Researcher Observation

The session content was originally delivered and monitored by the TSG facilitator, while the researcher served as a non-participant observer. Due to extenuating circumstances the facilitator was only able to participate in four of six TSG sessions. Upon her departure, the researcher ensured the TSG sessions still continued, but the participants emerged as the facilitators of the final two sessions. During the TSG sessions the researcher took thorough field notes to enhance the audio-tape recordings of each TSG session. Tape recording the sessions and interviews provided concrete data

that the researcher may have missed by solely using field notes. This also secured more reliability and validity (Freebody, 2004).

Session Artifacts

All session artifacts including agendas and reflective journals were collected and used for data analysis. Participants were encouraged to keep a reflective journal that was used in the data analysis component of this research project. Participants were asked to make at least one entry per week during the entire TSG process. Reflection could focus on the TSG process, the participants' comprehension of CRT, the readings, happenings from the workweek or any other area of interest.

Research Setting

Eagle Middle School

The TSG took place at Eagle Middle School, located in the Allied Independent School District. Allied is located in the southwest part of a large urban city in Texas. Eagle Middle School is a pseudonym for the middle school where the research was performed. The middle school was named for a principal (Mr. E) that began work in Allied Independent School District in 1965. At an early age, Mr. E knew he would join a number of his family members in the field of education and began his teaching career as a junior high mathematics teacher in 1959. Later in his career as a principal in Allied, Mr. E. was active with the student population and established lasting relationships with students. He always knew where they were and what they were doing. An administrative pioneer in Allied, he recalls many firsts, including the first graduating class, football team, drill team, National Honor Society and National Merit Scholar.

These firsts were a result of an increasing enrollment which led Mr. E to a new facility with nearly 500 seventh through twelfth grade students in 1968. Mr. E went on to receive his Ph.D. and serve as the Director of a Regional Education Service Center so he resigned from Allied. After ten years of service in 1975, the school was named for him.

Opened in August 1976, Eagle Middle School housed 200 sixth and seventh graders. The school had a football team, cheerleading squad, an active student council, a band and many other clubs that helped the school to thrive. Eagle Middle School was the third of three middle schools in Allied. Its enrollment increased in 1977 to beyond 1400 students. The school was constructed using students' ideas, and even today (after a large renovation project in 2000-2001) the suggestions are still seen throughout the building, such as the many windows, two courtyards and a sunken resource room. As part of the open-education trend of the 1970's, Eagle Middle was created with room for the students to learn. Sliding partitions enabled teachers to break away from or join teammates.

In 2000 Eagle Middle School underwent a major renovation. During this time classrooms were enclosed, science and computer labs constructed and the facility updated. Classrooms today are spacious and large group instructional facilities are available. Eagle Middle has four computer labs, computers with Internet access in each classroom and a large library (which is still open). Enrollment has fluctuated over the past few years from between 800-1000 students in grades seven and eight.

According to the Texas Education Agency's 2007 PEIMS report, Eagle Middle School's enrollment for the 2006-2007 school year was 1,040 students. The population

breakdown of the 1,040 students was as follows: 33% African American, 52% Hispanic, 3% White and 12% Asian/Pacific Islander. Eagle Middle School's population of African American, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students was double and triple the state population respectively (TEA, 2007). Eagle Middle School's White population was 3% while the state average is 36%. Nearly 70% of the students were labeled "at-risk"; 77% economically disadvantaged and 14% Limited English Proficient. The faculty at Eagle Middle School during the 2006-2007 school year consisted of 77 teachers: 34% African American, 14% Hispanic, 47% White and 5% Asian/Pacific Islander (TEA, 2007). These statistics represent a diversified faculty that is not aligned with the state percentages.

Academic achievement at Eagle Middle School is considered acceptable by the state, yet according to state standardized testing results, Eagle Middle School falls under the state average on the exams for both the 7th and 8th grade levels. The disparity of achievement on the state TAKS test among African Americans compared to their Hispanic counterparts is visible in the math and all tests reporting. However, the gap closes some each year as the academic progress at Eagle Middle School increases.

Participants

Six teachers, willing to be a part of this research design, were originally selected to participate in a TSG. Prior to the study, mini-staff development sessions on culturally responsive teaching methods were presented during various faculty meetings throughout the 2006-2007 school year. At the conclusion of the fourth presentation, the faculty was polled to see if they were interested in participating in the study. From the group

expressing interest in participating, a purposeful sample of teachers was chosen. A purposeful sample of participants was necessary to offer an opportunity for intensive study (Stake, 2005) and they all shared an interest in developing their knowledge of CRT and teaching practices. The participants represented a mixture of race, age, content specialization and educational background which can be viewed in Table 3.1. A more detailed description of each participant can be found in Chapter IV.

Table 3.1: General Characteristics of Participants

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Years Teach.	Grade Taught	Cert.	College Major	Masters Degree
Dion	AA	M	28	5	7 th -8 th SPED	ACP	History	Y
Standing Tall	H	F	25	2	7 th	ACP	Psychology	N
Cajun	W	F	40	14	8 th	T	Physical Education	Y
Justice	H	F	25	3	8 th	ACP	Government	N
Inspiration	W	F	24	2	7 th	TFA	Pre-Med and Psychology	N

The TSG Sessions

Six sessions were held during the second semester of the 2007-2008 school year; they were held after-school, for two hours each, between the months of March and June.

These sessions were necessary in order to gather data to answer the two research questions:

1. What are the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?
2. How do urban middle schools teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

Originally, each session was to be facilitated by an administrative faculty member, a school counselor, selected to lead this group based on her knowledge of cultural diversity and her strong relationships with the participants. However, due to extenuating circumstances, she was only able to facilitate four of the six sessions. In the last two sessions the researcher reminded the group of its decided meeting times and secured a space for the meeting but the participants emerged as leaders of the final two sessions. The participants took ownership of the TSG and decided on the content of the remaining sessions.

During each session, readings from Geneva Gay's (2000) book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, and Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1994) book, *The Dreamkeepers*, were assigned and discussed. The discussion of the readings often led into deeper discussions of various students and concerns and happenings in the participants' classrooms and around the school. These readings were combined with a variety of individual and group activities, such as examining student grades that served as further content for discussion in subsequent TSG sessions.

The researcher originally designed a complete plan for the TSG sessions (see Appendix A). This guide was created for the facilitator to offer suggestions as to what the participants could read or activities they could complete. It was given to her and she used some suggestions for the first session only. TSGs should be teacher driven (Saavedra, 1996) and a facilitator present for guidance. Since the main content of CRT was already decided, the researcher wanted the facilitator to have access to references since she was not an expert in CRT, nor had she participated in a TSG before. The researcher provided an article on TSGs (Saavdra, 1996) and asked that it be read and shared at the first session so the participants could comprehend the ideas of a TSG and their responsibilities as participants. Further description of the TSG sessions is found in the next part of this chapter.

Informational Session

The first session of the TSG was an informational and introductory session for the participants. Before the study commenced, the researcher had to secure signatures for the IRB paperwork. The participants were given materials for the TSG which included a journal, a folder for materials and two books (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Geneva Gay and *The Dreamkeepers* by Gloria Ladson Billings). The participants were given an open-ended survey that provided general information about them. Readings for Session One were decided upon by the facilitator and assigned to the group.

Session One

The first TSG session began with the facilitator and participants establishing group norms for the sessions. The facilitator used the CHAMP model from Randy Sprick's Safe and Civil Schools (APPENDIX D). The CHAMP model allows the groups to decide on appropriate actions for the following areas: Communication, Help, Activity, Movement and Participation. This model is used by teachers in the Allied school districts in their classrooms and during their Professional Learning Community (PLC) times. The group decided on the following as their norms:

Communication: professional, discussion on topic

Help: refer to the text for help, ask each other

Activity: discussions

Movement: move around as needed; decide if we need a collective break

Participation: everyone needs to talk, be on time and prepared, write in your journal once a week

After establishing the norms, the facilitator directed the participants to discuss Saavedra's (1996) article about TSGs.

The facilitator reiterated Saavedra's (1996) premise of TSGs that the teachers should be doing most of the talking, and her role was to help move the conversation. She stated, "Because you are the ones in the classroom actually doing the stuff, or having the experiences, you are the ones that should be moving the conversation." Although she stated this, during this first session few participants shared their ideas. The facilitator tried hard to not take control and was hesitant to offer too much of her opinion; however, no one would speak or respond to her questions. This was looking

too much like the traditional model of professional development, where one person was the expert and was supposed to dictate the learning. Justice finally spoke up and asked for a review of the readings to help get her caught up. The group, mostly the facilitator reviewed Saavedra's (1996) article and Gay (2000) Chapters 1-2. It was a brief discussion, but the TSG commenced. The facilitator suggested reading Chapter 3 of both books for the next meeting.

Session Two

Session Two began with a review of the norms and an invitation to the participants to share their journaling for the week. Dion shared his thinking and the group began talking about the readings. The first comment shared from the reading was from Standing Tall about caring for students. Caring became the predominant theme of the session. The participants all spoke on the importance of remembering that the students are people; we are all human and have feelings. Inspiration spoke about the Billings book and a specific reference to one teacher in high heels that told her students she liked her job because she got to work with the most important people in the world. This prompted discussion about teacher dress including former teachers that the participants had while in school, and the participants' co-workers. After this discussion, the group decided to do an experiment by "dressing up" their appearances and noting student reactions.

Having expectations for students was also a large part of the discussion during this session. The participants spoke about having expectations for students, but that sometimes the expectations changed depending on the student or the class. This was

both positive and negative for the students. The conversation then focused on building relationships, and if not having relationships with your students created an unsuccessful classroom. Inspiration pointed out that sometimes the lack of success is due to the teacher not upholding school-wide expectations and rules, and that teachers have to set reasonable goals for their classes. The discussion returned to caring and concluded with the participants trying to define caring with words and actions.

Session Three

Session Three began with a lengthy conversation about the participants' responses to the "dress-up" assignment. Most of the participants were surprised at the reaction of the students towards the teachers' attempt at dressing up for a day. Cajun thought more students would have mentioned something to her, because she is a coach and is often in athletic gear. However, for this assignment she wore nice slacks and a long sleeved shirt. Dion's dressing up had an adverse effect; his students made fun of him and actually acted-out the day he dressed up his jeans and wore penny loafers.

The second assignment was to learn something new from three students they either did not know a lot about or one with whom they did not have much of a relationship. The participants all noticed a change in student behavior when they spoke to the students; the conversations centered around something that was interesting to the student, and the teachers found that the students were more willing to participate in class after that previous interaction. This led into telling about various success stories the participants had with various students after they built a relationship with the student.

The session continued with discussion of chapter six of the Ladson-Billings book and chapter seven of the Gay book. This prompted discussion about a variety of topics: communicating with parents (especially of different cultures), sense of time for various cultures, keeping kids engaged and enrolled in school and ultimately the major topic of discussion, high expectations for achievement at Eagle Middle School. Inspiration had been quiet most of the session, but she finally brought up something that bothered her: setting lower expectations because of the situations and challenges Allied students face in their daily lives.

The discussion became intense and the participants really had to reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices at Eagle Middle School. Compared to neighboring school districts was the work at Eagle Middle School as or more rigorous? While the participants had shown an emerging understanding of culturally responsive teaching, it became clear that here they were making exceptions for their students, and some of the exceptions were harmful to the children. Allowing the students to use their culture as a crutch, because of associating terrible circumstances with socio-economic class and even ethnicity, this demonstrated that the participants were possibly just beginning to scratch the surface of CRT.

Standing Tall felt that her students were not able to perform as well academically than a neighboring more affluent district, and felt parental involvement was key to that. In her experiences in Allied, parents did not take an active role in aiding their children with homework, thus causing a stereotype. However, she was quick to note that sometimes the culture of a race upheld different views about education. For example,

often times in a Hispanic home, children drop out of school to help the family financially by working or helping with their brothers and sisters. Playing the opposite side of the fence, Inspiration felt that was an example of lowering your expectations if you “say that you understand their culture so that you are not going to give them homework.” Dion felt you had to uphold the same standard, but you may cut down on the amount of work to allow them an opportunity to succeed. He offered, “I will never lower my standards even though I teach Special Education. I’m never going to lower my standards, whether I teach language, whether I teach math. I tell them what they need to know.”

Cajun began speaking about changing children grades to passing, which became the topic of another intense debate about upholding high expectations. She said,

There were a lot of the kids that I feel like they needed to do the work, because this was for a high school credit, and if they were just slackers that didn't do it, just because they didn't want to do it, they got the 67. And the kids that I felt like really worked hard and turned in their assignments and did something, but maybe their test grades were just a little bit lower but for the most part they got the concept, I bumped them to the 70.

The facilitator asked if this decision was in part due to the relationship you had with your students. “Does it make a difference how much you know about your kids? Because what if that kid is a discipline problem because their mom died a month ago but you don't know that?” The participants, all with good intentions, were beginning to realize that culturally responsive teaching meant caring about children, but at the same time meant emphasizing the importance of achievement. For children of color,

achievement has to be equivalent to their peers, and cannot be accomplished through effort grades. This session took a toll emotionally on the participants, but caused them all to reevaluate their grading, ultimately moving them in the right directions of utilizing CRT.

Session Four

Session Four was the first session without the facilitator. The participants were asked to bring a copy of their class rosters and offer reflections about the class as a whole or certain students. They each received copies of their grades for the year thus far, and were asked to look at their notes and compare it to the grades. This is how the session began. Justice and Inspiration took the lead on facilitating this TSG session. Both shared lengthy thinking about their reflection on this assignment, which initiated meaningful conversation about the students and teachers at Eagle Middle School.

Most of the conversation in the beginning was about the issue of respect. The term “disrespectful” is often used by students and staff at Eagle Middle School, but Inspiration pointed out that you have to carefully examine the student and situation before you claim that they are being “disrespectful.” Most of the time behaviors are a result of not having been taught what is appropriate (at school) and what is not acceptable. “Most of the people in my sixth period have what I feel is an appropriate sense of what is socially acceptable and socially respectful.” Justice addressed this too:

I think [the students] are somewhat lacking, their social skills are lacking and morals and norms. I know myself what I was taught, but I see that they have gaps. They are not trying to be defiant or anything they just have no clue.

Sometimes it is the first time they have ever heard it.

While no participants labeled their thinking, nor had they made a complete transformation into a culturally responsive teacher, this illustrates that their thinking is evolving. They fail to see that the “school” and “acceptable” norms are that of a White and middle class society, but they recognize that the children are not always to blame when they do not meet the expectations of their teachers due to a cultural mismatch.

The remainder of this session included a lot of storytelling about students and their grades, as well as various strategies and interventions that were used to help the students succeed behaviorally and academically. After the group spent a lot of time sharing about students that were behavior problems and non-achieving, Justice brought up the topic of highly engaging lessons:

If you have highly engaging lessons your students won't misbehave. However, some of our children are going to have horrible days and they do not care how fabulous your lesson is or how much fun it looks like everyone is having, they don't give a flying flip. They are going to be what they want to be that day.

Maybe something happened at home, or something else plays into it. My lesson is engaging, but they do not want to be engaged.

Again this illustrates Justice's evolution into a culturally responsive teacher, but she is not quite there. She recognizes that there are other factors influencing the child's interests and achievement, but she still sees that as a deficit. Most of the teachers in the group are in the same stage as Justice and this is noticeable through their dialogue and

intonation during the sessions. Overall in this session the topics of conversation were grades, high expectations and academic achievement.

Session Five

Session Five was also held without the facilitator. At this point in the study the participants were more comfortable with one another and the format so it was natural for someone to emerge as the leader. In this session, Inspiration emerged as the leader and started the group off with a discussion of chapter seven from *The Dreamkeepers*. This chapter was about culturally responsive schools and Inspiration sought answers from the group to see if Eagle Middle School fit into the categories laid out by Ladson-Billings. Justice shared the categories with the group: self determination, honoring home culture and helping African American students understand the world as it is, and encourage them to change it for the better. From here the groups discussed where Eagle Middle School stood in regards to each category.

Inspiration and Justice spoke the most in this session and clearly had passion about moving Eagle Middle School in this direction. In response to EMS being a culturally responsive school and who is responsible for that to happen, Inspiration offered:

I think the teachers have a certain role with the students and parents, but I think honestly if it is going to be something that is embedded in the school or district culture, it should be administration, within the school and on the school board.

Justice concurred:

If your administration pushes you to do that outreach, then basically you the teacher are the front line, you've got that direct contact. If the parents catch on then that curiosity will naturally take them into trying and seeing other things happening in the school and the more aware they become of things the more involved they get with things in the school. We are the front line, but if we are not pushed, then things get put on the back burner.

The group agreed that there should be a structure set up to make a school culturally responsive. In regards to making Eagle Middle School more culturally responsive, the group felt that if it was expected, the teachers would comply. The systems are in place, but if a school does not utilize them, ultimately the students are the ones that get hurt.

The session closed with a discussion about the overall experience of this staff development study. The participants liked the format of this TSG and were interested in continuing their study. Some of the participants wanted this to be opened up to more teachers at the campus and others felt it would be beneficial at the district level. The following is some dialogue from the last session, where the participants demonstrate their learning from this experience:

Dion suggested that there should be another TSG. He suggested that if the school district was not going to provide it, then he wanted Allied to offer one. Standing Tall felt that a TSG on CRT could get people to rethink what they are doing when they step back and reflect on their actions. Justice agreed that the CRT content needed to be presented at the beginning of the year to the whole staff.

While each participant gained something different from this experience, the overall conclusion is that they learned something, about themselves and their students. Now it is up to these teachers to spread the knowledge and work to make their classrooms and schools culturally responsive.

Follow-up

Some follow-up was necessary during the summer and was conducted through email and telephone calls. The follow-up consisted of clarifications from interviews and some member checking. The researcher sought information from the participants to see if the reported data were accurate and acceptable. A final evaluation (SEE APPENDIX C) consisting of nine open ended questions was sent via email in early July, allowing the researcher to analyze changes in attitudes, thinking and professional practice.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study was originally designed to answer two specific research questions:

1. What are the experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?
2. How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

The qualitative inquiry methods used in this research study included: audio-tape recordings of semi-structured interviews and each TSG session, field notes from the TSG sessions and each semi-structured interview, an initial and final open-ended survey and the participants' reflective journals. All of this data were used in a constant

comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to answer question one of the two research questions. The first step in conducting the analysis was to ensure that all tape-recorded sessions and interviews were transcribed. After the original transcriptions were completed, they were checked for accuracy against the recording (Freebody, 2004). At this point, the data (interview and session transcriptions, researcher's field notes, participants' journals and surveys) were cross-compared constantly and continually and coded.

The following steps were then taken to analyze the data:

1. The transcriptions were read.
2. After the initial reading, the transcripts (and other data) were re-read and color-coded based on ideas that emerged from the data. The color-coded categories were put into a master list.
3. The master list was examined and new, broader categories were created based on the results that emerged from the data. The researcher categorized the results into distinctive sections: professional development experiences and learning experiences of CRT.

The researcher used a more sociological approach to coding (and categorizing), looking for ideological and cultural ideas, rather than using a linguistic approach concerned with the application and taxonomy of language (Freebody, 2004).

4. The data from the initial, original categories were then grouped under an appropriate broader category.

5. The data were re-visited in its new organizational structure, and the overarching themes were confirmed.
6. Constant comparison and shuffling of the data finally led to the decision on overarching themes and sub-headers for each results section of each research question.

During the analysis, major themes emerged about the TSG based on research question one. The sub-headers for each theme were then determined based on the grouped data. The data were again compared to each theme and an analysis for question one was created. Once the data were analyzed for question one, it was re-examined and reported.

The following steps were then taken to analyze the data for research question two:

7. The transcriptions were read.
8. After the initial reading, the transcriptions were coded and placed into CRT
9. The research question had to be revised in order to accurately report the data; the participants were reporting on their understanding of the CRT content and a change in practice could not be observed through this data. Research question two was revised to report the learning experiences of CRT in the words of the participants.
10. The transcriptions were re-read and sorted into various categories.

Descriptions of participants' learning about CRT were color-coded based on various themes of CRT.

11. After further constant comparison of the data, the researcher reviewed all of the transcriptions, re-shuffled the data and sorted it under the appropriate theme and sub-headings in the voices of the participants.

Triangulation

Triangulation was utilized to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 2005) and increase the reliability and validity for the reader (Freebody, 2004). Repeated listening to the audio-tapes, continuous viewing and coding of the transcriptions were strategies used to improve clarity and consistency (Freebody, 2004). Triangulation was achieved through constant comparison between the audio and written TSG session transcriptions and interviews, field notes, the reflective journals and open-ended surveys. The researcher also used member checking. Participants viewed and could offer comment on their analyzed biographical sketches and changes in professional practice to ensure reliability. Data reporting was also shared with the original TSG facilitator. This offered another “eye” to ensure accuracy and validity of data reporting from the interviews and sessions. Two outside sources were used to edit for grammar and readability of the paper which also aided in the accuracy of data reporting and readability of the completed research study.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations of the study:

1. The participants volunteered to be a part of this study after an initial introduction to culturally responsive teaching during a campus-based staff

development workshop. They received compensation in the form of staff development credit and materials for their participation.

2. The study was conducted over a four month period, March through June, limiting the possibility of further in-depth study of the TSG and its effect on the participants' attitudes and professional practices in the classroom.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANTS

This chapter begins with the selection process of the study's participants. A brief overview of the five participants is provided. The chapter continues with detailed biographical sketches including information about their birth and childhood, higher educational experiences, teacher preparation, teaching experiences and staff development experience. Chapter IV concludes with a narrative to the reader about the importance of each participant's story and that relationship to the impact of the study.

Introduction

Six teachers willing to be a part of this research design were originally selected to participate in a fourteen credit hour staff development focusing on culturally responsive teaching methods. Its purpose was two-fold; to offer pertinent information on CRT practices to the participants and for the researcher to gather information in order to answer the two research questions:

1. What are the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?
2. How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

Prior to the study, mini-staff development sessions on culturally responsive teaching methods were presented during various faculty meetings throughout the 2006-2007 school year. At the conclusion of the fourth presentation, the faculty was polled to see if

they were interested in participating in the study. From the group expressing interest in participating, a purposeful sample of teachers was chosen. A purposeful sample of participants was necessary to offer an opportunity for intensive study (Stake, 2005) and they all shared an interest in developing their knowledge of CRT and teaching practices.

Before identifying the participants it was important to seek and secure IRB approval. Once the study was approved, those faculty members interested in participating in a TSG and willing to offer information about their experiences with staff development and culturally responsive teaching were selected. The participants had to be willing to commit to all of the TSG sessions and agree to be interviewed. After agreeing to the terms of the study, the participants were chosen and completed and signed all necessary IRB paperwork. Originally six teachers signed up to participate but one failed to show up for the meetings so she was dismissed from the study. Additionally, one paraprofessional signed up for and attended the TSG to receive staff development credit, but did not participate in the study.

The participants represented a mixture of race, age, content specialization and educational background. Collectively, the participants had 26 years of teaching experience and all of that teaching experience was completed in Allied I.S.D. at Eagle Middle School. Table 3.1 provides specific information about their ethnicity, gender, age, certification, grade taught, college major and attainment of a graduate degree. Each participant's biographical sketch offers more explanation and insight into their personality, character and experiences as an educator. This allows the reader to better

know each participant before reading about their participation and contributions to the TSG.

Participant One – “Dion James”

“Go Tigers!” Not one TSG session occurred without the mention of the 1998 Texas High School State Football Championship Team. Dion, one of the team’s biggest fans and one of its former superstars, never failed to mention memories from his time playing for Tigerville. Tall, dark, handsome and athletically built, Dion’s presence and sense of team failed to go unnoticed throughout the study. The group relied on him for his perspective and knowledge of the students, advice from his teaching experiences and expected mention of flashbacks from his glory days at Tigerville. No session was complete without mention of a Tiger coach or legendary play made by Dion. Serving as the only male and African American in this study, he offered a unique and distinct perspective for which all participants were grateful.

Birth and Childhood

Dion was born in the large metropolitan city encompassing the Allied school district in 1979. He is native to the area and was raised by his mother, father, an uncle, and his two sisters. Dion spent his first seven years in the northeastern part of the city until safety concerns caused his family to move west to the suburbs. This area is where Dion considers his formal upbringing to have occurred. “Go Tigers!”

Growing up as one of two or three Black kids in his neighborhood, Dion’s participation in this study group, being the only male and African American participant, mirrored his educational experiences as a child. He attended predominantly White

schools where he had to adapt to “a different way of life.” This taught him “how to handle dealing with different people and different cultures.” Dion always liked school. During his entire K-12 experience, he missed a total of five days of school. “There was nothing to do at home so I always went to school. My sisters were going to school. They had joined the band so I would be the only person at home. I liked [school] so I went.” School and sports shaped Dion’s goals for his life:

My goal in life was not to be a teacher. My goal in life was to be a football player, like all of our students. I’ve always been around coaches. My dad was a coach for 35 years, so I was always around the football field and always at the football games and baseball games. He was the head baseball coach and I knew if football did not work out for me then I wanted to be a baseball player, and if I couldn’t be a baseball player then I wanted to be a coach, of either sport. I’m currently a football coach. My goal was not to teach but to coach, but in order to coach you have to teach, so that is how I came about the teaching profession.

Higher Educational Experience and Teacher Preparation

Dion attended a private, prestigious college in North Texas, where he majored in history and football. Predominantly White, like his high school, he was comfortable in the demographic environment of this university. He spent many grueling hours on and off the field, working to make himself a champion football player and student. Dion had many culturally pluralistic experiences during college. He said,

Throughout college, I learned how to deal with different people of different cultures and I had friends who were Middle Eastern, White, Black, African; I had friends of all different cultures and we had to work together on and off the football field.

On and off the field he continued to build relationships with others. Upon graduation from college, Dion went through an Alternative Certification Program (ACP) at a predominantly African American campus after getting his Masters in Educational Administration. This experience offered him a different set of challenges building relationships with others. Dion reverted back to the teambuilding skills he learned on the field.

Dion felt his Alternative Certification Program (ACP) prepared him well for special education, his emphasis area. The other aspects of teaching, such as the day to day operations and classroom management, he learned from hands-on experience and his two sisters that teach in Allied. “I have taken some of their ideas and combined my ideas and that is how I do it now.” Dion’s road to Allied came about very quickly after finishing his ACP. Dion received a call from the Eagle Middle School principal who offered him a “contract which paid.” Since signing on the bottom line of the contract, he has not looked back. Dion lives near Eagle Middle School, although in another school district, but does not see himself getting drafted to another team.

Teaching Experience

Dion’s presence does not go unnoticed by students or teachers at Eagle Middle School, and the experience he brings to the school is invaluable. He has taught special

education students for five years and his experiences range from serving as an inclusion co-teacher to teaching the Emotionally Disturbed (ED) class. Dion is also a football and basketball coach, slowly turning his coaching dreams into reality. Mr. James feels that his gender, culture and age play a role in student achievement, but it ultimately comes down to the relationships he establishes with his students. When asked how much these factors influence his students he said:

Gender helps it seems. I don't know, I can tell them something and they will do it, whereas they will go to another teacher and they don't listen to nothing she says. So maybe since I have majority boys maybe that is what they need to see or they are not getting it at home. I think age is really something that they can accept whereas you have some teachers who have been teaching for at least fifteen to thirty years and their teaching styles might be antiquated, whereas mine, I am teaching the same things but I have different methods, a different way of teaching. I can relate to some of the stuff they are going through.

Many faculty members turn to Dion to be their coach. Teachers seek help with how to better support and serve their special education students.

Staff Development Experience

A lifelong learner, Dion thinks staff development is very important for teachers. He thinks it is “helpful and encouraging at the district and school level.” He continues, You have to be a lifelong learner. You never can stop learning, so that is what you do in staff development. You learn how to do your job better. I am a proponent of staff development. As you see I have a whole bunch of hours that

I have to attend this summer, because I have no choice. It is stuff that the administrative team has recommended and told me to do and you have to do that. And it is only going to help me. Staff development is very important if you ask me, you can never stop learning. You have to be a lifelong learner.

Even if a staff development experience is miserable, Dion believes that you must take something away from it. Even if it is only one thing. His never quit attitude towards helping kids and being a lifelong learner was apparent throughout the study and helped others gain new insight into themselves and their roles as educators.

Participant Two – “Standing Tall”

Hardly five feet tall in heels, and often confused as a student, Standing Tall towers above many staff members in only her second year of teaching 7th grade math. Her personality is sizable, her expectations for her students are high and her passion for teaching immense. If looks and stereotypes were to tell her tale, you would think she was a pushover, but Standing Tall had much to contribute to the study and proved she stands high above the crowd.

Birth and Childhood

Born to Cuban parents, Standing Tall and her sister traveled the world because of her father’s work. Delivered in a hospital in California and raised for a short time there, this was one of Standing Tall’s many homes. She claims home to be various cities, suburbs and countries ranging from Florida to Texas and even Saudi Arabia. These worldly experiences place her one step above her colleagues when discussing culturally pluralistic experiences. Standing Tall’s elementary school experiences were located in

California, Florida and Saudi Arabia. She often moved mid-year during school. However, in middle school and high school she attended both public and private schools in a suburb near Allied. Standing Tall considers herself a Texan, possibly because everything is bigger and better here, but likes to say she is from California, just to be different. She remembers well her various schools during her childhood:

I started in Montessori school when I was little and they were very, very strict. Once I was put in the corner when I was two because I did not know how to tie my shoes. After that I did public school and I traveled a lot. Kindergarten through first grade were in Houston, second grade in Houston, California and Miami, and third and fourth grade in Saudi Arabia. Fifth was in Houston and I really enjoyed all of the traveling and even changing schools so much.

Traveling offered Standing Tall many opportunities to interact with people of other cultures. “Most friendships I made were positive which is probably why I liked traveling.” In Saudi Arabia her best friends were Egyptian, British, Lebanese, Peruvian and Greek. In Miami, she had many Hispanic (mostly Cuban) friends and in California had a diverse group of friends. “I remember when we moved to Houston actually, I had a crush on this boy who was Black.” She recalls Houston as being the first place where the African American population was noticeable. She grew up speaking Spanish and learned English when she began school. “I remember them sticking me in ESL and I was like ‘but I know English.’ It was pull-out ESL so it was not like I had all my classes in ESL.” It was clear she had an edge over others at an early age.

Higher Educational Experience and Teacher Preparation

College was Standing Tall's first time away from her parents. She attended a large, public university in Central Texas, where she majored in psychology. She was also a Resident Assistant (RA), which exposed her to a diverse population and numerous diversity trainings:

I was an RA in college and we do diversity training every semester. So every semester, like the two years I did PALS in High School, and the three years I did RA, I sat through every little diversity thing. Whenever they would throw some new information out, like whenever we went over learning the differences in the cultures of African Americans and Hispanics, that caught my attention, but whenever it is like the same thing over and over I just zone out.

After graduation, while avoiding graduate school and trying to stay on her parent's health insurance at the age of 22, Standing Tall took some math classes at a nearby community college and made some money working at an afterschool program at a local middle school. While doing this, she learned about an Alternative Certification Program (ACP) and decided to give teaching a try. Her intentions were not to work in Allied, but rather in a nearby district where she grew up. Fortunately for Allied, that district was only hiring special education teachers from this particular program and Standing Tall wanted to teach math:

It started out that I was totally burned out and didn't want to go to graduate school for psychology, but I was really into child psychology and I took a behavior class so I was kind of thinking about teaching for a while. Then

whenever I came back I needed to take some classes to stay on my parents' insurance and so I took some teaching classes and math classes at a local Junior College. I worked part time at a middle school at an afterschool program, and then through the classes at the college I learned about the ACP program and that is where it all started.

Standing Tall feels that she got good training for teaching her content, but was not prepared for all of the other classroom experiences. “I don’t think I was experienced nor prepared for the management of a classroom.”

I was actually pretty scared especially when I found out I was going to be working at Eagle Middle because when I was doing my training I saw the Eagle kids walking by; they were giant, they were so big, and I was really sheltered growing up. My family is paranoid and scared and I wasn’t afraid for my safety, I was just afraid about how much bigger they are than me and having control over them. I didn’t want to be making empty threats.

Although very familiar with multiculturalism, the fear of this new experience initially worried Standing Tall, but she quickly rose to the occasion, standing out as a stellar first-year teacher.

Teaching Experience

In her second year of teaching, at the time of the study, all of Standing Tall’s teaching experience has been in Allied I.S.D. and at Eagle Middle School. Her classes are made up of regular and special education students. In a school where race is noticeable and a constant topic of conversation among staff and students, Standing Tall

gets confused for being White, until she spouts off Spanish to her students or to a Hispanic parent on the phone. She never thought her culture was a “big deal” until she started teaching in Allied. When asked if being Hispanic affects the achievement of her students she said the following:

Yeah, I think it kind of motivates them a little more when they remember and when they relate to me. I mean I remember last year there was this one girl having issues with her dad being all over her because she had guy friends and I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, talk to me about it, it is like my life!’ And so relating on that kind of issues like immigration and getting jobs and trying to get an education ... so I think that's a plus. Even African American kids whenever they realize I am not White, they will even react differently even though I am not African American, they will still see me a little differently because I am not just a White lady.

It is clear that Standing Tall builds strong relationships with her students, and although literally shorter than them, she stands tall in their eyes. She describes her students as open and believes that their openness is positive when it comes to learning. She is passionate about teaching math and refuses to dumb down the material. Standing Tall works hard to explain math to her students at their levels. “I will break it down for them. I think that explaining it at their level is important but not making everything smaller numbers.” She also ensures that math is relevant by using real life examples and relevant experiences.

Overall her experiences as a teacher in Allied have been good. She admits that her first year she struggled with management, mostly with one class, and had little parent involvement. “This year, I called parents a lot more, some parents even called me.” After working at a private school in an after-school program, Standing Tall thinks the kids in Allied are more fun and more honest, and does not regret her decision to come to Eagle Middle School.

Staff Development Experience

When asked about staff development, Standing Tall said that “it is pretty useful but very drawn out.” She feels that most staff developments that can be covered in a couple of hours often take two days. “A lot of it I understand is repetitive because of the new teachers and reminding them of things, but it is very time consuming and it becomes very boring whenever it is the same information over and over.” She described an awful staff development experience she had last year where they reviewed the TEKS and were given basic information that “you would use in a perfect world. At first it was useful but now it is just boring and repetitive.” Standing Tall’s positive experience with staff development involved one session that addressed motivating kids and another one that was a book study. The presenters were engaging and humorous and she left with new knowledge and practical applications for her classroom.

Productive and enjoyable staff developments have helped her soar to success in her classroom, although some negative experiences stand out in her mind. Standing Tall began the TSG feeling shy and uncomfortable, but as the sessions accumulated she

began to speak up. For her, the TSG was both comfortable and enjoyable, thus her participation and enjoyment became more evident each session.

Participant Three – “Cajun”

Cajun, a 40 year old White female from Louisiana, brought the most teaching experience to the group. Her experiences growing up in Louisiana were often mentioned, and it became clear that her expectations and values were shaped by growing up in Louisiana. Cajun is also known throughout Eagle Middle School as the crawfish cooking queen. She boils up nearly 100 pounds of crawfish each spring at the annual family picnic. Combine her love of food and ability to spice up life with her strong Louisiana upbringing, and Cajun seemed an appropriate name. Growing up and playing sports in Louisiana, her experiences were “predominantly White or Black” but it never really fazed her. “I played with a lot of Black kids in high school, they were not the ones I went and hung out with after school, but they were people I associated with.” Teaching fourteen years at Eagle Middle, she has seen the school and community change, while many of her practices have continued to stay the same.

Birth and Childhood

Born and raised in a small town in Louisiana, Cajun moved to Texas fourteen years ago to begin her teaching career at Eagle Middle School. Growing up, Houma, Louisiana, a family oriented town of about 90,000 people, was “White or Black, there was really no in-between.” However Cajun notes that it too “has changed a whole lot since then.” There were four high schools, and one of them was a private Catholic school “which you had to pay a fortune to attend.” Cajun comes from a “medium sized”

family of five kids and grew up with a mother and father. “I was the baby that came along way later.”

Cajun attended an all White Catholic school until 7th grade when she chose to go to public school because she “wanted to be mixed with everyone else.” She loved school; she was athletic and the big jock on campus. “That's what I lived for, and that is what I did. I went to school and lived to play ball.” Spending her entire life playing sports, Cajun always knew she wanted to be a coach; “I just always knew deep down that I was going to grow up to be a P.E. teacher.” She attended a state college in Louisiana, where she received traditional educational training and then earned a Master’s Degree in Physical Education. “That’s what I loved and that’s what I wanted to do.”

Higher Educational Experience and Teacher Preparation

Cajun’s student teaching practicum occurred at a public high school in a college town comprised mostly of college kids, retired couples and large families, all within a few miles radius. It was not a big town and the population of the high school was mostly White. “There were a lot of Whites and few Hispanics or Asians,” Cajun said. Her student teaching prepared her for Eagle Middle, but that was fourteen years ago. She admitted to feeling prepared in the beginning, when there were more White children and the culture of the school was familiar. Many of her teaching experiences were similar to what she went through during student teaching. Nothing was too drastic for her and she was able to handle the situations that occurred. However in the year 2000, the Allied school district and Eagle Middle School began to change.

Teaching Experience

Cajun felt that her student teaching prepared her for Eagle Middle School when she began teaching in 1993. But when asked about her students today she said:

Well, I just find the kids aren't what they used to be. They are very apathetic, the parents aren't involved like they used to be and they don't care. Education just doesn't seem to be very important to them. You know athletics, we used to have 50-60 kids trying out per team and now we are having to take anybody who shows up with a physical. I think it is like that with a lot of clubs and organizations too. The kids aren't wanting to be involved. They have their focus on other things, the pregnancy rate and sexual activity.

Despite her opinions about the students at Eagle, Cajun does recognize that her students need her more than kids in some of the other districts do, and that is what keeps her in Allied.

Staff Development Experience

After many years of teaching, Cajun has weathered her fair share of staff developments. When asked about her thoughts on staff development, she stated, "I feel our district and school offer a wide variety of staff development classes that are useful to all." She appreciates that teachers are not forced to go to each and every staff development that is offered, but rather have some choice. Cajun admits that many of the staff development sessions at school are boring and repetitive and she wishes that the administration would differentiate those more. "You have to look for what it is you are wanting to do."

Cajun's worst staff development experience was one for PE coaches, that was geared towards elementary and not middle or high school coaches. She said that it did not pertain to what she would be doing in her classroom. "We got there and we were sitting there playing with the little sticks, and doing our little dancing and all types of things that we really don't do." The only reason she stayed was because her co-worker needed the hours and she did not want to abandon her. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Cajun recently attended a staff development session called CHAMPS that positively affected her. Although it was a one-shot workshop, the structure, content and delivery appealed to her.

It was broken in to different parts and scenarios of dealing with the types of kids I teach. It offered solutions towards different types of situations, ways to reinforce positive behavior and ways to re-direct off task behavior. Maybe I was just picking up more because that was the most recent and the most needed. Bettering herself as a teacher and improving her methods of meeting the needs of all students were what Cajun expected from the TSG. While many of her practices have stayed the same for fourteen years, the TSG and a previous staff development taken earlier in the year drastically changed Cajun's attitude and professional practices.

Participant Four – "Justice"

A native of the Allied community and schools, Justice's passion for the people of Allied is evident; it is no coincidence that she studied and majored in government. Her voice speaks for her disenfranchised students and their parents when they do not have an opportunity to do so. Her knowledge and comprehension of local and community

politics and policies better the school and its students. It is apparent she has earned the respect of her colleagues for this.

Birth and Childhood

Justice grew up in a mixed household in Allied, and lived in the same house her entire life until she moved away to college. A twenty-five year-old only child, her dad is White and from the Northeast, and her mom Mexican, from a middle class family in a small Texas town. Going to her maternal grandmother's house, Justice was exposed to another type of voice. "My great-grandmother would only speak Spanish, that was all she knew. There were cultural meals and everything and I always remember it being fun." Although growing up visiting Spanish speakers, Justice is not a fluent Spanish speaker but is in tune with the Hispanic culture.

Justice attended Allied public schools through high school, and then attended a large state university where she majored in government.

School was a positive place for Justice:

I don't remember much from elementary school, I used to go to summer school in elementary school, but I went to art and cooking classes, I didn't go for remediation purposes. I was a social butterfly, so we would have parent conferences about me talking all of the time.

Although attending predominantly all-White schools until eighth grade, Justice was introduced to a diverse mix of Asian, Hispanic, White, and African American students when she began high school. It was this exposure to cultural pluralism and the voices of her disenfranchised friends in this predominantly White community that shaped Justice's

thinking as a person and educator. Interactions with people different from herself whether in class or on the drill team continuously exposed her to the stories of others. She chose to embrace that diversity.

Higher Educational Experience and Teacher Preparation

Justice attended the largest state university in Texas and majored in government. She enjoyed her stay in central Texas but came home after graduation. Not in her original plan, Justice was drawn to teaching for several reasons:

I came home and was substituting and I found that I was very comfortable in the system and I was very comfortable in schools and it seemed like a natural progression if I could do something related to my area of interest which was government and history.

Knowing teaching would be the logical choice for a career, she enrolled in an Alternative Certification Program and decided to teach in Allied. Teaching in Allied was also a logical decision, since she was raised and attended schools here. It was also the first district that offered her a job. When asked about any multicultural training in her ACP program, she said that she received none, and it was hardly mentioned. Justice feels that she prepared herself more to teach in Allied than her program did, partly because she served as a substitute teacher prior to employment.

I do think my preparation was good, however, if you don't come in with some knowledge or prior experience, the preparation they give you is not helpful for our clientele. I was prepared for [Allied] but I had background experience here.

My growing up in [Allied] was not the same type of preparation I would have needed though.

Teaching Experience

At the age of 25, Justice has taught for three years. She capitalizes on the fact that she was brought up in the Allied school system in order to build relationships with her students:

I know when I try to use the fact that I grew up in [Allied], even though it was a different [Allied] they don't recognize that. They were not here then. So I try to pull up the fact that I grew up here and I know this and I know that, and that I am not a transplant here from another place. So I try to reach them more in their community, even though I know my background (Hispanic), they look at me and I am a White person.

Overall, Justice's teaching experiences have been positive. She used her first year as a learning year and most importantly recognized that when she was mad, it did not always have to do with her students. "You just get frustrated even more with yourself and it's not worth it." Justice uses many real world experiences to engage her students and aid them in understanding the content. "We may spend two days on a real world experience and then a day on the actual content, but since they know the experience, they can get the content." Part of this she learned through staff development.

Staff Development Experience

Passionate about her students and opinionated about issues affecting them, Justice also has strong opinions when it comes to staff development. “It does not apply to the needs of the school.” When asked to elaborate on that she offered the following:

We do not learn anything about who we are serving, school and district wide. I think there are some things on the district level, but I don’t think we actually look at the data of our population, and analyze the factors. We have some people at our school that try to point out certain populations, but then I think is that all we are going to do? We also need to look at the other populations that we are not serving and do something for them as well. We don’t serve everybody. We have M.O.V.E. which serves our African American male population, when however, the Hispanic population is greater and we do nothing to serve them.

Describing her worst staff development experience, Justice commented on a Sheltered Instruction in-service where she “read definitions from a book and copied them down.”

It was one day. We sat in the same seat all day with no movement. She would show us the definition, she would talk about the definition and we would write it down in our book. There was one opportunity where we talked about the word, but it was not structured. It was the only in-service offered for that topic and I wanted to vamp up or look for something for that class when I was teaching sheltered. It was the only one they had. It really disappointed me. It was the district person teaching it, the highest person was teaching it, and I thought that

was awful because they are supposed to be the guru and they had nothing. It said it was an advanced course and it seemed more like an intro course.

The most meaningful staff development Justice was a part of was History Alive Level One because she learned a program that was a totally student directed product and activity. What made it meaningful and effective was the structure of the in-service. “It was a four day workshop, you go through how to teach it, you experience the strategy as if you were the student and then you break down how the strategy is to be used in the classroom and how it can be used for different levels and different lessons.” Follow-up is offered in a part-two workshop and Allied has several coaches available. There is also a website where you can exchange information and chat with other teachers who have gone through the training. “They don’t disconnect you, you are always connected to the program.”

Never having participated in a teacher study group, Justice looked to expand her knowledge, clarify misconceptions, and learn useful techniques that she could apply in her classroom. She found that the TSG allowed for more group discussion and constructiveness when putting a comment out in the open. Justice gave and received applicable feedback and had the opportunity to advocate for the community, which was an opportunity never offered to her in previous staff development sessions.

Participant Five - “Inspiration”

Inspiration is from out-of state and secured her teaching position through a job with Teach for America. The diversity of Allied is not something she was used to, but it

took her no time to adjust and become a part of the Eagle Middle School family. Her dedication to the students is unquestionable as is the impact she has on her colleagues.

Birth and Childhood

Born and raised in a major Ohio city, Inspiration is a family girl. She comes from a large extended family; her dad, one of eight children from an established Ohio upper-class family and her mom from a small farming family in Northern Ohio.

Inspiration is the third of four children and grew up with a father, an educator for over 30 years, and a stay at home mother. She has always been close to her family and her relationships were always strong and solid:

When I went away to college I expected to talk to everyone in my family everyday or every other day. I still talk to my parents every day, not because I have to, but they are still a very large part of my life. I am also extremely close with my older sister. She is definitely my best friend and was throughout my entire life.

School was always important to Inspiration and it always “counted.” Stressed as important, Inspiration’s parents promised they would give her the best education that she could have. “Luckily, because my dad worked at a private school, my siblings and I were allowed to attend for free.” As a kindergartner, she attended an all-boys school where her dad was an administrator. “I remember really enjoying kindergarten even though I was the only girl. I was very sociable both with adults and children and loved to lead and participate in all the activities.” At the end of her kindergarten year a new headmaster was hired and announced that the school was going co-ed. “This

announcement had a huge impact on the way I would view my education and my privilege from that point on.” After the headmaster made this announcement, he approached Inspiration’s dad and told him that he wanted me to be the first girl to attend The Columbus Academy and that her dad should be excited about because it meant she would constantly be spotlighted throughout my schooling. Her parents disagreed with the headmaster’s decision because they had always planned on Inspiration attending an all girls school. That spring, Inspiration’s dad was demoted as a result of his refusing to send his girls to the school where he worked. Her parents were forced to pay tuition for the all girls school on a teacher’s salary; they held true to their wishes, despite the consequences.

Even though I was only a first grader, I understood what was going on and how much my family was sacrificing to make sure I got the best education. Because of that experience, I always valued my education and thought that education should be prioritized first after a child’s basic needs.

Inspiration, although young, started questioning decisions of others at an early age, and quickly learned the value of remaining true to herself, her knowledge and her beliefs. There would be little inconsistencies with her as she continued to grow and inspire.

Higher Educational Experience and Teacher Preparation

Inspiration attended a well respected Catholic University in Ohio and majored in pre-medicine and psychology. Not originally planning to teach, Inspiration was drawn to Teach for America, an organization where college graduates offer a two year

commitment to teach in some of America's most needy schools. She tells a telling tale of tutoring two students while in college and how this changed her career path:

My decision to apply came after a tutoring session with some local South Bend students. I was paired with two students who were sophomores and college bound. During this session, one of my first sessions, I learned just how much public schools were failing our kids. These two students were considered high performing in their school, both on honor roll and very hardworking. Both of these students had aspirations of going to college, a definite possibility I thought after our first meeting. They got good grades, they were hard working, but then during one of the first homework help sessions, they brought in a science assignment: a picture with different items in it like trees, rocks, water, a bike, and some animals. Their assignment was to identify items that were living and non-living. I said nothing and tried not to give any expression as they explained to me the assignment, but I thought to myself that this seemed like something that 1st grade students should be doing. As I pointed to the rock I asked, "Living or non-living?" [Andy] responded, "Living?" I was in shock. This was an A student in the 10th grade who had aspirations of going to college and he couldn't tell me whether a rock was living or not. At that point, I realized that it was not the students who weren't working, but the system that was cheating students all over America.

Inspiration's focus in college was pre-med, which prepared her for the science content aspect of her current position. However, she feels that she was not well prepared

to teach in Allied. She received good general teaching strategies and could effectively plan, but her training focused on elementary school children and not middle school, contributing to some of her problems with classroom management. Teach for America addressed multiculturalism in the classroom, during some of their training sessions. In them were open discussion about background and biases that people brought with them from their own lives. “In addition, there was also some group instruction that reviewed different scenarios that could arise in the school system and we practiced our responses and were debriefed on them.” While Inspiration was unaware of the diversity of Allied, the student population did not overwhelm her.

Teaching Experience

Not by choice, but with no regrets, all of Inspiration’s teaching experience has been at Eagle Middle School in the Allied school district. This was her second year teaching seventh grade science. She was the inclusion teacher, which means she co-taught special education students. Labeled the most difficult students in the school, Inspiration loves her children. According to her:

They are people who work hard and want to be successful in life. They are as caring as they know, they are as motivated as they know, but the one roadblock that I see many of my students face is that they do not understand the relationship between cause and effect. Students have a hard time seeing how following school rules will help them to be successful in their future jobs. Because they can’t see a direct connection they often disregard school rules which takes them on a path that does effect their future education. I don’t know if the disconnect

between cause and effect is a result of the students family backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, or a result of their age, but is the main roadblock I have faced when connecting with students.

Inspiration believes it is important that a teacher knows their subject matter inside and out because if they don't, planning and instruction are compromised. She knows it is necessary to chunk concepts. When instructing her students, Inspiration introduces the concept then allows the students to do something hands-on having to do with that concept. She teaches first, then has the students do an activity, then they talk about it and repeat an exercise. "Learning science has to be hands-on for a lot of the concepts, but also because a lot of my students are hands-on learners." She also believes that it is important for teachers to be able to build relationships with their students. "If you do not know how to effectively communicate with your students you will not have any investment in your classroom and students will not work for you."

Staff Development Experience

"I think that staff development is key, no matter how many years you have been teaching or what you teach," offers Inspiration. She has a very positive attitude towards staff development and is opinionated on the matter. "I think it is important for new teachers to learn from veterans and vice versa." Like many others in the TSG, she thinks it is important for individual teachers to acquire new ways to improve themselves as the leader in their classroom. However, she is critical of Allied's staff development offerings:

I think that often times the ‘type’ of students that we teach are ignored in professional development sessions. I do not think that our district should gear sessions to lower standards for our students because of their backgrounds, but instead it should give us techniques to meet our students where they are. Most of our professional development sessions completely disregard our students’ backgrounds. It’s as if we are teaching students from another district and not our own.

Unsurprisingly, Inspiration did not offer a tale of meaningful or successful staff developments from Allied, however she has been pleased with sessions offered from Teach for America. Specifically, she felt a staff development on differentiated instruction was beneficial because it offered lots of concrete examples of how to differentiate for students and why these ways were helpful to students. Inspiration did mention a trying staff development experience she had after she began teaching. “The facilitator kept pushing the same concepts on teachers. Also, it offered nothing new to any teachers that were veterans.” She was frustrated that the expert facilitator forced an outcome that could have been achieved in a more meaningful manner to the participants. They were also grouped according to subject matter and asked to break up TEKS according to Bloom’s taxonomy. The workshop entailed reviewing the words from Bloom’s and made them “organize the same TEKS that I had already organized about ten times throughout the school year.” She felt that the session “assumed that none of the teachers had ever taken the time to look at the TEKS in their subject matter.” Even

more frustrating than the workshop itself was the fact that Inspiration had to attend this same session three times.

Frustrated with the disregard for her students in Allied, Inspiration hoped to gain concrete and specific ideas from the TSG to help her deal with her students. She also wanted to find ways to build relationships and break any barriers between students and teachers. While she also wanted insight as to what other teachers are doing in their classes to be successful, she in turn proved to be solid and consistent, as well as the one who continuously inspired others with her knowledge and compassion.

Conclusion

While the biographical sketches tell you pertinent information about each participant, each participant continued to grow throughout the remainder of this study. However, prior to revealing the findings of this study, I feel it is important that you have a good overall picture of who each participant is as a person and an educator. Understanding who they are, where they come from and where they have been, helps the reader better connect their words to the themes they support. Pseudonyms were given to each participant, partly based on their biographical information but mostly derived from their personality and participation during the TSG. As the researcher, learning about the participants' lives and varied experiences better enabled me to look deeper into their words and allowed me more easily draw conclusions when analyzing the data.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The purpose of this study was to investigate urban middle school teachers' professional development experiences participating in a culturally responsive teaching TSG and examine their descriptions of their learning experiences of CRT content in a TSG. This chapter will discuss the findings from the following research question:

What are the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?

Three major themes from research question one evolved and are discussed in this chapter.

Emergent Themes from the TSG

TSGs encourage teachers to openly discuss various issues facing them in their classroom settings. In this TSG, participants were encouraged to talk about the readings, tell stories about themselves and their students, seek advice and answers from their colleagues, apply new techniques and learning, analyze their problems and successes and continually tackle any of their concerns. The participants decided upon "assignments" so they could gain more knowledge about themselves and their students and were asked questions to help guide and focus discussion. Observing the TSGs in addition to the surveys, interviews, field notes and participant journals allowed the researcher to collect an abundance of thick, descriptive data, enabling her to answer the first research

question about the experiences of urban middle school teachers who participated in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG).

In research question one three themes emerged from the data: changes in the participants' perception of staff development, the importance of building relationships with colleagues and an impact on instruction. Figure 5.1 provides a graphic organization of the overarching themes for research question one.

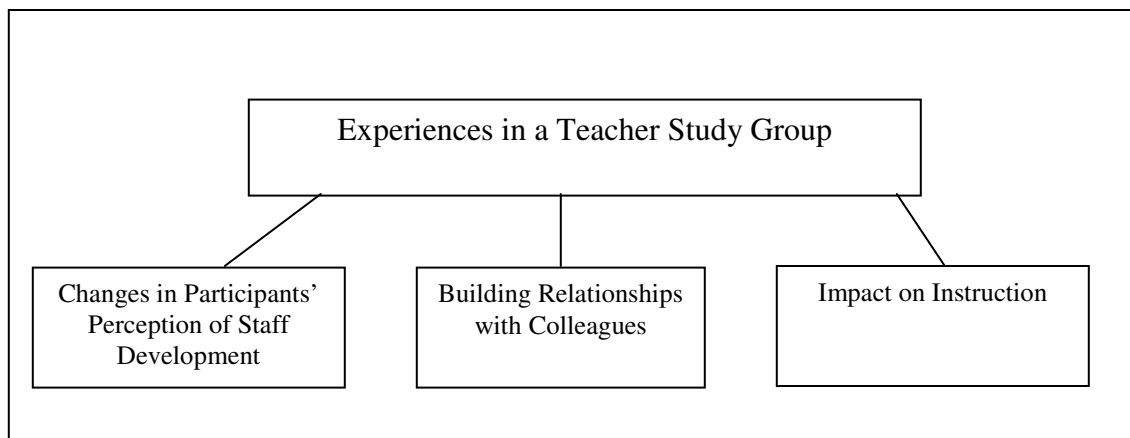


Figure 5.1: Emergent Themes from Experiences in a Teacher Study Group

Each theme also contained sub-themes that contributed to the further explanation of the TSG experiences. Theme I, changes in the participants' perception of staff development yielded findings on the expectations of participants, a positive experience and overall effectiveness of the TSG. It is graphically represented in Figure 5.2. Theme II, the importance of building relationships with colleagues was supported by two smaller themes, the presence of a safe and comfortable environment and discussion and storytelling. Figure 5.3 provides a graphic organization of Theme II. Finally Theme III,

the TSGs impact on instruction had three sub-themes, new strategies, changed expectations and rethinking grading and is graphically represented in Figure 5.4.

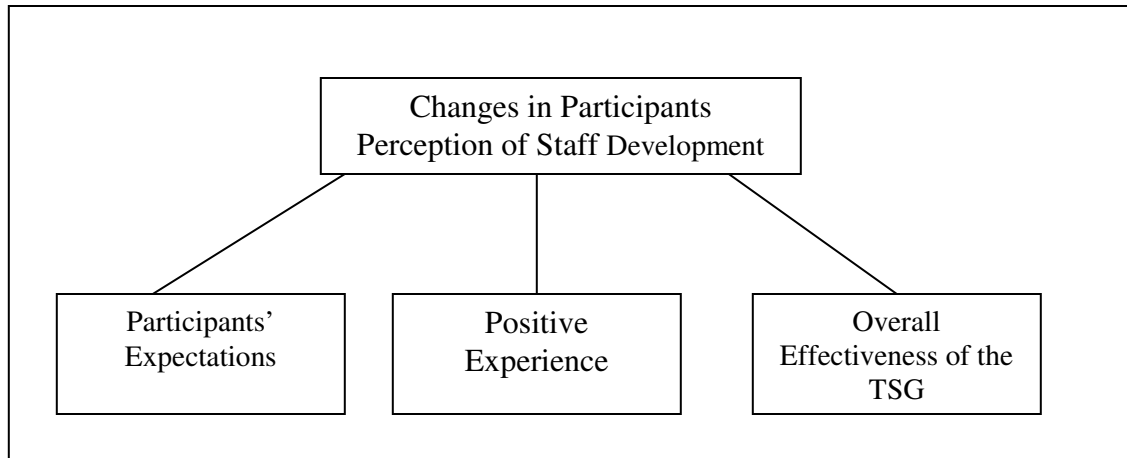


Figure 5.2: Theme I – Changes in Perception of Staff Development

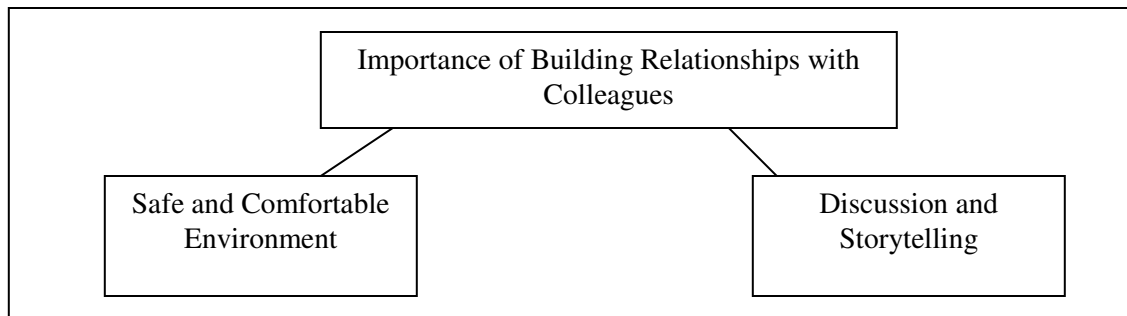


Figure 5.3: Theme II – Importance of Building Relationships with Colleagues

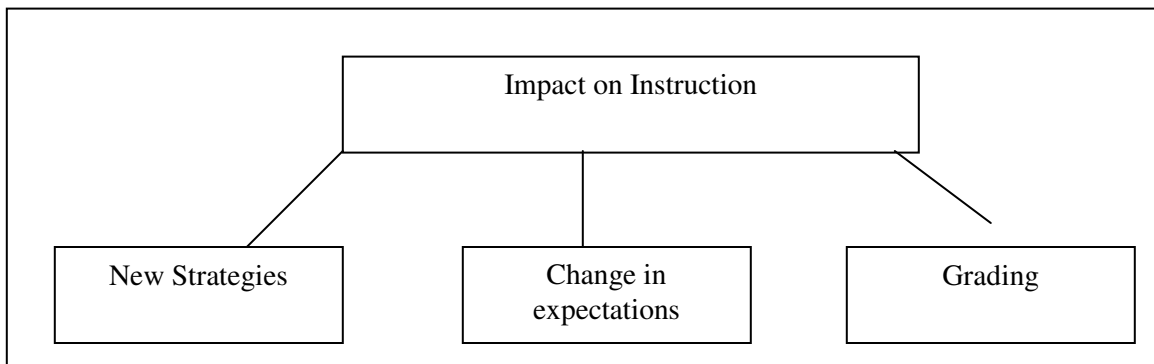


Figure 5.4: Theme III – Impact on Instruction

Theme I - Changes in Perception of Staff Development

None of the participants in this study had ever taken part in a TSG. Most were unfamiliar with the terminology prior to its commencement and some thought it would be similar to a book study. While TSGs have some similarities to both one shot workshops and book studies, they are a unique experience for educators to gain substantial knowledge and experience with a specific content. This type of staff development proved meaningful and was well liked by the participants. It also changed some of their perceptions about staff development.

Participant Expectations

The expectations of the TSG are important to this research, for few studies have actually captured the essence of the TSG design and participants' attitudes and feelings towards them. Treading into unfamiliar territory, the participants brought expectations with them into the TSG, which possibly affected the outcome of their experience. The norms of traditional methods of staff development are well established and familiar to

educators, so inquiring into their thoughts about a TSG helped the researcher identify ways that the TSG needed to be further explained or designed to help participants fully gain from this unfamiliar experience.

When asked about their original expectations for the TSG, most participants utilized their background knowledge of previous staff development sessions to formulate an answer. They responded that they anticipated small group discussions, story telling of experiences in the classroom and gaining some knowledge about the CRT content. It was clear that the definition and process of a TSG was new to all of the participants, but they agreed to participate anyway. Dion, Justice and Inspiration hoped to gain techniques to use in their classrooms, as they had or had not previously gained in other staff developments. For instance, in a one shot workshop, they expected to be taught something that they could take back and apply instantly. Three participants mentioned wanting concrete examples to take back to the classroom. The content of this TSG did shape the participants' expectations for this staff development experience; all of them wanted to expand their knowledge on the topic. Justice sought clarity for any misconceptions she had about her students. Standing Tall wanted to become more aware of different home situations and dealing with the diversity of her students. Cajun hoped to find new ways to better herself as a teacher by being able to meet the needs of all of her students. Inspiration also sought insight into what other teachers were doing in their classes to be successful.

While the participants' expectations varied, it helped that all were open minded about joining the TSG. None of the participants came into the group feeling like there

was a specific end product that they were “forced” to take with them. There was some obvious hesitation in the beginning of the TSG process (during the first two sessions) and the participants relied heavily on the facilitator to offer them information, but they quickly caught on to the design of a TSG (as described by Saavedra, 1996) and by the end of the study were fully participating.

Positive Experience

The overall response to a TSG as a form of staff development was very positive. Most participants noted similarities and differences between the TSG and prior staff developments they had attended, however none expressed dislike or dissatisfaction with the process or design of the TSG, as they did with other types of staff development. Standing Tall asserted that she preferred the TSG as opposed to traditional staff development. “I mostly find staff developments boring. But this one was both comfortable and I actually participated in it! So I thoroughly enjoyed it.” She also said it met her expectations and she was confident that she had learned from the experience and content. Inspiration also admitted that her perception was altered. “This is the first professional development that has actually forced me to think and come to my own conclusions on what to do to improve my classroom.” Justice adamantly stated that she preferred the TSG format of staff development. “I am more likely to remember and use the content of that session if I have the freedom to discuss and analyze things with my colleagues.”

The participants appreciated the opportunity to talk in depth about various situations involving their students and often left each session feeling validated as good

teachers. They consistently reported positive feedback for this type of staff development. According to Justice:

I prefer the TSG because it allows for a lot of group discussion, where you put a comment out there and it really gets bounced around and discussed. If it were a staff development session your comment would be not be judged or discussed, your presenter may say thank you and the session moves along without you having the opportunity to process your thought. When I participate in a TSG discussion I get feedback and applicable knowledge for my classroom.

Dion was excited about the opportunity to participate in another TSG. “I wouldn’t mind participating in another study group because they were very informational and beneficial for all, including myself. During the final session Dion was insistent that we have another TSG once the researcher finished this study. He felt, “we need stuff like this. And it doesn’t need to be just an hour and a half when we rotate and have staff development in the beginning of the school year.”

Overall Effectiveness of the TSG

The design of the staff development left a positive impression on the participants as did the content. Justice said it was, “different because it was discussion based with a result” and she felt as if the group had control over where they were going in their learning. Borko & Putnam (1995) insist that:

There is substantial evidence that professional development programs for experienced teachers *can* make a difference – that teachers who participate in these programs can, and often do, experience significant changes in their

professional knowledge base and instructional practices. When professional development programs create an environment that facilitates and supports teacher learning, and when they continue to support teachers in their endeavors to integrate new conceptions and instructional strategies into their ongoing educational programs, then teachers can expand and elaborate their professional knowledge base and can begin to teach fundamentally in different ways (pp. 60-61).

Based on the data from the participants in their interviews and during the TSG sessions, it is clear that the content and the format of the TSG fostered change in the professional practices of the participants. According to Inspiration, “this is the first professional development that has actually forced me to think and come to my own conclusions on what to do to improve my classroom.” Cajun declared that “it’s starting to make me more culturally aware, mostly seeing things differently, how my kids group themselves, how I am different or the things I need to do differently based upon culture.” Dion was the biggest proponent of continuing the study group into the next school year.

Upon completion of the TSG all participants agreed that they liked and learned from it, although for different reasons. Cajun enjoyed the conversations:

I have liked the conversations with the other teachers and bringing ideas to the light and seeing how we do things, so it’s opened my eyes up to a lot of stuff there, so I think I will be more culturally aware of kids in my class now.

Standing Tall also noted the conversation:

I really like the back and forth, nothing that was out of the blue would come up, it was all stemming off and branching off from each others ideas. I am bad about remembering specific examples, but I recall the feelings.

Dion acknowledged, “I think we should have another one, I will continue to be in the study if you want me to. It is interesting and new and I have learned from it.” Justice stated that, “I liked it, I enjoyed it, and I think it will make me better.” A few of the participants felt that this type of staff development and this content needed to continue and be taken further. “I think that we should do it more, this should be something that is not just once, you should get your research and doctorate first, and this should be something that is offered in the summer.”

Theme II –Importance of Building Relationships with Colleagues

Building relationships was a prominent theme throughout the study. All of the participants agreed that building relationships is a key part of being a culturally responsive teacher; however, the importance of building relationships with one another was also a key component of the TSG. Prior to the commencement of this study, all of the participants knew each other, but the extent of the relationships varied from participant to participant.

The participants noted that relationships with one another were not readily established before the study commenced. Dion said,

I don’t get a chance to move around. I am back there in the hole ... a lot of teachers are far away and I do not get to see them teach or talk about some of the things they go through.

He also commented that relationships were built through the TSG because “some teachers don’t say more than two or three words and they said more than that in the meetings.” This enabled him to better know his colleagues and their daily routines and experiences; “I teach their students in my class, and I see what they have to deal with and some of that stuff we are going through in my class.” Standing Tall said that she was uncomfortable in the beginning, but once she got comfortable with the group, she did not hesitate to participate. Part of the enjoyment of the TSG for Standing Tall was that she did not speak to the other participants much at school. With seven periods and a short planning time, there is little time to see and talk to other staff members. Most of the interviews confirmed that once the participants grew comfortable with the format and each other, they positively gained from the TSG experience.

Both professional and personal relationships were fostered by the end of the study because of the comfortable and safe climate that was established in the beginning. Once participants felt safe, they began to express themselves through storytelling and discussion. Those parts were instrumental in the overarching theme of building relationships. Not an original expectation for the TSG, most participants were pleased with the new relationships developed with their colleagues because of the TSG.

Safe and Comfortable Environment

Establishing norms and remaining professional also contributed to the creation and maintenance of a safe environment. The norms that were established for this TSG were taken from the CHAMPS model, a part of Randy Sprick’s and others (1998) Safe and Civil Schools program. The following norms were decided upon by the group:

Conversation – professional, on topic and open discussion

Help – refer to text, ask each other

Activity – discussion and outside assignments

Movement – get up and take care of yourself, move freely, stop for a collective break if needed

Participation – everyone needs to talk, be on time and prepared with something to share and write in reflective journals once a week

CHAMPS is a model that Eagle Middle School teachers are expected to use in their classrooms, so all of the participants were familiar with it. The relationships between the participants would not have been positive if the environment had not been safe. Once people felt safe they opened up and shared information knowing that others could have judged them. Standing Tall said, “I was more comfortable after I was not apprehensive about what I was going to say; I liked the TSG as soon as I felt comfortable.” Once the participants established a safe and trusting rapport, the conversation became more open and at ease and the learning from one another was immense.

In the first two sessions there was a dependence on the facilitator to lead rather than facilitate. The participants looked to her as the expert. In the beginning of the study the facilitator made it clear she was there to serve as a guide and to facilitate their discussion. However, during the first session she had to work hard posing questions and scenarios and offering ideas about topics to get the group talking. The majority of the participants held back and did not contribute a lot to the first session. My initial thought

was that the participants were expecting the facilitator to serve as the expert, as in their previous staff development experiences. This was confirmed in my interview with Cajun. I asked her about her apprehension to participate during the first session. She admitted that she was hesitant because she wanted to have the right answers although she didn't read and what she did read, she did not understand. One thing I feel held her back was her worry about the study itself, rather than the actual participation in the TSG. She told me:

I think we kind of wanted to find out exactly what you were wanting us to do, so to start and it not be at all what you were looking for, I think we were kind of waiting for something to be put for us to do and told where to go.

Eventually the meetings became easier for her as she grew more comfortable with the other participants.

Judgment from peers and evaluators is often what causes teachers to remain silent at school. If the facilitator and participants would not have worked to maintain a safe place, and respect each other professionally, specific comments and opinions about race and culture might not have been shared, thus possibly adversely affecting the outcome of the research. The following two examples offer the reader insight into the comfort level participants had when sharing during the TSG. Both excerpts could be considered touchy subjects, but neither participant hesitated to share. Dion, during a discussion, spoke about how time is viewed by some cultures:

Our concept of time is different than theirs. They're not in a rush necessarily to do anything so like you said about the open house when you talk about that, we

have all of these different cultures and some of the people might come in at like 8:00 and it ends at 8:15 but at least they made it.

Cajun shared some of her struggles she had with teaching during the year; defeat is difficult for anyone to admit:

My classes this semester are really, really good compared to what I had last semester, which was my first time ever in the classroom. My classes were almost twice the size that they are now, my grades were a whole lot lower and my kids were a whole lot worse. I did a lot of yelling and screaming and thought I would end up on the news with my 6th period class. A lot of time they knew what would push me to my limit and they got a kick out of it whereas I came in with a whole new attitude with the CHAMPS training and all that. This time, I have not yelled once this semester, I think I have a much better relationship with my kids; I just calmly say something to them to get them back on track and I just feel that the overall relationship I have built with the kids is much better. I don't have to do the yelling and screaming and carrying on like a crazy person. And the grades have definitely shown that, the grades have drastically improved from last time.

Standing Tall said, compared to other types of staff development, she preferred the TSG “because we all knew each other and it was a comfortable setting to converse in.” She also said,

I think that even though that I don't hang out with everyone that was in the group on a regular basis, we worked together and saw each other everyday, so it was

comfortable and we pretty much knew each other's attitudes on things which made it comfortable.

Keeping the conversation honest seemed to help everyone progress and respect their colleagues even more, which in turn allowed for the success of sharing ideas and resources, because the participants valued what each other said. Evidence of building relationships came in different forms. The most obvious means in which relationships were established was through storytelling and discussion.

Storytelling and Discussion

Part of what makes a TSG unique is the discussion for teachers, by teachers. In this TSG, some of the best discussion occurred as a result of a story that was shared by a participant. It took some time for the participants to stop relying on guidance from the facilitator, but once they grew comfortable with the process, the participants, for the most part, guided the sessions with their discussions.

Standing Tall originally expected discussion and “figured that we would bounce off of each other, scaffold discussion, and that I would gain some knowledge.” However, she forgot about the sessions being tape recorded for the purpose of the research, thus admitting her hesitation to speak in the first session. Ironically, Standing Tall disliked the first session because everyone seemed so quiet. Justice felt like her ideas and feelings were validated through the discussion in the TSG; “I thought it was good, to be able to vent and to see that I was not crazy about things. The TSG was different because it was discussion based with a result.” Inspiration said that this staff development was very different from any other in which she had participated.

Every other staff development has had one person leading the session already anticipating what they want the outcome of the development to be. In other words, in other staff developments most teachers are forced to come to the same opinion or belief at the end of the development, whether they truly feel that way or not.

Dion felt he learned by listening to the discussion and from the ideas of others:

Knowledge is out there and no one person holds all of the knowledge. When they say what they want to say and it sounds interesting, then if it is applicable to my class, I can use it. I have heard so many different opinions.

Allotting for discussion during staff development allows participants to form their own opinions, receive information on the content that is important and relevant to them. This engagement will motivate the participants to apply the information to their professional practices.

A few of the participants commented on some of the discussions that stayed with them - even after the conclusion of the TSG. At the completion of the study Justice had this to say:

What I can't get out of my head is that failure ratio we talked about, especially the whole school failure ratio and what statistics say about a child that fails once and what their possibilities of graduating are versus a child that fails twice. There is almost a slim chance they actually will graduate.

Dion also mentioned a discussion that he still values and fully recalls:

I remember this teacher over here saying she didn't lower her expectations and that really got me thinking. You don't necessarily want to lower your expectations but you have to adjust them to your student body. That was right here, it was not a heated but an intense debate. I remember it still.

Without the opportunity for discussion and storytelling, valuable information is lost during staff development. The TSG format offered the participants a chance to share what was on their minds, and it impacted all of them in a positive manner. Sharing these stories also allowed the participants to build new friendships and professional relationships with one another that did not exist prior to the study.

Another form of discussion was joking with one another. There were a few times when participants were sharing stories and Cajun would make a joking comment. The group responded with lots of laughter. For instance, Justice was sharing her experience from the "homework assignment" of getting to know new things about students and speaking to students she did not talk with much:

Justice shared:

Then the students that are my students said, 'Miss, I have to come to your class, leave me alone right now,' so that was okay because they were responsive to my saying sit down two to a seat. So that was kind of good because they were not as hostile to me. But I found out three things that I didn't know, but I don't know if that made our relationship better or not. One of them left my class, so who knows?

Cajun responded, "That is because you talked to them" and everyone laughed.

All participants felt comfortable enough to laugh and tease one another to make the meetings more humorous and comfortable. Another instance in which humor was used was when the facilitator was talking about instilling relationships with students:

During a practice test or whatever the teacher came out in the hallway and was throwing a FIT about how awful this child was being in their class and he was bouncing off the walls and being inappropriate so I went up to him and I happened to know that he liked baseball and I was going to the Astros game that night and I said, 'Listen, you can just shut your mouth and sit down and just do what she asks you to do for this time that you are in here then tomorrow I will bring you something from my trip to the Astros game.' 'OK, OK, OK' and he was so good for the rest of the time and he behaved but it was one of those things that wouldn't have been something I pulled out if I did not already have a relationship with him.

Cajun asked if she brought him a peanut and the group laughed. The ability to laugh with each other and at oneself demonstrated the comfort and safety level the participants had during the TSG. They got to know enough about each other personally and professionally and made a professional time enjoyable.

Theme III - Impact on Instruction

Besides offering knowledge, traditional staff development often gives participants concrete items to take with them upon their departure. Lesson plans, examples of activities and handouts are three common things participants of traditional sessions take back to work with them. However, in the TSG, the teachers were forced to

use their new knowledge and apply it in their classrooms or within their instruction. Therefore, the impact on instruction from this TSG differed greatly from traditional one-shot workshops in which participants had previously participated. From this experience three sub-themes that emerged in this data was changes in expectations and rethinking grading practices.

New Strategies

Although the participants left with newfound knowledge after each TSG session, they did not always leave with something that was concrete; they took various strategies, ideas and exercises along with their new knowledge. Dion stated, “The knowledge is out there and no one person holds all of the knowledge. When the other teachers said something, and it sounded interesting and applicable to my class, then I can use it.” Most of the participants felt it was helpful to hear other teachers’ responses to scenarios in their classrooms and opinions about educational strategy, structure, and bureaucracy.

Like other participants, Inspiration originally worried that this discussion group would simply be a discussion of the problems in people’s classrooms. However, because of their resources (books and each other) she felt the group was able to make progress and help one another develop as teachers. What Inspiration liked most about the TSG that she did not originally expect was that she left each session with at least one concrete strategy to try in her classroom. She offered:

I also liked the TSG more than traditional professional developments because we were able to take the development in the direction that we believed to be most

beneficial for the group. In other words, we were not limited by a set agenda and were not expected to all come to the same conclusion at the end of the session.

Sometimes assignments were decided upon in the TSG and the learning experiences from them were taken back to the classroom. In one session the assignment was to dress professionally and examine the response of the students' behavior. During one TSG session, grades and high expectations for students at Eagle Middle School was the major topic of discussion which caused a shift in thinking about expectations of students.

Changed Expectations

One TSG session was intense and caused a great deal of participant reflection. Inspiration asked if the participants felt they change their expectations for their students since they are so aware of the various hardships most of the Eagle students face, and if that was doing them a disservice. Inspiration put forth the following:

I know just because of the nature of the school it comes up a lot, but I was thinking about this as I was reading through it they were talking about including community and stuff. Obviously I work with great teachers that get really close to the kids, but I think that sometimes why these schools become, I mean it's the nature of like kids backgrounds that they can come in starting lower, but I think a lot of times with kids you need that stability at school. We spend a lot of time providing that and sometimes because you get to know a kid so well in this kind of setting, and I know that sometimes I have lowered my expectations, I know the kid and her situation or his situation and I'll just well, here she is going through this and this and this, outside of the classroom but at home and so why

not give them a break? And I think that something like that here in our school you would rarely ever see in a [Tigerville] school which you don't have the feeling that you are needed as much. But you can always count on the fact that you're giving the kid the most rigorous education where as here I have dropped my expectations not all the time but on a case by case basis. For example, just think about teaching if you went to another school at say the same grade level. Do you think you would be doing the same activities in your class and have it set up the same way? Like at the same rigor, I guess not the same, we do things different according to who our kids are. Are you teaching at the same level that you would be if you were in [Tigerville]? Would you be teaching higher level stuff there?

The responses varied, and even changed as the participants reflected on their practices and sorted out their true thoughts and feelings. Justice believed the expectation would be based on your content and Standing Tall thought it would depend on the background knowledge of the students. When posed differently by the facilitator some participants admitted lowering their expectations with their students.

The facilitator asked, "if you are in a more affluent school would you expect the same quality in work that you accept here?" She also wondered if the participants had thought about the fairness to the kids of teachers accepting mediocrity just because they have more baggage than other students. Dion said he did not take the circumstances into consideration when it came to the overall delivery of teaching what had to be taught.

Dion added, “You have to teach what you have to teach and they have to pass that test. I’m not saying you have to lower your standards, but as opposed to 20 problems you may give 11 problems.” This prompted more discussion about grading, modifications and expectations. The question of extra credit was also brought up.

Changes in Grading Practices

In one TSG session, the facilitator printed grades and asked the participants to reflect on their grades. They had a discussion about grading practices and then they were asked to reflect upon their grades again and see if they could make any connections or possibly offer a solution to raising achievement with their knowledge of CRT.

Cajun mentioned that “the kids that do the extra credit work are the ones that have the highest grades in your class. The ones that really need it aren't the ones turning it in.” This triggered something in Inspiration. She replied:

But why is it that you have to give extra credit here instead of giving homework?

Why can't we give homework? If you went to another school district they would give it at their middle school. At my middle school, like Standing Tall said, we had homework every night so why here can't we?

Standing Tall offered a possible explanation, demonstrating some understanding of CRT:

Their home life isn't always centered around school. You know how you were saying working maybe in the Hispanic culture is more important than school.

Some kids may go home and do chores, help out around the house and with their sister.

Inspiration concluded, “but then are you lowering your expectations if you say that - that you understand their culture so you are not going to give them homework.”

The participants continued to reflect on the dialogue. In their minds they were upholding high expectations for their students, and taking their situations into account in order to meet their needs. No one wanted to admit they did not hold their students to high expectations, however, when placed into different contextual situations, participants began to see how their actions may not be in the best interest of the child, even if they were acting culturally responsively in their minds. Standing Tall shared:

In math we grade a lot on the effort. Whenever I do assign homework, if you bring it back, I just say you did it, because if you don't have all the resources at your fingertips, then I'm not going to grade you specifically on your answer. I'm going to look at the work, I'm going to look at the concept and if they understood it. I look a lot at if you are trying. Especially in math you have a lot of kids that say they don't get it, and you know that as much as they are hurting they don't deserve a 67 just because they can't grasp math because they are trying so hard.

This stirred discussion about passing students when they are close to a 70. Is it the right thing to do or does it hurt the student. Cajun said if a child tries hard and is working to their potential she tends to pass them, but if they do not try she gives them the grade they earned. Inspiration said she gives her kids as many opportunities as possible to be successful, especially because they are in inclusion and “a lot of them have this feeling that they are not good at it and they are not smart so I give them opportunities to do

corrections and stuff like that.” The facilitator joined in and this seemed to turn the thinking about passing students:

The thing is, when you guys do that, as much as you are wanting to help in the short term, because she is really sweet and whatever the case may be, but now I have no grounds to try to find any interventions for that particular student because everything says she's passing. So, if I try to take this to any kind of a committee or if I try to start paperwork to maybe look at testing or to provide a staff process with some intervention, I can't. My hands are tied. Because if you pass them, you are saying that they are capable. It is a double edged sword. Yeah, you're helping; yeah, she's sweet and now she can play basketball and that might keep her in school but she doesn't know anything and now she is going to have to pass the TAKS test in 8th grade.

The participants were in agreement that if a kid fails the TAKS then they would feel like they got cheated because of being passed. All of them began to rethink their grading practices as well as how to hold their students, with lots of issues to higher expectations.

This discussion was thought provoking and instigated much contemplation about the participants' professional practices and attitudes. Although they did not leave the session with a pre-made lesson plan, the reflection they would have to do after this session could cause a major shift in their thinking and actions. While lesson plans, activities and handouts are great resources to take back from a staff development session, the TSG offered much more than that. Offering specific content on CRT, and allowing the participant the opportunity to discuss and apply their learning over a longer

period of time, proved to be an effective delivery of information. Internalizing the information and processing it allowed the participants to alter instructional practices and beliefs. Without the intensity and focus that the TSG offered, the researcher concludes that the participants would not have gained as much knowledge and meaning about CRT had this been an ordinary staff development session.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

This chapter examines the second research question of the study:

How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

Two major themes evolved from this research question. There are two components to CRT as described by the participants: professional and personal development. Within each theme there are sub-themes that support the over-arching themes. A discussion of these results ensues.

Participant's Learning Experiences of CRT

The second research question was designed so the researcher could report descriptions of each participant's learning experiences of CRT content while participating in a TSG. In order to capture any change in thinking about CRT, the researcher asked: How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

The researcher used the data from the TSG sessions and interviews to report the participants' understanding of the culturally responsive teaching content. After much re-reading of the transcriptions and sorting and shuffling of the data, the researcher performed one final shuffle of the data. Focusing specifically on the participants' words, describing their learning, the researcher was able to determine the emergent themes on the learning experiences of CRT in a TSG. The two major themes that emerged were in regards to the role of a teacher: personal development and professional development.

Figure 6.1 is a graphic representation of emergent themes from research question two. Figure 6.2 illustrates Theme I – Personal Development and Figure 6.3 is a graphic organizer of Theme II – Professional Development.

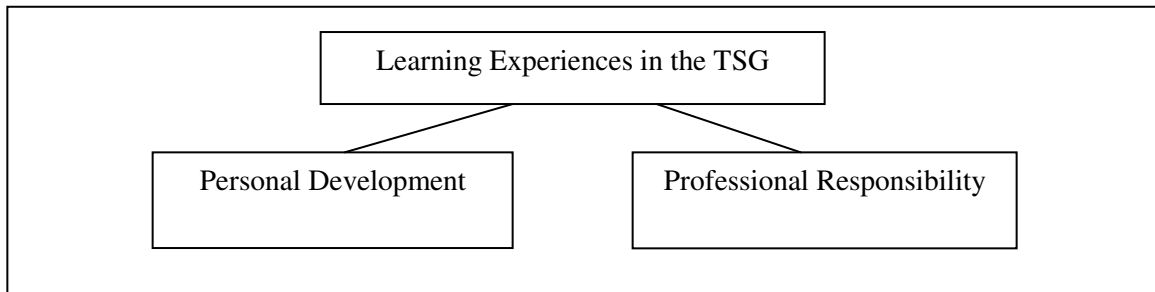


Figure 6.1: Emergent Themes on Learning Experiences on CRT in a TSG

Each theme had underlying themes that supported the ideas of personal and professional development.

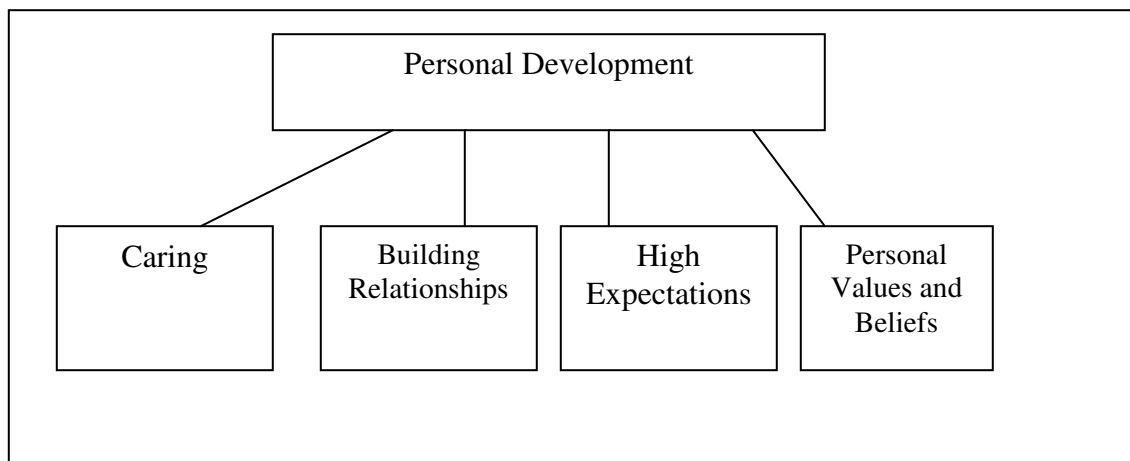


Figure 6.2: Theme I – Personal Development

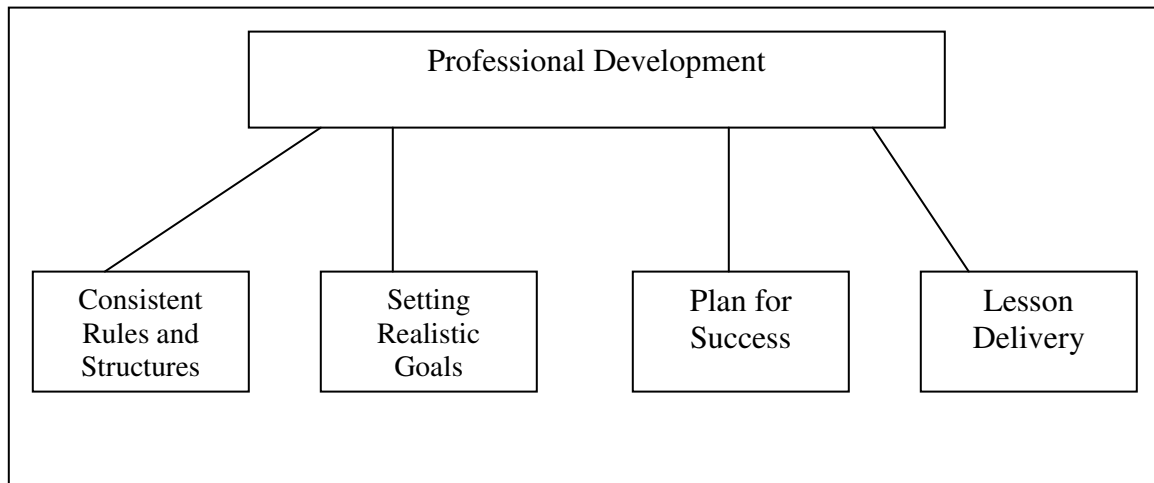


Figure 6.3: Theme II – Professional Development

Theme I – Personal Development

Personal development is an integral component of the CRT content. Caring for students, building relationships, holding students to high expectations and reflecting on your personal and professional values and beliefs is time consuming and difficult. None of these four components are necessarily achieved easily and do not come without some head and heart ache. However, when a teacher puts time aside to value and develop these four characteristics, they increase their ability to become culturally responsive. A culturally responsive teacher is more apt to reach a CLD student and help them achieve success.

Caring

Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings both cite caring as a key pillar of culturally responsive teaching. This tenet also proved to be a critical component in this study. Gay (2000) states that CRT promotes an ethic of caring, while Ladson-Billings

(1994) suggests culturally responsive teachers create a caring classroom community. Caring was displayed in various capacities by the participants, thus supporting the idea of caring as a key component of culturally responsive teaching. Caring is critical when dealing with students and an integral component of a teacher's responsibility to self.

All of the participants stated that they cared about and for their students. Observations of their words and actions during this study upheld those statements. Yet, caring is very situational; it can look different depending on the situation. During one session the facilitator posed the following question about caring: "Is there a certain way to do it? Because I don't think that you would find anybody here that thinks they don't care, so is there a certain way to show them? What do you do?" Based on this study, caring cannot be summed up in one definition or with a simple, single action or gesture. Caring is unique to the situation at hand and is sometimes even shaped and effected by the culture and gender of the teachers and students.

Dion insisted that caring had to be real and genuine and could not be fake, but describing what that looked like was an impossible task. The participants offered many examples of caring, each different from the others. Standing Tall shared:

The way I care is to explain the why behind the fussing. Why do you think I have to write you up right now? Why do you think I need to call home? Making eye contact with them sometimes when you are talking to them in the hallway trying to figure out what is going on they won't look at you because I think they are afraid of caring.

The participants shared many pieces of their learning with each other and the implications were important. Dion spoke about having a heart. “Sometimes I ask them what’s wrong, and often they will tell me, and from there we try to correct it then they are good the rest of the day.” Inquiring about students is an act of caring that can make a tremendous impact on the child. It can literally make or break the child’s day.

Inspiration shared that she had to be cognizant when she was frazzled or having a bad day. She realized that if she ignored her students due to her own personal problems it negatively affected them. She maintained that even at her worst, she just had to notice what was going on with her students. Standing Tall believed that caring meant treating the students like real people. All of these examples are ways teachers can care about their students, which in turn will positively affect them both socially and academically.

Dion maintained, “Caring is important. You have to care for your students. You can’t care too much.” The facilitator also added, “part of caring about kids is holding them to a high enough standard that they are going to achieve so that they can maybe overcome whatever situation they might be in.” Being that caring was deemed situational and altered due to circumstances, it is critical to address the importance of building relationships in order to be able to care about students.

Building Relationships

Caring is a prominent characteristic of CRT as stated by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Gay (2000). In order to care about students, one would assume that a relationship is built with each individual. A prominent theme that emerged during this study and was central to participants acting as culturally responsive teachers was building relationships

with students. The Allied school district advocates meaningful relationships with students, and offers various opportunities for teachers to learn more about the importance of building relationships and how to build them. The Allied school district and Eagle Middle School place a heavy emphasis on building relationships with students. This could have contributed to the reason why it was important to the participants, however it is clear that building relationships with students is a key to being culturally responsive.

Building relationships with students can come in many forms, similar to caring. Ultimately the importance in the relationship is knowing about the child and how to best meet their academic needs. Teachers can inquire about many things in students' lives that can make a difference in how to reach them: culture, religion, values and beliefs, home lives, interests and academic skills. Knowing this pertinent information can make or break a relationship with a student. According to Dion, "When you know your students, they know you have their best interest in mind." Standing Tall shared an example of why it is so important to know your students:

Just being aware of people's differences is important. You can't treat every kid the same. There are different ways to handle different situations and being aware is most important. For example, you might not know someone's family background and you might one day do a Mother's Day card as a project and one kid decides not to do this Mother's Day card so you flip out write him up and maybe it is because their mom just passed away or their mom is in jail. You have to be aware and can't just assume that they are being a behavior problem.

Ask them why they are acting up and then if they don't have a legitimate reason or don't want to answer you need to have an alternative.

At the end of the third session, the group decided to participate in two "homework assignments" before they met again. One, inspired by one of the readings, was to dress more professionally and look for a change in student behavior. The other assignment was to learn something new about three students the participants had little relationship with. During the next session, half of the discussion was consumed with stories about the teachers building relationships with new students, and the effects this had in and out of the classroom.

It was obvious relationships were already established between many of the students and their teachers. When Dion spoke about his experiences dressing up, although he did not like the outcome, the reaction of the students demonstrate their comfort level with him:

Me, I took the advice of the group and dressed up my jeans, and I had people try to challenge me. No other day would they try to challenge me, so I guess they are used to seeing people they are used to in that kind of clothing. I think it had an adverse affect, I had people challenge me, I said just because I have these penny loafers on does not mean I can't get with you, and they try to be funny and crack jokes because they have never seen me wear those, so, they were trying to challenge me and I didn't like it.

The fact that Dion's students were open and honest with him about their surprise in his appearance, as well as made jokes about him, suggests an environment where the students are comfortable with the teacher. They knew how far they could push.

The other "homework assignment" was to greet more students in the hallway and find out something new about three students. From this experience the participants learned that even a simple gesture in attempting to initiate a relationship has a monumental effect on the students and their behavior. This allowed the researcher to draw the conclusion that eventually academics will be positively affected by this relationship. Justice talked about her experiences at her morning duty. She mentioned that the first two days went pretty well, but observed that some students just don't like to be spoken to in the mornings, and often do not like it if they do not know who you are. Some of Justice's students told her "Miss I have to come to your class, leave me alone right now." Justice laughed it off and said that it was okay because although they said that, they tended to be more compliant with her directives after she initiated conversation. Standing Tall mentioned that she noticed that many of the students participated more if you made an effort to talk to them. And Cajun offered her experiences:

Well what I have found doing the CHAMPS stuff this semester and greeting them in the hallways and this and that and just knowing a lot more about them, I am having a lot more response in class too. Whether they are volunteering reading and or going through a chapter they are fighting to get to do things

whereas before I just had kids who wanted to sit there and not do anything. I think the relationship you build causes them to participate a lot more.

While this certain “assignment” instigated conversation about the effects of building relationships and allowed the participants to share specific experiences, comments about the importance of relationships were also revealed in the interviews. When asked about the one thing she took from the TSG experience, Justice said, “Just to go slow, listen to the kids and remind myself to think about where this child is coming from, what is going on with this child, who he is and what does he know from home.” This is a prime example of how important it is for teachers to know their students. A culturally responsive teacher takes the issues and situations facing their children into consideration when dealing with them in the classroom, both socially and academically.

Standing Tall used her culture to help build relationships with the Hispanic students, the majority population at Eagle Middle School:

I think it kind of motivates them a little more when they remember and when they relate to me. I mean, I remember last year there was this one girl having issues with her dad being all over her because she had her guy friends and I was “Oh my gosh, talk to me about it, it is like my life!” And so just relating on that kind of issue or like immigrants coming in, I am not an immigrant but my family is and just relating to them getting started and trying to get a job, trying to get an education, so I think that's a plus. Even African American kids whenever they realize I am not White they will even react differently even though I am not

African American they will still see me a little differently because I am not just a White lady.

While Standing Tall utilized her culture to help build relationships, Dion often relied on his gender, as well as his position as a coach to strengthen his relationships. He strongly believed that children would work harder and perform for teachers they trusted and felt cared for them:

As a teacher you have to have a rapport, a relationship with the students. If you have that rapport it doesn't matter how old you are. You have a good relationship and they know that you have the best in mind for them and it's about business. The whole business is about you learning how to read, in my case how to read and write.

Building a relationship with students is crucial to being a culturally responsive teacher. Once that relationship is established, students notice that you are more than a teacher. They know that you care about them and value where they are coming from.

Having High Expectations for Students

Another common characteristic that emerged from the data was having high expectations for students. The participants discussed this topic in every TSG session. Each participant believed they were holding students to a high standard, but with further discussion the participants realized they were not on the same page in regard to expectations for grading and achievement. Dion offered the following about having high expectations for students:

I think it all goes back to your expectations. You want to treat all children fairly but you can't treat everyone the same because they come with different circumstances and different things. But if you lay out your expectations to everybody as a whole at the beginning, and you keep on them and be consistent with them, then they are going to figure out that it is one way or the other. My students know my rules, my procedures and they are not going to change. They have not changed in five years. And it doesn't matter what type of students I am teaching, if I'm teaching DC or resource, they stay the same.

He also shared what he learned about high expectations from another member of the TSG, "I remember this teacher over here saying she didn't lower her expectations and that really got me thinking, you don't necessarily want to lower your expectations but you have to adjust them to your student body."

By the end of the study having high expectations and how to maintain them became more evident. It was decided that Eagle Middle School students needed to be held to high standards, similar to the ones you would expect in neighboring affluent school districts, despite the circumstances that affected them. The participants agreed that while circumstances must be taken into consideration the teacher needs to remain responsive to the child's needs, race, gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status and that should not be used as an excuse to allow for mediocrity. The facilitator shared the following during one session:

Something that I thought was really good from the reading was, teachers who really care about students honor their community, hold them in high esteem,

expect high performance from them and use strategies to fulfill their expectations. The part of it that stuck out to me was expecting high performance because I think that when I first started teaching I was so busy caring about them and wanting to make sure they knew I cared about them, that I didn't hold them to that higher standard and I didn't expect that they could do just as much. I would let their problems be a crutch even though they didn't ask them to be.

Inspiration touched on the same issue during another session and felt like we were doing our students a disservice:

I work with great teachers that get really close to the kids but I think that sometimes why [lower socio-economic schools] become, I mean it's the nature of kids' backgrounds that they come in starting lower, but I think a lot of times with kids you need that stability at school. We spend a lot of time providing that and like sometimes because you get to know a kid so well in this kind of setting, I know that sometimes I have lowered my expectations because I know the kid and her situation or his situation, and I'll just say well, she is going through this and this and this outside of the classroom, so why not give them a break? I think that something here in our school that would rarely ever see at a [Tiger] school, which you don't have the feeling that you are needed as much but you can always count on the fact that you're giving the kid the most rigorous education, where as here, I have dropped my expectations not all the time but on a case by case basis.

This caused the participants to reflect and think about what was occurring in their classrooms. From here, the participants began to clarify their understanding of what it meant to hold the children at Eagle Middle to high expectations. Dion reflected:

I made this response in my reflective journal. One meeting we had it wasn't heated, but intense, and it was about expectations. And that is the one thing that will stay in my mind. Are we dropping expectations for different students? If we are not, should we adjust them? That is one thing that has stayed on my mind since that meeting. Just because we are teaching predominantly minorities doesn't mean we need to drop our expectations. That is one of the things I like about [Inspiration], she doesn't drop her expectations and that is not going to change.

While the participants felt that they may be holding students to high expectations in their classroom, it was difficult to maintain without clear school-wide expectations, buy-in and consistency from other teachers in the school. Inspiration during one discussion offers insight into the difficulties of holding children to a high standard when other people in the building do not:

The rules and expectations are not streamlined. It is supposed to be, but students may come in to your room and when they get into line, they know they have to have their shirt in and their ID on, but for another teacher they know that they do not have to do that. They see that if I am talking in that class then that is going to look to her like I am not working hard, so working hard for one teacher may be like being in dress code, being prepared, working hard for another might be being

quiet and sitting down in your seat, for another might be talking really loud in a discussion. I think that is one thing that is not everybody follows the rules that are set out maybe because the rules are not clear enough, that is something that is very confusing for a kid. I know kids get very frustrated with that. You have to read basically 7 different adults daily about what they are and are not allowed to do.

Dion replied, “They have had nine months to get this, so they should have gotten it.”

Inspiration agreed but felt like there needs to be consistent school-wide expectations and enforcement.

This information prompted reflection and consideration. The participants were able to see what adjustments they needed to make, and how much their actions affected other teachers as well as students. Ultimately the participants agreed that maintaining high expectations for students is an integral part of being a culturally responsive teacher.

Examine Personal Values and Beliefs

Currently public schools are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of so many diverse learners. While the teaching force in the US is increasingly White, middle class and female, the population of CLD students continues to rise often causing a cultural discontinuity that interferes with the academic success of CLD students. The culture of public school teachers and different ethnic groups are often not synchronized. In order to better serve CLD students, teachers need to examine their own personal values and beliefs and recognize existing biases. Teachers, in a position of authority,

can sub-consciously push their ideals on to their students and when the cultures, religions and social values clash, this can lead to failure for both the teacher and student.

One way for a teacher to stray away from teaching their beliefs and values is to recognize the diversity in the classroom and capitalize on it as a strength. Dion and Standing Tall demonstrated that with the use of students' native languages and by allowing them to use their native language to help them comprehend the content. Appreciating diversity and offering students an opportunity to share helps them feel safe and respected, and in that type of environment students are more likely to achieve success.

Even when the student's value clearly differs from that of the teacher's, and that value can hinder future academic achievement, it is up to the teacher to teach and explain options, not judge. For example, Dion shared an experience involving one of his students that demonstrated a Hispanic cultural value of work over education. While he disagreed, he was quick to give the student options and not judge him.

During TELPAS writing I had a student ask in his writing what was the importance of school. He's Hispanic. He said that he did not see what school does for him and that why he needed to learn this and that. I wanted to ask him to change his writing but I said to myself, this is his writing and I am not supposed to change it, but he was saying it is not important! He said he was going to get a job and make money and that he would rather work and help his family. I think they are struggling and I would rather have my family be able to

eat and stuff like that, so when he was saying I don't see the need in school I decided that while I am here with him I am going to do the best I can to help him.

Teachers need to constantly reflect, and not just on lessons. Thinking about your beliefs and values and if you are pushing them on students is essential. Justice said this about culturally responsive teachers:

Respond to the needs and situations of each student based on what their understanding of right is and their understanding of right may not be what we think is right. So the teacher responds by correcting it or mending it to fit the norms of the classroom or school to help them be successful in that situation.

Theme II – Professional Development

While personal development is an important component of CRT, professional development must also occur simultaneously to ensure that issues regarding the classroom and instruction are being addressed and taken care of. Professional development, in this sense, is not attending a session and learning information, but rather it encompasses reflecting, researching and planning in order to build success in the classroom. It is working on the professional aspects of teaching rather than the personal. In this study four themes of professional development that support the content of CRT are: establishing and maintaining consistent rules and structures, setting realistic goals, planning for success and appropriate lesson delivery.

Consistent Rules and Structures

Students need structure and consistency in order to be successful in the

classroom. These are also important occurrences needed at home. However, students do not always receive the structure and support needed at home. Also, as they get older, students begin to experience the expectations of seven different teachers in a day. These expectations may not make sense to the student or they forget which causes more students to get in trouble or fall behind academically.

Part of that is due to the lack of consistency in schools. This issue was a problem that the participants noticed at Eagle Middle School. “Kids need stability at school,” said Inspiration. In one session someone asked whose responsibility it was to create consistency at school and she offered this:

I think the teachers have a certain role with the student and parents, but I think honestly if it is going to be something that is embedded in the school or district culture it should be the administration, within the school and on the board.

Justice replied:

If your administration pushes you to do something, then as the teacher you are the front line, you've got that direct contact. We are the front line, but if we are not pushed, then things get put on the back burner.

Summarizing, Inspiration insisted:

Well if there is not a structure set up, it is one of those things where people decide what we need to equip the students with. And if you do not know how or the best way to do it or even what the plan is, then you are not going to do it, even if it is a good idea.

Even if the structures, routines and consistency are in place at a school, it is essential to teach the importance of why they are established. Inspiration offered,

I love my students and that they are people who work hard and want to be successful in life. They are as caring as they know, they are as motivated as they know, but the one roadblock that I see many of my students face is that they do not understand the relationship between cause and effect. All of my students want to be successful in life, but many of them do not see that there are small tangible steps that need to be taken in middle school in order to ensure their success later on. Students have a hard time seeing how following school rules will help them to be successful in their future jobs. Because they can't see a direct disconnect they often disregard school rules which takes them on a path that does effect their future education.

Justice recognized the importance of structure and routines with one of her classes at the beginning of the year. She found that her students could not enter the classroom on their own and then get on-task. They soon fell behind in their learning. She decided she had to change something so for the first four months of school she lined them up outside of her classroom door and controlled their entry into the room.

Simple procedures can do wonder for academic success for all students. It is important that teachers take time to examine the systems in place, or not, in their classroom and work to create an environment where students can achieve. Teachers can also help students by following school-wide expectations and helping students understand the importance of the systems in place.

Set Realistic Goals

Although it is extremely important to have high expectations for students, teachers also need to set realistic goals for their students. When a student is incapable of achieving victory, they begin to get frustrated and shut down. The environment becomes less safe and welcoming. If a teacher establishes a connection and relationship with each individual student, they will have a grasp on the academic needs of the child, and that will allow them to plan for success for each student.

Dion worked hard to know his students and build relationships with them, but even when they were having a tough time he did not allow them to use their burden as a crutch. He said,

I don't take that into consideration. You have got to teach what you have got to teach and they have to pass that test. I'm not saying you have to lower your standards but as opposed to 20 problems you may give 11 problems instead. Eliminating problems from a homework assignment, or modifying a test can be done for all students, not just students being serviced through special education. Standing Tall exclaimed that, "You have to give students something they are able to do!"

Building success in students goes hand in hand with their learning. Teachers cannot create self-fulfilling prophecies about students or believe the negative connotations they hear about a student in the teachers' lounge. Standing Tall shared that she had a student that was described as a "ticking time-bomb" and she just waited for the child to explode each day in her class. She never saw this happen so she had to believe that there was good in this student. Believing in them and giving them the tools for

success will help them triumph. Once they have that feeling of victory, they may be willing to work harder. Therefore it is important that they believe in their students and plan for their success.

Plan for Success

Planning for the success of your students requires extra time and effort. Building relationships and making connections with students makes it easier to identify how best to help a student instructionally. Teachers must make the time to formulate a plan for achievement, which means more than looking at the pacing guide and following it.

Strategies that culturally responsive teachers use to plan for success are good teaching strategies for all students. Teachers need to use data to address the deficiencies in their learners as well as target their areas of success. Student interest should help drive instruction. Sometimes a teacher may need to change their approach as to how they are looking at content or a student. Teachers must also identify resources that will assist their CLD students. That can come in the form of more culturally relevant materials or using resources and equipment that may change the delivery of a lesson.

Teachers must also make time to reflect on their grades and lesson delivery. Sometimes patterns or information is noticeable when you take time to think about it. Cajun shared something she noticed during the TSG session when the participants reflected on their grade books:

I noticed I did not have any kids that failed last nine weeks and right now in this nine weeks I have four kids that are borderline with a 72. Those four that are failing are all black boys. They all sat together originally at the same table in

my class, but they have all been separated and their grades are gradually coming up.

Cajun easily noticed the misbehavior in her classroom by the four boys but did not see how that affected their academics until she sat and reflected upon the grades. Taking time to evaluate grades can tell you many things about your classroom including how effective your lessons are. Lesson delivery needs reflective attention and is another component of CRT.

Lesson Delivery

The participants felt that the act and art of teaching was a huge component of CRT. There is research that discusses the effective and/or preferred learning styles of different races and genders and that is important for our CLD student population. However, these methods of instruction, when used effectively can benefit all students in the classroom.

Despite the lesson delivery, lessons need to be highly engaging and interesting to the learners. According to Justice, “If you have highly engaging lessons your students will tend to misbehave less.” Dion tries to get his students involved by acknowledging the different native languages of the students and having them teach words to the class. He shared one example of how he has to utilize the background knowledge of his students. “We played a game about idioms and expressions of the day, and the only way that my students could really understand was by using something they know. So that’s what I tried to do.” Dion also works to alter the scripted lesson to turn it in to something more exciting and motivating:

My program is scripted, everything is laid out for you. Most of the time we are on the board, but I like to change it up and sometimes we play games. We talked about analogies and it turned into a very competitive lesson. I asked them to figure out the analogies. Some people were getting them and the other people were not listening so I decided to make a game out of it. Four people volunteered and we played for a Milky Way. Today it was an interesting day but some days it is not interesting and I can hardly keep their attention. But I try to make it fun.

Even though these teachers work hard to make their lessons engaging, Justice acknowledges that some students will have bad days, something happened at home, or something else plays into it and even though my lesson is engaging, they do not want to be engaged.

How teachers teach their lessons is important as well as making them fun and engaging. Inspiration felt that it was necessary to teach her students by chunking concepts:

When I teach I always think it is important to chunk concepts. In other words, I introduce a concept then the students do something hands-on having to do with that. I see myself as instructor who first teaches, then has the kids do some activity, then talk about it and then repeat this exercise. I teach this way because learning science has to be hands-on for a lot of the concepts, but also because a lot of my students are hands-on learners.

Standing Tall paid lots of attention to her audience. She refused to dumb down the material so she explained it to her students on their level, using examples and vocabulary they could understand. Cajun offered various ways in which she selects teams for instruction and activities in P.E. Ultimately all the participants agreed that you had to do whatever it takes to keep your students motivated and excited about learning.

As the study progressed, the participants demonstrated a beginning grasp of Gay's (2000) and Ladson-Billings' (1994) components of a culturally responsive teacher and began formulating responses and offering examples of their own interpretations of CRT. They relayed stories of utilizing culturally responsive actions and strategies while using terminology that made sense to them and was appropriate to the setting.

Although each participant finished the study with a different understanding of and confidence in being a culturally responsive teacher, the content delivered and discussed during the TSG was internalized and in some cases put into practice.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' thoughts and feelings about a specific design of staff development called a teacher study group (TSG) and describe the participants' learning experiences of CRT during the TSG. This was done using the following research questions:

1. What are the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participate in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG)?
2. How do urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group?

Five seventh and eighth grade teachers at one urban middle school participated in the four month long study. Collectively, the participants had 26 years of teaching experience and represented diversity in their age, gender, teacher preparation and content specialization. Each participant attended six TSG sessions with a focus on CRT, participated in one interview, kept a reflective journal and completed two open-ended surveys. The vast amount of qualitative data produced from this study was analyzed and sorted, yielding two major findings: themes of the TSG and a description of their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching content.

Teacher Study Groups

Research question one was designed to describe the professional development experiences of urban middle school teachers who participated in a culturally responsive

teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG). Data from this question yielded some important findings about TSGs. Three themes emerged and two of them had supporting themes. Theme I reported the changes in perception of staff development for the participants. The sub-themes were: participant expectations, a positive experience and the overall effectiveness of the TSG. Theme II focused on the importance of building relationships, which included information on: a safe and comfortable environment and storytelling and discussion. Theme III focuses on the impact the TSG had on instruction.

The available literature on TSGs lacks depth and substance. Past studies have provided information including definitions and general characteristics of TSGs, however limited information about the design, framework and results localized to previous studies have been shared (Sparks, 1983; Clair, 1989; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001). Information about the learning experiences as described by the participants in a TSG is scarce. This study of a TSG on CRT offered a suggested framework for a TSG that can be easily reproduced. It includes important information such as the use of a facilitator, appropriate size and length.

Sparks (1983) suggest discussion is most productive when guided by a facilitator. The facilitator's role is to keep the group focus on sharing ideas and finding solutions rather than getting sidetracked by other issues about school. This study corroborates this notion. During the sessions when the facilitator was present, the conversation was more focused and more ideas considered and implemented. In the sessions when the facilitator was absent, a few of the participants emerged as leaders of the group, but

while the discussion was interesting and thought provoking, the group tended to lose focus and speak more about their frustrations. The size of the group matters as well. Sparks (1983) maintained that in order to allow for equal participation in discussion and to develop camaraderie, a TSG should comprise of eight people or less. A small amount of participants proved important in contribution to discussion as well as the relationships that were built within the regular meeting times of the TSG. All the participants commented on the importance of and surprise of the relationships that were built with their colleagues through this experience.

Current literature on TSGs also neglects thorough reporting of teacher's voices about the attitudes and feelings of their experiences in staff development and descriptions of any learning experiences. This study contributes a unique example of a TSG design clearly focused on culturally responsive teaching to the literature. It enhances the existing research with thick description of the participants' professional development experiences in a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) teacher study group (TSG) and a description of their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content.

Theme I - Changes in Perception of Staff Development

Participant Expectations

Guskey (1991) asserts that teachers are attracted to professional development because of their beliefs that "it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with students" (p. 382). He also maintains that teachers hope to gain specific, concrete and practical ideas that relate directly to their

daily routines in the classroom (Guskey, 1991). Previous experiences with staff development for the participants in this study were mostly negative. Many of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the design and disseminated information from past professional development they had attended. For example, Justice complained that the sessions rarely apply to the needs of the school. “I don’t think we actually look at the data of our population, and analyze factors. We do not service all of our students.” Justice shared some of the characteristics of some of her worst professional development experiences:

The facilitator forced the same outcome on our exit tickets rather than taking comments from teachers about the subject matter and then giving reason as to why this technique was so crucial. There also was no follow-up offered for the sessions.

Having associated negative connotations with past professional development experiences I was worried that the participants would have similar reactions to this study and treat it more as an obligation rather than a learning experience. Sometimes teachers feel that staff development is a waste of time and that they already know or do not need to know what will be presented. Fortunately, the teachers in this study entered with open minds and were willing to take a risk and try something new. When asked about their expectations for a TSG, the participants shared characteristics that were documented in this TSG experience. Justice and Standing Tall thought it would be discussion based with the majority of the learning coming from their colleagues. The idea of discussion supports prior research on what makes professional development effective: a campus-

based study, teacher collaboration (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003) and opportunity for discussion (Sparks, 1983). Inspiration expected to leave each session with concrete strategies that she could apply in her classroom, confirming Guskey's (1991) research about why teachers are attracted to professional development.

The participants reported the TSG as an effective type of professional development. Inspiration preferred the TSG over traditional professional development because it was controlled by the teachers and they focused on what they believed to be most beneficial for the group. She summed it up with, "In other words, we were not limited by a set agenda and were not expected to all come to the same conclusion at the end of the session." This idea validates available research on TSGs. This TSG offered teachers the opportunity for interaction and to discuss pertinent topics to their classrooms (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Cramer (1996) viewed collaboration as an integral component of professional development because teachers are able to get new ideas and encouragement from one another. This too was upheld in this research. During each TSG session, participants reported various successes they had trying new ideas or strategies learned from their peers in the TSG. The group rejoiced with one another when they were victorious and sought help from one another when they were not successful. This case-study proved the TSG to be an effective means of professional development, as well as a positive and enjoyable experience.

Positive Experience

Wallis & Rosado-McGrath (2004) state that in ongoing professional development, study and reflection are necessary components that a district must put into

practice to support teachers. Although teachers only spent a few months in this TSG, it proved meaningful and productive for the participants. This case-study lasted only four months. It is difficult to cite this length of time as short or long. Compared to traditional modes of professional development (i.e. a one shot workshop), four months of on-going staff development is lengthy. However, compared to previously cited studies on TSGs, like Sleeter (1992), Clair (1998) and Emery (1998), which lasted over a year or longer, four months would be considered a short amount of time. The participants did not complain about the length of time, and Dion suggested another TSG happen the next year. The participants reported this staff development as positive and analysis of the data support an alteration in their understanding of the CRT content. The researcher concludes that spending a longer amount of time in the TSG would yield even more positive findings.

Emery's (1998) study of TSGs was designed to assess the attitudes of teachers and principals towards the use of TSGs as an alternative form of staff development and to gain a deeper understanding of the essential elements of a TSG. Her study found that most of the teachers left that professional development experience with a positive feeling. Participants in Emery's (1998) study however did voice concern that they wanted more control over choosing a topic. The TSG focusing on CRT content already had an established overarching theme – culturally responsive teaching. Participants entered into the TSG knowing the group would focus on that content. Two texts were provided as resources, but the group helped drive the discussion and study. Compared to Emery's (1998) study, this one was more successful because the participants had more

choice and control over the content during each session. They also did not have to participate after knowing the initial topic. Robb (2000) and Clair (1998) both maintain that a negotiated content combined with ownership contribute to the success of a TSG. TSGs designed and driven by teachers incite the power of this type of professional development, which is evident in this study. Many scholars such as Saavedra, 1996; Clair, 1998; Emery 1998 & Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001, all validate the use of study groups as a form of professional development, and this view is upheld in this study.

Overall Effectiveness of the TSG

Clair claims, “TSGs represent a radical change from teacher as receiver to teacher as creator of information” (1998, p. 470). This is an extreme role reversal for participants compared to traditional staff development. In staff development workshops, teachers sit back and are passive consumers of information. This contradicts Firestone, Maggin, Martinez & Polovsky’s (2005) research that suggests professional development should provide teachers with opportunities to engage with ideas, modify them and incorporate them into their teaching practices. Such professional development needs the participant to be a creator and reflector of information. Without an opportunity to practice what you have learned, reflect and then report back to your colleagues, information can get lost or wasted.

The TSG format allots opportunity for participants to engage in their learning, make it pertinent and meaningful to themselves and then implement in their classroom.

Hefty's (2005) research revealed various characteristics of TSGs that were noticeable in this study: acquiring knowledge about the content, time for reflection, and collaboration with other professionals. These characteristics cited by Hefty (2005) were important components of this TSG and contributed to its effectiveness, upholding the previously cited research. Hefty's (2005) research stated that participants felt constrained by the time, stress about assignment completion and frustration regarding group dynamics. These issues were not reported by the participants in this study of a TSG on CRT. Cajun did express frustration with the readings because she did not like to read and felt like it was over her head. Yet no other negatives were reported to the researcher about the design, format or execution of the TSG. Overall, the majority of the participants in both studies felt their participation was valuable and a positive experience. This study supports the research that TSGs are effective. This success can also be measured based on the results from the data participants revealed about their learning experiences.

Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch (2001) assert that the study group approach holds promise for substantive professional development and this case-study confirms that statement. This TSG proved meaningful for the five participants. All reported taking something with them upon conclusion of the study, and the researcher noticed shifts in their understanding of CRT as a result of comprehending the content. Goldenberg & Gallimore (1991) suggest that the context of professional development should include teachers in rigorous examination of teaching, the contextual challenges teachers face daily, probable solutions to these challenges, and a close examination of any progress in addressing these challenges. Due to the nature of a TSG, and its opportunity for

participants to talk and share with one another, this design of staff development aligns with research on effective staff development.

The design of the staff development left an impression on the participants as did the content. Justice said it was, “different because it was discussion based with a result” and she felt as if the group had control over where they were going in their learning. The data confirmed a fostered change in the beliefs of the professional practices of the participants. According to Inspiration, “this is the first professional development that has actually forced me to think and come to my own conclusions on what to do to improve my classroom.” Cajun declared that “it’s starting to make me more culturally aware, mostly seeing things differently, how my kids group themselves, how I am different or the things I need to do differently based upon culture.” Upon completion of the TSG all participants agreed that they liked and learned from it, although for different reasons.

Theme II – Importance of Building Relationships with Colleagues

Safe and Comfortable Environment

Five teachers participated in this study. The small size of the group aided in the participants’ feeling comfortable and having ample opportunity to participate in discussions with one another. With a small number of participants they were able to build professional and personal relationships which is a theme not found in other professional development research. Building relationships is a key component of effective staff development.

Establishing norms contributed to the creation and maintenance of a safe environment. The norms established for this TSG were taken from the CHAMPS model, a part of Randy Sprick and others (1998) Safe and Civil Schools program. Once the participants established a safe and trusting rapport, the conversation became more open and at ease, and the learning from one another was immense. A study by Grossman and Weinburg cited by Wilson and Berne (1999) noted that teachers enjoy talking about their work, it takes time to develop a community and that teachers have very little experience engaging in professional discourse because it is often critically evaluated by others. The safety and comfort maintained in this TSG is an example of a characteristic necessary in a TSG in order for it to be productive and successful. This concept parallels the existing ideas in the literature about discussion in professional development.

Other essential ideas explored by Wilson & Berne (1999) include opportunities to talk about students and learning and opportunities to talk about teaching, which materialized in the TSG discussions. A TSG can thrive only when participants are able to openly share their honest thoughts and feelings with their colleagues. Keeping the conversation honest seemed to help everyone progress and respect their colleagues even more, which in turn allowed for the success of sharing ideas and resources, because the participants valued what each other said. Evidence of building relationships came in different forms. The most obvious means in which relationships were established was through storytelling and discussion.

The participants were given ample time to work with one another, and developed relationships with other teachers that they knew little about. Dion stated that in the TSG

he was able to “build relationships with some of the teachers that I see in the hallways and just say ‘hi and bye’ to.” Each participant was isolated in their own way; through their content, grade level or as part of the special education team. There was little whole school collegiality that existed at Eagle Middle School and the TSG brought these teachers together. Wallis & Rosado-McGrath (2004) put forward that educators assigned to work with ELLs are often most isolated from their colleagues and the most culturally apart from their students. The TSG worked to decrease isolation of teachers at a large urban middle school campus and helped establish unexpected relationships among peers. While the participants in this study were not limited to teachers of ELLs, the idea of a TSG holds promise for other groups or teams in schools that tend to be isolated from the mainstream academic teachers. Therefore, it is even more essential that teachers have time to interact with one another within professional development, which is allotted for in a TSG design.

Storytelling and Discussion

This case study allowed the participants ample time for storytelling and discussion which aided in their exploration of culturally responsive teaching methods, ultimately affecting their learning experiences of CRT. It also allowed for collegiality. While TSGs have some similarities to both one shot workshops and book studies, they are a unique experience for educators to gain substantial knowledge and experience with a specific content. Part of what makes a TSG unique is the discussion for teachers, by teachers. Sparks’ (1983) found that effective staff development allotted time for discussion. The participants in this TSG affirmed this idea. They reported learning

more from one another rather than from the text. They also shared that they took the advice of their colleagues back to the classroom and applied it, something they may not have done if it has not been for the relationships built in the TSG. The participants felt affirmed and empowered when sharing their ideas and successes with one another. Inspiration said that she enjoyed the TSG because “it was discussion based with a result.”

Dion felt he learned by listening to the discussion and from the ideas of others:

Knowledge is out there and no one person holds all of the knowledge. When they say what they want to say and it sounds interesting, then if it is applicable to my class, I can use it. I have heard so many different opinions.

Allotting for discussion during staff development allows participants to form their own opinions and receive information on the content that is important and relevant to them. Without the opportunity for discussion, valuable information is lost during staff development. Wallis & Rosado-McGrath (2004) maintain that organizations must offer teachers time for purposeful learning and dialogue. “Effective teaching requires educators to spend time together to think about and discuss the theories and beliefs that undergird their teaching practices” (Wallis & Rosado-McGrath, 2004, p. 265). The TSG format in this study clearly offered the participants a chance to share theories and their beliefs and teaching practices, thus positively impacting the teachers in this study.

Theme III - Impact on Instruction

The five participants in this study reported a change in their comprehension of CRT content and spoke of noticeable transformations in their attitudes, beliefs and

instruction. The three sub-themes that emerged in this theme were: new strategies, changed expectations and rethinking grading practices. The participants grasped many of Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings' (1994) components of culturally responsive teaching. Change was evident through their use of CRT terminology, understanding of the readings and discussions and shared accounts of noticeable differences in their teaching practices.

New Strategies

Guskey (1991) contends that teachers hope to gain specific and practical ideas that directly relates directly to their daily routines from professional development. Interviews with the teacher participants confirmed that they entered the TSG seeking strategies and ideas to improve their practices and increase student success in their classrooms. McCarthy, 2005 notes that administrators are increasingly looking at staff development as a way to enhance student achievement. Culturally responsive teaching uses cultural characteristics, experiences and diverse perspectives to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students more effectively. Research on CRT suggests that teachers recognize students' cultures and utilize it to enhance learning. When academic knowledge and skills are meaningful to the real life experiences of students, they are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2001; Gay, 2000). Employing some of their learning in the classroom affirmed the value of CRT according to the participants in this study.

Changed Expectations

In this study there was a notable shift in thinking towards students by the

teachers. Some teachers realized that had been using labels, such as special education, or unfortunate circumstances for a student as a crutch for achievement. Fortunately the impact of this study group design allowed for discussion, which presented new ideas and ways of thinking for the participants.

In her research Hollins (1990) called for an elimination of bias toward white middle class populations of learners. While few white middle class students attended Eagle Middle School, the teacher participants tended to design and implement lessons that were geared toward that population, as well as taught how they were once instructed. It took discussion and reflection to alter thinking about students present in their classrooms during this study. One though provoking question asked in the initial staff development presentations before the study commenced was “are you color blind?” While the researcher knew this was a trick question to ask, the importance of it carried over into the study.

The participants wanted to believe that they were color blind and had no biases towards students that were different than them. However, when told it is imperative to see color in the classroom, their thinking towards students and their expectations of them began to change. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2003) insists that ignoring the ethnic identities, cultural beliefs, perceptions and values of CLD students they fail as culturally responsive pedagogists. Reflecting on their personal beliefs as well as feelings about students caused most of the participants to change the way they viewed their learners. For example, Justice had more patience for her regular education students. Inspiration realized her special education students could not replicate the performance of her regular

education students so she had to shift her thinking. Many times this meant turning negative thinking into positive thinking.

Rethinking Grading Practices

Changed expectations of students changed the thinking towards grading practices for the participants. In the beginning of the study the teachers expected students to do everything they had planned correctly with out hesitation and error. Towards the end of the study the participants realized that grading was not fair if CRT methods and strategies were not employed in the classroom. They also learned that it was not acceptable to lower the grading standard just because someone may have been dealt a rotten hand. Barnes (2006) proclaims that culturally responsive teaching supports the achievement of all students and functions with a learning environment offers optimum opportunities to learn regardless of circumstance. While the participants meant well, they realized their good intentions in trying to help a student ended up hurting them in the long run. The teachers vowed to hold their students to high expectations with a rigorous curriculum.

Rethinking grading practices is not a component of CRT that is found in the existing literature, but this study supports the idea that it is. The participants admitted to giving grades to students, grading them solely on effort and passing them to help them stay on a team but never thought about the long term consequences. The discussions suggested that all students, regardless of circumstances needed to earn their grades. However, this component of CRT, like others that emerged in this study, go alongside many others in order for CLD students to achieve success.

The participants in this study were offered an abundant amount of information on CRT. Understanding and utilizing the ideas presented in this TSG on CRT allowed the teachers to gain practical and meaningful ideas that could alter a change in thinking as well as instruction. Sparks (1983) deemed staff development as one of the most promising manners of improving instruction. Under the premises of multicultural education, achievement of students of color can increase when CRT methods are implemented in the classroom. Thus, this study confirms that professional development is a means of improving academic achievement, and a TSG on CRT can help teachers unleash more potential from their CLD students.

Teacher's Learning Experiences of CRT

Research question two asked how urban middle school teachers describe their learning experiences of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content in a teacher study group. The TSG format allowed for ample discussion about the participants' experiences in the TSG as well as the CRT content. Wilson & Berne (1999) question existing professional development research because of its lack of empirical evidence about what professional knowledge teachers do or do receive during traditional professional development activities. In this study, teacher participants were able to describe and explain in their own voices examples of their learning and application of CRT methods in their classrooms. This offers a new perspective, the voice of participants, to the professional development literature. The data in this study also offered support for the need for professional development on CRT in today's public schools.

The growing diversity among K-12 classrooms has caused teacher preparation programs to add a few courses on multicultural, bilingual or urban education in hopes this exposure to diversity would suffice as preparation (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Assuming these institutions do a good job of educating teacher education candidates to be successful in diverse classrooms, there are still many other teacher candidates certified through alternative routes. This study included 5 participants; only one was certified through the traditional route but had no exposure to multiculturalism. Four of the five participants in this study were products of an Alternative Certification Program and felt they were not well prepared to meet the challenges of diversity that were evident in Allied. Participants receiving certification alternatively also had very little preparation in multicultural education. In 2002, 26% of Texas teachers were certified through an Alternative Certification Program (TEA, 2002).

Staff development is the main mechanism of communicating new and important knowledge to teachers, and offering sessions on CRT is absolutely necessary if teachers are expected to meet the needs of their CLD students. Yet, CRT and its components require thorough investigation, reflection and implementation in order to be understood and become a part of a teacher's practice. This indicates that school districts need to instruct their own personnel on culturally responsive practices and pedagogy if they want their CLD students to achieve. Nevertheless, it needs to be done effectively. This study confirms that a TSG is an effective means of delivering staff development on CRT.

Theme I – Personal Development

Caring

Caring is one of the most prominent characteristics of CRT, yet it is difficult to offer a simple definition of it within the educational realm. Irvine (2003) stated that a caring culturally responsive teacher, according to students she had researched, treated them as individuals. Howard (2001) shared that students noted teachers who were willing to care about them and established a bond with them. Students also described caring teachers as those who showed them respect and were willing to follow the directions because the teacher held them to high expectations (Howard, 2001). The participants shared what they learned about caring from the TSG, and results were similar to the existing research.

Irvine (2003) states, “Students said that they liked school and did their best when they thought that teachers cared about them or did special things for them” (p. 10). This was upheld in the descriptions of learning provided by the participants. Cajun offered an example of how she had worked a lot harder at building relationships with her students and getting to know them better on a personal and academic level. Although she would often complain of being frustrated with one of her class’ behaviors, when she examined their grades and thought about it she said, “That class actually sits down and gets to work. They probably have the highest major test grades versus the others.” She attributed that to caring about her students as people, but she could not genuinely care for them without having built relationships with them. This upholds beliefs that Irvine

(2003) and Howard (2001) propose in their research: students perform better for teachers that they know care for them.

Irvine (2003) lists a variety of characteristics that students described were attributes of a caring teacher: laughed at students, trusted and respected them, set limits, provided structure, had high expectations for them and pushed them to achieve. Many of the examples shared within the TSG discussions were these same characteristics. This confirms that the participants took knowledge from the TSG, but also really understood various tenets of CRT. The participants truly cared for their students and that caring was displayed in various capacities and was often expressed as a key component of being a good teacher. According to (Howard, 2001) and this study, students noted teachers who were willing to care about them and established a bond with them.

Building Relationships

Building relationships with students proved to be another important and prominent characteristic of culturally responsive teaching in this study. Many CRT scholars report building relationships as significant, however this concept is recorded in the literature using other terminology. Hollins (1993) stated a premise of cultural inclusion (similar to CRT) was knowing the students and being able to communicate with them as diverse learners. She also offered that developing supportive and collaborative relationships within the classroom and building self-confidence and positive interpersonal relationships were keys to reaching CLD students.

The researcher maintains that without building genuine relationships with students, most interaction in the classroom will be ineffective, and the chance for increasing academic achievement decreases. However, the TSG aided in building these relationships because the participants were able to openly discuss race and ethnicity of their students and acknowledge all of the positives and negatives that come with that culture. Without a safe place to explore opinions and learn more about different cultures, misconceptions tend to become truth. This supports Irvine's (2003) suggestion that teachers recognize the race and ethnicity of their students and openly discuss issues regarding it.

Evidence of strong relationships was abundant in Dion's classroom and experiences. Dion spoke about his experiences "dressing up" and although he did not like the outcome; his students made fun of him and challenged his authority because he was out of his typical character. His students challenged him and this reaction demonstrated their comfort level with him. The fact that Dion's students were open and honest with him about their surprise in his appearance, as well as make jokes about him, suggests an environment where the students are comfortable with the teacher. They knew how far they could push, demonstrating the importance building relationships to the existing literature on CRT.

Another "homework assignment" conducted during the study was to greet more students in the hallway and find out something new about three students. From this experience the participants learned that even a simple gesture in attempting to initiate a relationship has a monumental effect on the students and their behavior. Wlodkowski &

Ginsberg (1995) maintained that educators can influence the motivation of students by learning and understanding their perspectives, seeing them as unique and utilizing their cultural characteristics. This cannot be done without building a relationship with the individual students in the classroom. Based on observations of the relationships the participants built with students, and the progress students made once this relationship was established, academics will be affected by the teacher-student relationship. Building a relationship with students is crucial to being a culturally responsive teacher. Once that relationship is established, students notice that you are more than a teacher; they know that you care about them and value where they are coming from.

Having High Expectations for Students

Most teachers believe they hold their students to high expectations. However, after much thorough discussion during this study, the teachers realized that sometimes a student's background and culture inadvertently affected how much a teacher expected of a student. Ladson-Billings (1994) maintains that to be a culturally responsive teacher, one must have high self-esteem and a high regard for others and believe that all students can succeed. The results of this study confirm that, but the researcher argues that teachers must reflect on these expectations and be honest with themselves about why an expectation might be lower than for another student, or for a student in a more affluent situation.

Irvine (2003) reports that "the power of high teacher expectations in raising the achievement of students of color is receiving renewed attention in educational research" (p. 11). In accordance with current literature, creating and maintaining high expectations

for students was discussed in every TSG session. Each participant believed they were holding students to a high standard, but with further discussion the participants realized they were not on the same page, and often times thought they were helping students by modifying for them due to unfortunate circumstances.

“Culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities” (Gay, 2000, p. 20). This cannot be done without holding students accountable and expecting the most from them. Holding students to high expectations is beneficial because when something is expected of them they tend to rise to the occasion and perform. This happens socially and academically. However, the expectations must be realistic. Justice talked about one of her classes that struggled with bringing their supplies to class and being in dress code. She repeated the expectations over and over again and eventually the students complied and these issues no longer took place. “They know if you really expect that of them or not.” Consistency, as well as holding all children to high expectations, regardless of circumstance or creed, is essential in this component of CRT. While having high expectations for students is a tenet of CRT and mentioned in the available research on CRT, this study offers a more in-depth description of the importance of high expectations and some examples of the value behind it.

Examine Personal Values and Beliefs

Reflection of personal values and beliefs, as well as understanding one’s own

culture proved to be a major component of CRT, but it was also instrumental in how the participants constructed and applied their newfound knowledge on CRT. Hollins (1993) believes in the importance of reflective teaching and deemed it a competency of cultural inclusion and asserts that engaging in a type of reflection that extends understanding and recognition of new approaches that can aid in teaching culturally diverse populations is encouraged for professional growth. While Hollins (1993) does not offer a specific means of how best to reflect, the participants' learning experiences in the TSG imply that is a valuable way to help teachers with that reflective process of understanding themselves and as a means of empowering their students by using CRT methods.

Borko & Putnam (1995) insist:

There is substantial evidence that professional development programs for experienced teachers *can* make a difference – that teachers who participate in these programs can, and often do, experience significant changes in their professional knowledge base and instructional practices. When professional development programs create an environment that facilitates and supports teacher learning, and when they continue to support teachers in their endeavors to integrate new conceptions and instructional strategies into their ongoing educational programs, then teachers can expand and elaborate their professional knowledge base and can begin to teach fundamentally in different ways (p.p. 60-61).

The evidence presented in this study about TSGs and CRT supports the idea that CRT content delivered through a TSG design is a novel idea, particularly because of the reflective component necessary in understanding CRT content. Gay (2000) feels that, good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the changes needed in educational programs. Good will must be accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and skills. The researcher maintains this cannot be done without the opportunity for and occurrence of reflection in professional development and that can be maintained in a TSG. Active involvement of teachers in action research can create relevant and meaningful knowledge as well as a valuable form of reflection (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003).

The effectiveness of this TSG in disseminating information on CRT and the participants' ability to gather new knowledge from this format suggests that offering TSGs focused on CRT methods would benefit the teaching force. This study suggests that a TSG, focused on a CRT content, is the best means for delivering this pertinent information. Justice shared that participating in a TSG on CRT made her more likely to remember and use the content if she had the freedom to discuss and analyze it with her colleagues. She added,

I preferred the TSG because it allows for a lot of group discussion, where you put a comment out there and it really gets bounced around and discussed. If it were a Staff development session your comment would be not be judged or discussed, your presenter may say thank you and the session moves along without you

having the opportunity to process your thought. When I participate in a TSG discussion I get feedback and applicable knowledge for my classroom.

The format of the TSG allowed Inspiration to make meaning of the content as well as apply it to her professional practice:

If I had been in a PD on culturally responsive teaching with a speaker and a long power point, I would have taken the packet of highly effective strategies and probably convinced myself that because I care about my kids I already practice a majority of these strategies.

Dion agreed. He felt that the TSG was a necessary form of staff development in order to go deeper into a given topic of discussion like CRT. “We need to have a TSG for the information that we need to study at length.”

Necessary in the literature on CRT are the voices of teachers and their reflection on implementing CRT in their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests that teachers’ unique perspectives and personal investment in good practices, such as CRT, need to be shared. She challenges practitioners to communicate that information in order for us to reevaluate good teaching practices. This will also contribute to the knowledge base of teacher educators to help continue building teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1995b), as well as offer school districts pertinent information on how to better served their CLD population.

Based on information shared by the participants in this study, reflection and sharing shaped their understanding of CRT, and guided others in achieving best practices in their classrooms. Justice said she learned how to improve approaching difficult

learners from her colleagues. She added “This really made me evaluate the systems I use.” Inspiration offered she thought it was helpful to hear other teachers’ strategies, their responses to scenarios in their classrooms and their opinions about educational strategy, structure, and bureaucracy. Offering a different perspective on sharing, Dion stated that, “At first, I was information seeking. Towards the end, I began sharing knowledge of my past experiences and current situations.” This offered him some validity on his practices and offered an outlet for him to share his knowledge and understanding.

Teachers are the front line to the happenings in our public school classrooms. We need to welcome and honor their stories and experiences and add it to the literature. Their stories of triumphs and defeats will aid in developing a better educational system for all.

Theme II – Professional Development

Teachers need to be able to identify what is hindering academic performance or the obstacles blocking high achievement cannot be removed (Gay, 2000). In order for teachers to increase learning opportunities for all students, they need to be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of learning (Banks, et al., 2001) and employ culturally responsive teaching (CRT) methods to increase the achievement of CLD students. However, with teacher preparation and alternative certification programs not adequately preparing practitioners to meet the diverse needs of their students and teachers not grasping the components of CRT, an alternative to offering this information must occur. Culturally responsive teaching evolved out of a need to “make

classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). After participating in a TSG on CRT the participants also left with an understanding of their professional development of a culturally responsive teacher.

Consistent Rules and Structures

Another theme of professional development as part of CRT is establishing and maintaining consistent rules and structures in the classroom and the building. Inspiration noted:

If you have a structure in place where whatever your goal or vision is, everybody knows it, then it is going to be reinforced the same way over and over, so if the kids are getting it from every person they see, if they are getting it seven times a day, then it is going to start settling in.

School-wide rules and expectations need to be upheld and enforced in all classrooms.

Teachers’ abilities to structure their classrooms in a way that valued home and community was reported in Howard’s (2001) research of what students wanted from their teachers. This can be accomplished through daily rituals and teachers who resembled mothers or other family members. Structures were set in place when the study began, but as the participants learned more they changed to help students be successful. This included changes in daily procedures (like handing out papers or entering the classroom) to lesson delivery. Irvine (2003) states that teaching is a calling. They have to be dreamkeepers and advocates for their students, and this means incorporating rules and rituals that will benefit the students. It involves participating in

the personal development that come along with CRT discovered in this research. Many of the Eagle Middle School students wake-up every morning waiting to see their teachers; the teacher's presence is a symbol of caring and commitment to the students. Many students do not experience stability in their home lives, thus school is the only place they can get this experience.

School-wide rules and expectations need to be upheld and enforced in all classrooms. Unfortunately the data suggested that teachers were consistent about their rules and regulations in their classroom but were not when it came to upholding school wide expectations, like the tardy and dress code policies. Inspiration felt like most of the teachers on the campus were establishing rules and rituals in their classroom, but they looked different to the kids and they were not standardized, which causes confusion and chaos. Inspiration also felt it important that teachers make themselves available to students and stay consistent in their behaviors and expectations.

Culturally responsive teaching supports the achievement of all students and requires teachers to create a learning environment where all students are welcomed and supported and provided optimum opportunities to learn regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Barnes, 2006). The participants upheld this belief when they acknowledged changing their thinking about seating charts, grading, homework and behavioral expectations in the TSG sessions. There must be a solid structure for children, but that structure needs to be aligned with CRT principles.

Set Realistic Goals

Helping CLD students up for success is a tenet of CRT, for success is

mentioned in the literature about CRT but setting realistic goals for students has not previously been cited as a component of CRT in the existing literature. Hollins (1993) advocated for teachers to create comfortable and supportive classroom environments for all students and to help them build-self confidence. Gay (2000) recommends incorporating culture in all aspects of the curriculum and classroom to make them successful. Part of helping students be successful is to have a relationship with them and be able to set realist goals for them.

With the current diversity within classrooms and of learning styles, it is necessary to make a plan as to how each individual will achieve success. This requires more than just using CRT strategies. It involves CRT strategies, like teaching to interests and real-life experiences, validating students' cultures and caring, but it is a necessary step needed before and alongside the implementation of CRT methods. Ladson-Billings (1994) states that teachers must believe all students can succeed, however teachers must be plan for that success.

Plan for Success

According to Pang (2001) teachers may not realize that they operate from a particular cultural orientation. Without acknowledging this, teachers can inadvertently set their students up for failure. Pang (2001) notes,

Teachers have specific expectations, behaviors and ways of doing things. They may always write things on the board. They may expect quiet all the time. They may allow students to walk around the room. There are rules and expectations continually operating in schools and they differ from room to room. (p. 260)

Throughout the study, many examples of accommodations for students were shared. Many of these accommodations were made by the participants because they saw a lack of success in their students. These accommodations were made before the participants entered the study. However, their lack of knowledge of the principles of CRT kept them from truly understanding how to wholly help their CLD students be successful. Therefore the idea that culturally responsive teaching includes recognizing and executing a plan for success as part of maximizing academic potential is a result of this study.

According to Irvine (2003), “when cultural conflicts exist between the student and the school, the inevitable occurs.” This inevitable is the miscommunication between the home, student and teacher which turns into anger, hostility and alienation. Self-esteem diminishes and ultimately failure is achieved, for all parties involved. When teacher and students are not aligned, confrontation occurs both consciously and subconsciously through means such as verbal and non-verbal communication, body language and coverbal behaviors such as eye contact and facial expressions (Irvine, 2003). Thus, using culturally responsive teaching methods is one means of synchronizing education for CLD students. Once education is synchronized, students are likely to be successful. Gay (2000) contends that culturally responsive teaching teaches to and through the strengths of CLD students, therefore utilizing CRT strategies in the classroom in the classroom alone is equivalent to planning for their success.

Lesson Delivery

Lesson delivery is another component of CRT that greatly impacts student achievement. The participants in this study revealed that careful attention needed to be to the means in which teachers planned and delivered their lessons. The types and cultures of learners today greatly differ from when the participants were in school, and they cannot rely on how they were taught to teach. An example offered by Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995) shared various methods of lesson delivery one teacher used in her classroom: small groups, small group discussion and problem-solving, and lively class discussions. Hands-on learning was also present, but the teacher ensured that the activity was meaningful and relevant.

When planning for student success a component of that will be lesson delivery. It is important that teachers know their audience. Sometimes planning will take the form of different lesson plans for the different classes in the same content. Teachers must account for learning styles, background knowledge, student interest, connection to real-life as well as content and time. Therefore it is imperative that lesson delivery be examined when considering if one is acting as a culturally responsive teacher. While in the previous literature lesson delivery has not been given ample attention, it is important to examine all of the CRT component that are integrated in to the lesson delivery, as a result of the data from this study.

Implications

This study examined urban middle school teachers' attitudes and feelings towards participation in a teacher study group and how participants describe their

learning experiences of CRT. The results of this study offered ideas that need further research, as well as some that can be immediately applied and implemented in teacher preparation courses, school districts and staff development sessions.

Teacher Study Groups

In this study, the teacher study group proved an effective means of delivering staff development to teachers, making it a viable option for staff development. The design of this particular study combined ideas from previous studies (Saavedra, 1996; Sleeter, 1992). There does not appear to be a solid blue-print for a TSG, but some factors revealed in this research are an absolute. Teachers gain more from a TSG when they are the seekers and deliverers of knowledge. However, a facilitator is essential to the success of the group. This TSG had a facilitator to get the group started and keep them on track. She was also able to press the participants with challenging and thought provoking questions and comments. It is important to note that the facilitator was not an expert in the field, so the participants could not solely rely on her to disseminate and deliver the information. With a limited amount of sessions, the facilitator seemed to play a large role in guiding the groups' reading and discussion topics. If more time had been allotted, the group most likely would have begun to guide themselves.

Ample time needs to be provided for a TSG as well. Unlike one-shot workshops, the delivery of information was on-going and continuous interaction and reflection occurred. That information could then be immediately applied, and then brought back for discussion, and even tweaked before being applied again. The follow-up and opportunity for reflection is what allowed the participants to receive the knowledge and

then use it, and eventually apply it to their teaching practices. A short-term TSG would not be effective. This study was done in a four month period and the results were fruitful. If this was done throughout an entire school year, the possibilities for further success are even greater.

Still, more research should be done on TSGs. Further research should focus on the process of the TSG design and set-up, as well as the specific methodology of gathering and delivery of the information. The results must also be tracked in a meaningful matter; simply asking participants if they liked it and learned is not enough. Evidence of growth in the participants is important to endorsing a TSG as opportune staff development. The voices of current practitioners should be expressed in the literature so that we are better able to meet the needs of teacher learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Methods

Findings from this study reveal that culturally responsive teaching methods were not readily taught in teacher education courses or alternative certification programs for persons wanting to teach in public schools. Most, if any, training on CRT or multiculturalism, was covered in one class session or during graduate courses. The researcher sees this as detrimental to new teachers and the educational system in general. Schools today are more diverse than ever before and filled with children experiencing different lifestyles from the teacher candidates.

Without educating our teachers, both new and veteran, about culturally responsive teaching methods, we are suggesting that current trends in teaching practices not meeting the needs of CLD students are acceptable. If we want to empower our

future generations and ensure that every child receives an equitable education, we must train our teachers to work with the increasingly diverse populations of schools.

Achievement will not increase if we continue to teach to White, middle-class America. Training in CRT should not be limited to teacher preparation programs. School districts and campuses need to also work with their teachers to train them in culturally responsive teaching methods and diversity to better understand the needs of the students. Training in culturally responsive teaching methods proves valuable when there is: a knowledge base to be studied, time for teachers to use and apply their learning, an opportunity for teachers to practice new strategies and see the benefit of them and when opportunity is given to share the newfound knowledge of CRT.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study deems a teacher study group focused on a culturally responsive teaching content effective and successful. The researcher offers the following recommendations for further study:

1. Revisit the participants of this study in one year and see if the TSG content had a long-term impact on their attitudes and teaching practices.
2. Examine a TSG focused on CRT methods in an elementary or high school setting and evaluate the learning experiences of those teachers.
3. Conduct a TSG focused on a different content area (such as reading or math) and evaluate the learning experiences of the participants.
4. Research the cost-effectiveness of a TSG as a means to deliver staff development to teachers.

5. Recreate this study in a rural or suburban school district and compare the findings.
6. Include observation of teachers to examine changes in teachers' teaching practices and teaching strategies as a result of TSG.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research produced two important results for the educational realm. First, there is a tremendous need for schools and school districts to offer our current practitioners better and more meaningful staff development. This study found that type of staff development can be offered through a TSG. Next, trained and certified teachers clearly have little to no understanding of the tenets of culturally responsive teaching methods. In a state where over 50% of the school population is students of color, it is irresponsible and inexcusable for teachers not to know how to work with their students. The research has to be put out there and placed into the hands of the decision makers.

Researchers, teacher educators and current practitioners should all rise to the call to report on CRT practices that are proving meaningful, validating to students and effecting achievement. Without increasing all educators' awareness of CRT, we can count on failing most of our students. This study was designed for five teachers to become more culturally aware and they did. Hopefully, they too will take on the responsibility, as have I, to teach and share with others.

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APPENDIX A

Suggested Session Agendas

Information Session:

- Introduction and explanation of study
- IRB Paperwork explained and signed
- Informational Survey
- Assignment:
 - Read Chapters 1-2 of Gay
 - Reflection Journal Entry – What is CRT

Session I:

(Assignment – will be given in advance)

- *Read Chapters 1-2 of Gay*
- *Reflection Journal Entry – What is CRT*
- Establish norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (Gay 1-2)
- Group Activity –
 - Brainstorm definitions and characteristics of CRT
 - Posterboards
- Brainstorming session – “Culturally Responsive Teaching is Empowering”
 - Read p. 32-33
 - Generate a list of ways to empower your students
- Reflection (at end or at home) ...
 - Review pp. 42-43
 - What roles and responsibilities do you play/have as the teacher in the classroom? What will you do/have you done to be culturally responsive
- Assignment:
 - Read Gay Chapter 3
 - Read *The Dreamkeepers* Chapter 3

Session II:

- Review norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (Gay 3 and *Dreamkeepers* 3)
- Brainstorming session – “The Power of Caring”
 - Use Readings from last assignment
 - Generate a list of ways to authentically care about your students
 - Discuss personal experiences and the impact

- Independent Reflection
 - Review pp. 50-51
 - Choose one or two students and make a plan for how you will “care” about them outside of the classroom setting
 - **KEEP A RUNNING RECORD OF THIS UNTIL NEXT MEETING**
- Assignment:
 - Read Gay Chapters 4 and 6
 - Read *Dreamkeepers* 4
 - Running Record of “Caring”
 - Bring a copy of one lesson plan for next meeting

Session III:

- Review norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (Gay 4 and 6)
- Group Activity – “Diverse Learning Styles”
 - Divide into partners and become an “expert” in the learning styles of various ethnic groups (African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic)
 - Present to the group
 - Discuss the pros and cons of this type of generalizing
- Independent Reflection – “Lesson Planning with CRT”
 - Review a previous lesson plan
 - Note any uses of CRT methods
 - What additional steps could have been taken to make the lesson more culturally responsive?
 - Share and Discuss
- Assignment:
 - *Dreamkeepers* Chapter 5
 - Bring copy of a new lesson plan in which you incorporate CRT methods – note them

Session IV:

- Review norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (*Dreamkeepers* 4)
- Group Activity – “Re-Defining CRT”
 - Revisit initial definition of CRT from journal
 - Add or delete information to come up with a new definition
- Independent Reflection – “CRT Characteristic Challenge”
 - Reread *Dreamkeepers* pp. 123-126
 - Complete Worksheet

- Group Activity – “Re-Defining CRT”
 - Group discussion of worksheets
 - Implications for practice
- Assignment:
 - *Dreamkeepers* Chapter 7
 - Gay Chapter 6

Session V:

- Review norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (*Dreamkeepers* 7 and Gay 6)
- Group Activity – “Am I a Culturally Responsive Teacher?”
 - Fill out worksheet – characteristics of you as a teacher
 - Discussion of characteristics – T-Chart
 - Place characteristics in 2 categories – Teacher and Culturally Responsive Teacher
- Independent Reflection –
 - If you could give advice on how to be a successful with our students what would it be?
 - Make a poster of it
 - Share and tell why
- Assignment:
 - Gay Chapter 8

Session VI:

- Review norms and guidelines of TSG
- Discussion of reading and personal reflections (Gay 8)
- Group Discussion –
 - Overall thoughts of TSG (+/-)
 - Overall thoughts on CRT (+/-)
 - Highlights and low points
- Presentation of Certificate
- Final Reflections in journal

APPENDIX B

Teacher Information Survey

Please complete the following information about yourself:

1. Gender _____ Male _____ Female

2. Ethnicity _____

3. Educational Attainment

Bachelors degree

Institution:

Major:

Masters degree

Institution:

Major:

Post-Masters

Institution:

Major:

Other:

4. What is your certification (state and type)?

5. How many total years have you been teaching?

6. Please list all subjects taught, in what district and for how long.

APPENDIX C

Final Evaluation

What caused you to miss a session (if any)?

Would you want to participate in another study group again? Why or why not?

Compare the TSG to other types of staff development. Which do you prefer and why?

What concepts of CRT stuck with you after the study group?

Would you have acted or treated this differently if you were given time during the work day to have the TSG?

How did you feel in the sessions ... were you looking for someone to tell you what to do, to guide you or did you feel that you had the control? *ELABORATE*

Has your opinion of staff development changed after participating in the study group?

Did the TSG meet your original expectations?.

Define CRT.

APPENDIX D

CHAMPs Classroom Activity Worksheet

C onversation

Can you talk during this activity?

If yes, about what?

With whom may you talk?

H elp

How do you get questions answered?

How do you get the teacher's attention?

If you have to wait for help, what should you do?

A ctivity

What is the expected product/outcome of this activity?

M ovement

Can you get out of your seat during the activity?

If yes, what are acceptable reasons?

Do you need permission?

P articipation

What behaviors show that you are participating fully and responsibly?

What behaviors show that a student is not participating?

VITA

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