ABSTRACT

MCKINNON, JENNIFER DANIELLE. Culturally Relevant Teaching in Diverse Communities and the Impact on Discipline Outcomes (Under the direction of Dr. Michael E. Ward).

My dissertation explored the impact of culturally relevant teaching strategies in elementary classrooms on the disciplinary outcomes for Black students. This was assessed through an analysis of referral and suspension rates throughout the academic year, as well as the frequency of negative interactions that were observed between teachers and students during instructional times. In the context of American society's growing demand for a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse actions and beliefs, and amid some resistance, it is crucial that this comprehension of culturally relevant teaching practices extends beyond superficial acknowledgment. Cultural awareness is vital, starting from an early age, to prepare students adequately in public education systems that strive for high academic standards. However, developing meaningful relationships between students and educators can be challenging if there is a lack of genuine connection and understanding (Gay, 2002).

The study was conducted in a public K-5 elementary school in a large district in central North Carolina. The school served approximately 700 students and Black students comprised about 15% of the population. Among the three participants, two taught in fourth-grade classrooms, while one taught in a fifth-grade classroom. All three participants were White females. Their teaching experience in the public-school context varied, ranging from eight to sixteen years. They all fulfilled the minimum criteria for participation in the study. Additionally, one participant also possessed a Master of Arts degree in reading education.

I gathered quantitative data in the form of school and district discipline statistics, quasi-quantitative data in the form of enumerated interactions that I observed between teachers and students, and qualitative data from interviews with the teacher participants. Observations across

these classrooms indicated a lack of consistency in applying culturally responsive teaching methods. The interactions between teachers and students, and the effectiveness of behavior management strategies, varied significantly based on the classroom environment, instructional materials, and the degree to which students felt included in the learning process. Teachers expressed concerns over the sporadic use of PBIS and circle time processes, contributing to the uneven application of culturally relevant practices throughout the school.

Although there was recognition of the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into teaching, the implementation of such practices varied widely. In some cases, there was minimal effort to incorporate multicultural content or to acknowledge the students' diverse cultural identities, leading to more negative interactions in certain classrooms. The research highlighted the disproportionately high incidence of behavioral issues among students of color, especially Black males, and suggested that subjective biases might influence disciplinary decisions. The findings call for policy and practice changes aimed at ensuring equitable treatment and minimizing negative behavioral incidents among elementary students. The findings also served to undergird recommendations for future research.

Culturally Relevant Teaching in Diverse Communities and the Impact on Discipline Outcomes

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is wholeheartedly dedicated to the most important people in my life, who have provided me with the strength, inspiration, and love needed to navigate this challenging as well as rewarding journey. First and foremost, to my husband, for your unwavering support, patience, and belief in my capabilities. Your encouragement and love have been my sanctuary, enabling me to pursue my dreams relentlessly. To my entire world, Brayden, who has been my greatest joy and motivation. Watching you grow as I journeyed through this process has filled me with a sense of purpose and determination incomparable to any other.

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BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer McKinnon is a devoted educator and advocate for equitable education. Originally from Bunn, North Carolina, she embarked on her educational journey at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education. Jennifer began her career in education within the Wake County Public School System, where she took on the roles of kindergarten and third grade teacher, laying the foundation for her lifelong commitment to teaching and learning.

Driven by her passion for lifelong learning, Jennifer furthered her education by earning a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from North Carolina Central University. Her dedication to enhancing the educational experience for both teachers and students led her to pursue and complete a Masters in School Administration, also at North Carolina Central University.

Over the years, Jennifer has made significant contributions to the educational community, serving as the assistant Principal at Holly Grove Elementary School before assuming her current role as an assistant Principal at Holly Springs Elementary School. Her career has been driven by a persistent desire to foster equitable outcomes for all students, a mission that she continues with unwavering enthusiasm.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Jennifer is a proud wife and mother, enjoying time with her 10-year-old son. Her journey reflects not only her dedication to the field of education but also her commitment to her family and the broader community she serves.

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"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." - Philippians 4:13

This journey has been a testament to the strength and guidance I've received, not only from those around me, but from an unwavering faith in God and His love, grace, and commitment to me throughout this process. There is no way that I could have gotten to this point without God's unconditional love. I am thankful and truly blessed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter Introduction

Positive classroom environments are places in which students thrive academically and socially. Those environments also need to be free from disruptions to ensure that students have a place that is conducive to learning (Skiba et al., 2016). As the world becomes more diverse, classroom teachers need to be prepared to engage with all students regardless of their background or abilities for students to thrive (Brown, 2004). Teachers should possess the essential skills of knowing how to address and respond to multiple needs within an urban classroom setting (Brown, 2004). Professional learning experiences should aid teachers in the acquisition of such capacities. It is important that university teacher programs embrace the ideals of knowing and understanding that students' backgrounds and interests are assets to teaching and learning and will support student success (Olson & Rao, 2016). It is important for preservice education programs to support the development of different perspectives in the classroom (White, 2021). Brown (2004) stated, "Gaining students' cooperation in urban classrooms involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of and address students' cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs" (p. 267).

This dissertation investigated the topic of Black students' behavior outcomes in primary school settings as well as the connection between reported office discipline referrals and intentionally used culturally relevant instructional strategies. As American culture becomes more diverse, the educational practices of schools and classrooms need to continue to evolve as well. This is especially important for Black students within the public-school setting.

> Student culture is something that within classrooms is not connected to their success. This mismatch between school culture and the culture of the students creates the potential for misunderstanding of actions and misinterpretation of communication between teacher and student. (Ware, 2006, p. 428)

Educators should continuously be including different perspectives within their classrooms, making sure to connect to the cultures of the students they serve. Beckett (2011) states that teachers who understand culture and its relevance assume the posture of being "all things to all people" (p.74). They embrace the goal of ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the world in which students and their teachers live (Beckett, 2011). It is important that children feel accepted within the setting where they work, with the materials and curriculum that are used to educate them, and within the norms to which they have been taught to adhere through family beliefs (Beckett, 2011). "Teachers today who work with a diverse group of students have a challenging job. Teachers' perspective taking abilities and multicultural attitudes seem critical for negotiating the complexities of diversity in classrooms. These qualities enable teachers to better align their teaching to their students' needs" (Abacioglu et al., 2020, p. 745).

Understanding the cultures in which people function increases the tolerance one has for those who are different. Schools are potentially overrepresenting student demographic groups in office discipline referrals. Discipline disproportionality is unlikely to be reduced without an equity focus and culturally responsive practices (Zakszeski et al., 2021). Modeling how to accept different perspectives is something that preservice teachers should experience and will support the acceptance and value the diversity students bring into the classroom (Landorf et al., 2007).

Statement of Problem

In American society, there has been a push for citizens to be more understanding of others' actions and beliefs. There has also been resistance to this movement; in light of these conflicting perspectives, this understanding needs to go beyond the surface level. The impact of cultural understanding needs to be seen even by the youngest students. Progress continues to be made within the United States in terms of recognizing and understanding how the history of the country and its origins have an impact on the current social, economic, and political dimensions of society (Skiba et al., 2016). Educators who work with children in the United States are faced with the challenging tasks of not only nurturing students academically but doing so within the context of multiple attitudes and perceptions within their classrooms. Brown (2004) stated that "gaining students' cooperation in urban classrooms involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of and address students' cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs" (p. 267).

Public schools are challenged with the responsibility of educating students to a high standard; this can be difficult if relationships between students and educators are strained or lack relational investment. According to Gay (2002), despite having a varied student body, many American schools struggle to integrate cultural responsiveness into their curriculum and many teachers are underprepared to teach students from other origins and cultures. Teachers' need the resources and encouragement to acquire knowledge about different ethnic groups to help support a deeper understanding about multicultural education (Gay, 2002). Krawczyk (2019) found that in the classrooms of teachers who get to know their students and their families while appreciating different cultures, discipline problems decrease, and the teachers become less preoccupied with the negative dimensions of classroom environment.

Disciplinary consequences are disproportionately administered to students of color in American schools (Skiba et al., 2011). Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2010) found that Black students in urban school settings are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline practices when compared to their White counterparts. Similarly, Bradshaw et al. (2010) found that Black boys in an elementary classroom setting were 55% more likely to receive an office discipline referral compared to their White counterparts.

The interpretation of disciplinary infractions and the criteria for administering consequences are often subjective (Bradshaw et al., 2010). In many ways that subjectivity results too often in a discipline referral to the office instead of working with students to understand their needs and what might work better (Bradshaw et al., 2010). A study by Girvan et al. (2016) showed that there was a substantial difference between subjective office discipline referrals (ODRs) and objective ODRs. Students of color received subjective ODRs at a disproportionately higher rate of 1.5 to 3 times (Girvan et al., 2016).

Decreasing disproportionate administration of negative discipline outcomes to students of color is important in elementary school settings. The study results reported above show the need to help teachers identify and counteract implicit biases in order to reduce overall discipline disproportionality (Girvan et al., 2016). “There are many research studies that show the overrepresentation of Black students in office discipline referrals” (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p. 509). This, in turn, results in lack of direct instruction from the classroom setting and an increased risk for academic failure (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Among measures that can create more just and equitable classroom environments is the practice of ensuring that the instructional environment is relevant to multicultural groups of students. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that culturally relevant pedagogy relies on three different

criteria: “students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 483). Ladson-Billings also conducted research in classrooms that were identified as successful. The teachers who showed greater positive impacts on students' learning and behaviors were equitable in their treatment of students and created a class-wide bond rather than individualized relationships that may foster competitiveness within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Brown (2004) concluded that “effective classroom management consists of essential research-based pedagogical processes and connects to the emotional, social, ethnic, cultural, and cognitive needs of students” (p. 268). Culturally responsive pedagogy within elementary schools can have an important impact on discipline practices and outcomes. Many discipline problems that students of color have within the classroom and school setting stem from the lack of understanding of different cultures and norms among diverse student groups and an absence of willingness of teachers to work to include different perspectives in approaches to learning (Ware, 2006).

Student populations in urban America are very often culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse (Wells et al., 2016). The teacher population is far less diverse; an overwhelming majority of preservice teachers entering the field are White middle-class Americans (Brown, 2004). Teachers who do not connect with the culture of their students “frequently discount the home language and cultural understanding of CLD students and assume that their needs are the same as that of monolingual students” (Krawczyk, 2019). Krawczyk (2019) further concluded that there are many educators who do not understand the value of multicultural, relevant instruction in the classroom, and its impact on student success (Krawczyk,

2019). It is important that connections are found between teaching practices, student cultural identities, and student behaviors. Education of all students needs to become more culturally and linguistically adjusted to meet the needs of all students (Krawczyk, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my dissertation study was to determine whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect the discipline outcomes of Black students, as evidenced by the number of referrals and suspensions that occur throughout the school year, and, as evidenced by the number of negative behavior interactions that occurred between the classroom teacher and students during instruction. Culturally relevant practices also involve responding to the needs of diverse learners and adjusting or adapting curriculum to help students make connections to what they are learning (Brown, 2004).

This study took place in an elementary school in a large school district in Central North Carolina in which one-fourth of the students within the school receive free and reduced school lunch. The research design was a qualitative case study. I interviewed and observed teachers within the school setting. All observations were conducted with rubrics created to gather specific information about classroom practices related to culturally relevant pedagogy. Responses from the interviews and observational data from classrooms were analyzed to determine the answers to the research questions that are outlined later in this chapter and in Chapter 3. Each participant took part in an announced observation during core instruction, followed by a preliminary interview. Near the end of the study, participants were observed a second time in their school environment within their classroom setting during instruction. A concluding one-to-one interview was held with each participant at the end of the research study.

The research was conducted in central North Carolina in an urban elementary school where approximately fifty-five percent of the students are White. The research focused on the effect of culturally responsive teaching on disciplinary outcomes for Black students. The research assessed participants' strategies for reducing behavior incidences within their classrooms. Teachers participated in the study on a voluntary basis.

The teachers had a range of experience with implementing culturally relevant practices in the classroom setting. The school in which the research was conducted had not had any formal professional development within at least the past ten years regarding culturally relevant teaching strategies.

Research that addresses cultural responsiveness and its impacts on Black students within the classroom setting is timely and important. This study was responsive to the limited body of knowledge in which the relationships among engagement, response to behaviors in the classroom prior to the disciplinary infraction or consequence, and discipline outcomes for Black students are analyzed.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following core research question and related sub-questions: Central research question: How do participants describe the influence of culturally relevant teaching practices on discipline outcomes among students of color in an elementary school setting?

1. What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students?
2. Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions?

3. How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?
4. What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?
5. How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the chapters of this study. Definitions of the terminology are provided to mitigate confusion throughout the study. Some of the terms are technical terms specific to this study. Some terms are included because they may have one meaning in common parlance but have a unique meaning in discussions related to this study.

Classroom management: The wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to ensure that their classroom runs smoothly, without disruptive behavior from students (Mulvahill, 2018).

Critical consciousness: The ability to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems, especially those that result in societal inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally relevant pedagogy: Teaching practices that include (a) a focus on student learning and academic success, (b) developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and (c) supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Cultural responsiveness: Use of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2002).

Culture: The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, and social groups as well as the characteristics of shared people in a place or time (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Disproportionality: A group's representation in a particular category that exceeds expectations for that group or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category (National Association of School Psychologists, 2022).

Equitable opportunities: The effort to design a learning environment that accommodates students of different backgrounds and shapes their educational experience appropriately. This means that every student has access to the help and tools they need to achieve their academic goals, regardless of their background, language, color, economic status, gender, learning capacity, or family history (Western Governors University, 2021).

Implicit bias: A type of bias that influences judgements, decisions, and behaviors even though it happens spontaneously and unknowingly. According to research, unconscious bias might make it difficult to attract and keep a diverse workforce (National Institutes of Health, n.d.).

Marginalization: A form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities (UNESCO, 2009).

Office discipline referral (ODR): An event where "(a) a student engaged in behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified

by a member of the school staff, and (c) administrative staff delivered a consequence through a permanent (written) product that defined the whole event" (Sugai et al., 2000, p. 96).

Pedagogy: The art, science, or profession of teaching (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Professional development: Ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel through their schools and districts (Rebora, 2011).

Theoretical model: The foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Significance of the Study

I was motivated to complete this study because of my current work with different teachers as an educational administrator in the elementary school setting. I was interested in determining the impact of culturally relevant teaching on student discipline outcomes and on strategies adopted by teachers to provide positive experiences in culturally diverse settings. Student learning is dependent on the teacher's ability to construct and maintain favorable learning environments (Brown, 2004).

Beckett (2011) stated that culturally relevant teaching assumes that the basis of the curriculum is grounded in the cultural roots of America and needs to be completely re-visioned for the diverse students that are in classrooms across the country (Beckett, 2011). This research took place in an elementary school and will focus on teacher interactions, particularly behavior management practices, with Black students. Research was limited on the effect of culturally relevant pedagogy on disciplinary outcomes for Black students within school buildings in which the ratio of teachers who are White is significantly different than the ratio of students by race.

The number of behavior incidents reported by teachers that involve students of color, particularly Black males, is typically much higher than the number reported for their White counterparts, even for more subjective behaviors (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Brown (2004) stated that to minimize disruptive behaviors in the classroom, there needs to be a social environment created in which students feel as though they are a part of the pursuit of academic, social, and emotional growth (Brown, 2004). Conclusive literature about effective approaches to decreasing the number of incidents for Black students in elementary classroom settings is limited. More research is needed to determine if culturally relevant teaching practices support positive behavior outcomes for Black students in elementary classrooms (Larson et al., 2018). This study expanded the body of knowledge about such pedagogy.

In addition to expanding the body of knowledge, this research has the potential to provide information and guidance to policymakers on the development of statutes, code, and local policy. Such policy activity could include review of educational resources and materials, school improvement reform, and acknowledgement of the role race and ethnicity have in student learning. Teacher and administrator preparation programs will be able to use these data to aid course creators and professors as they review their curricula for the preparation of teachers in their programs. In order to ensure that all students succeed in school, the challenge of assisting aspiring teachers learn to establish relationships with students from culturally diverse backgrounds and implement equity pedagogy in the classroom has come to the forefront of teacher education. (Adams et al., 2007). School administrators and behavior support teams will be able to use information provided during classroom walkthroughs and observations. This research can also provide current teachers and administrators data on ways to improve teaching and learning within schools.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and includes a statement of purpose; it further details the problem that gives rise to the study and justifies the study through a statement of significance. Chapter 2 addresses the applicable body of knowledge through a review of relevant literature pertaining to culturally relevant practices in the elementary school setting and different approaches to teaching practices that are culturally relevant with classrooms. This review also investigates discipline practices and the relationship between culturally relevant pedagogy and positive behavior outcomes among Black students.

Chapter 3 presents information regarding the methodological approach for the study. A detailed description is given about this study's processes of sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The interview process and the observation procedures are also described. Finally, the proposed methods for analysis of qualitative data are detailed. Chapter 4 details the results of the analysis of the study data. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of these findings along with conclusions and implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Summary

The goal of this study was to determine whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect their discipline outcomes of Black students, as evidenced by the number of referrals and suspensions that occur throughout the school year. Throughout the research, I wanted to understand the relationship between the number of office referrals and related consequences and intentional culturally responsive practices highlighting specific strategies that are used throughout a public-school setting and within a large school district. The hope was that the findings from this research will benefit not

only the teachers who interact with students of color, but the students who historically have been marginalized within American society beginning in the elementary setting.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

The literature reviewed in this chapter discusses topics that are relevant to my study regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and its effects on classroom behaviors. Classroom behavior problems that are not managed appropriately can produce additional problems including high stress for students and teachers, as well as disruption to the teaching and learning process. The repercussions for students of a teachers' success or failure in creating a conducive learning environment and finding methods to defuse rather than increase student conduct are significant (Skiba et al., 2016). It can also unintentionally single students out and create a label for such a student of being a "problem student" (Parsonson, 2012). Parsonson (2012) observes that students come into the classroom with issues and experiences from their home and communities.

Focusing on individual students as the problem may not actually solve the behavior issues that exist in a classroom. One of the most important and defining relationships in the life of many students is their interaction with the faculty and staff (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Early on in elementary school, interactions between educators and students seem to have a lasting impact on the academic and behavioral results of students, especially when these relationships are detrimental (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Parsonson (2012) and others assert the need for restructuring of classroom management and approaches to learning how to engage students in the classroom. The following sections provide the background for the study and describe the context in which the study will occur. A theoretical framework is proposed, and a preliminary examination of pertinent theory and professional perspectives is provided.

This literature review examines culturally relevant practices in the elementary school setting and different approaches to teaching practices that are culturally relevant with classrooms. This review also investigates discipline practices and the relationship between cultural relevance and positive behavior outcomes among Black students. This chapter concludes by presenting connections between student outcomes and culturally relevant practices and pedagogy that are well-documented in the research literature.

Background and Policy Context

Culture can be defined or described as the cumulative knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and general concepts of life formed by a group of people through generations of time (Ware, 2006). It is one's way of life and includes socially constructed interactions among groups of people who are connected throughout a lifetime. Culture is learned behavior that is perpetuated within families and communities (Ware, 2006). Culture has also been described as consisting of three levels. Schein (1988) describes the first level as artifact, which represents the most observable and tangible levels of culture. Artifacts include visible behavior of groups, their values and mission, and their stories. The second level of culture is identified as values, which are the accepted reality of the group. Values of different groups are personal qualities, and how individuals act, speak, and interact with the world. The third level was identified by Schein as assumptions, which are values that endure and become the group's basic beliefs, which are largely accepted as fact (Schein, 1988).

Cultural groups often think and act differently, and there is no standard that renders one cultural group inferior to another (Little & McGivern, 2014). For example, cultures have different languages and conversational etiquette. Personal space and even eating and drinking vary from culture to culture (Little & McGivern, 2014). In American society, there are many

different cultural groups that interact daily. Becoming culturally relevant and responsive involves the understanding of culture and the openness to accept those who are different from what one has generationally been immersed within. The transition also involves understanding the importance of different knowledge systems being merged. Cultural relevance encompasses agreement that one's culture is not any better than that of others (UNESCO, 2009, p. 211).

The historically high percentage of White female teachers which has occurred in tandem with historically high percentages of students of color in American classrooms creates conditions for cultural gaps, particularly for Black students with and without disabilities (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Simmons-Reed and Cartledge refer to this disproportionality as the "diversity gap." The diversity gap is represented by the lack of teachers of color in public school classrooms (Paterson, 2018). Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) reported that about 50% of students enrolled in public schools come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. White educators made up more than 80% of public-school teachers at the time of the research (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

The lack of teachers of color arises from factors like the lack of students of color going into the teaching profession. Part of the reason why there are not enough future teachers of color and why European-American teacher trainees are so parochial is because leaders in teacher preparation schools' do not worry about diversity (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). Minority applicants are being excluded from the teaching profession in disproportionately high numbers. No matter the state, no matter the type of exam (admission or exit; standardized or customized; fundamental skills, general knowledge, subject area, or professional expertise), this exclusionary trend is obvious (Branch, 2001). There is also a need for creating more diverse graduating classes at the high school level, which enhances the diversity of the students in college who go

on to choose a career (Paterson, 2018). To effectively close the diversity gap, support for students of color needs to begin early in their schooling. There also needs to be more innovation in teacher recruitment efforts. Such measures might include ingenuity within the teaching programs and the ability to be creative and innovative in teaching practices with students, highly competitive scholarships, incentives such as student loan forgiveness, and increases in teacher salaries (Paterson, 2018). Paterson (2018) stated that there also needs to be more support for teachers of color within school districts. According to Will (2020), teachers of color pay an "invisible tax" by being required to perform unpaid tasks that are unrelated to their primary duties, such as translating for parents who do not speak English, supervising classroom behavior, or acting as role models for students from similar cultures and backgrounds.

There is increasing demand in elementary schools for culturally relevant pedagogy to be displayed in many ways throughout teaching and learning in classrooms (Beckett, 2011). Since curriculum and instruction take up a disproportionate amount of teacher education time and attention, affective learning—which is a key element of anti-racist, culturally responsive teaching—is neglected (Cosier, 2016; Dress, 2012). Irvine (2003, as cited in Beckett, 2011) asserts that many teachers have only a desultory understanding of what it means to be culturally relevant or what it looks like to bridge the gap between their cultures and the cultures of the students whom they serve. There is not only a need for cultural sensitivity, such as authors' and researchers' content but culturally responsive teaching practices that are effective and meaningful are needed for all students. Culturally responsive teaching should make students feel validated, affirmed, and empowered in their ability to perform well academically, behaviorally, and socially in a school setting (Brown, 2004). Culturally relevant teaching practices focus

around being responsive to the needs of the many culturally and ethnically diverse students in classrooms (Brown, 2004).

Teaching can be impacted by educators' beliefs and abilities to apply instructional strategies, especially when working with pupils from varied backgrounds (Bonner et al., 2017). Culturally sensitive educators are aware of the broader structural factors that have harmed marginalized groups over time and impeded their access to equitable educational opportunities. (Bonner et al., 2017). Norms that are set up within schools are often the dominant norms that come from White culture, and when students don't meet those expectations, teachers sometimes view such instances as a disciplinary issue (Castillo-Montoya, 2020). It is important that when thinking about culturally responsive practices, teachers and other practitioners also think about how to reframe the norms within a school to enact an equity standpoint (Castillo-Montoya, 2020). Teachers who fully embrace culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching practices can become change agents within their schools, facilitating the creation of equitable opportunities for students, particularly students of color (Cruz et al., 2019).

Cultural responsiveness also means addressing "colorblindness." Once lauded as a noble social aim by members of the majority population, the construct of colorblindness has been revealed as neither attainable nor creditable. (Kressler et al., 2019) states that collection of beliefs known as colorblindness describes how people think about, justify, and behave in relation to race. When it comes to students, colorblindness allows adults to ignore the racial identities of students by viewing them as separate from their cultural, economic, and social influences that have shaped their experiences (Kressler et al., 2019). In education, particularly classrooms, colorblindness appears as avoidance of topics that involve of race, unconscious actions that are associated with race, and impacts entire school environments (Kressler et al., 2019). Willful

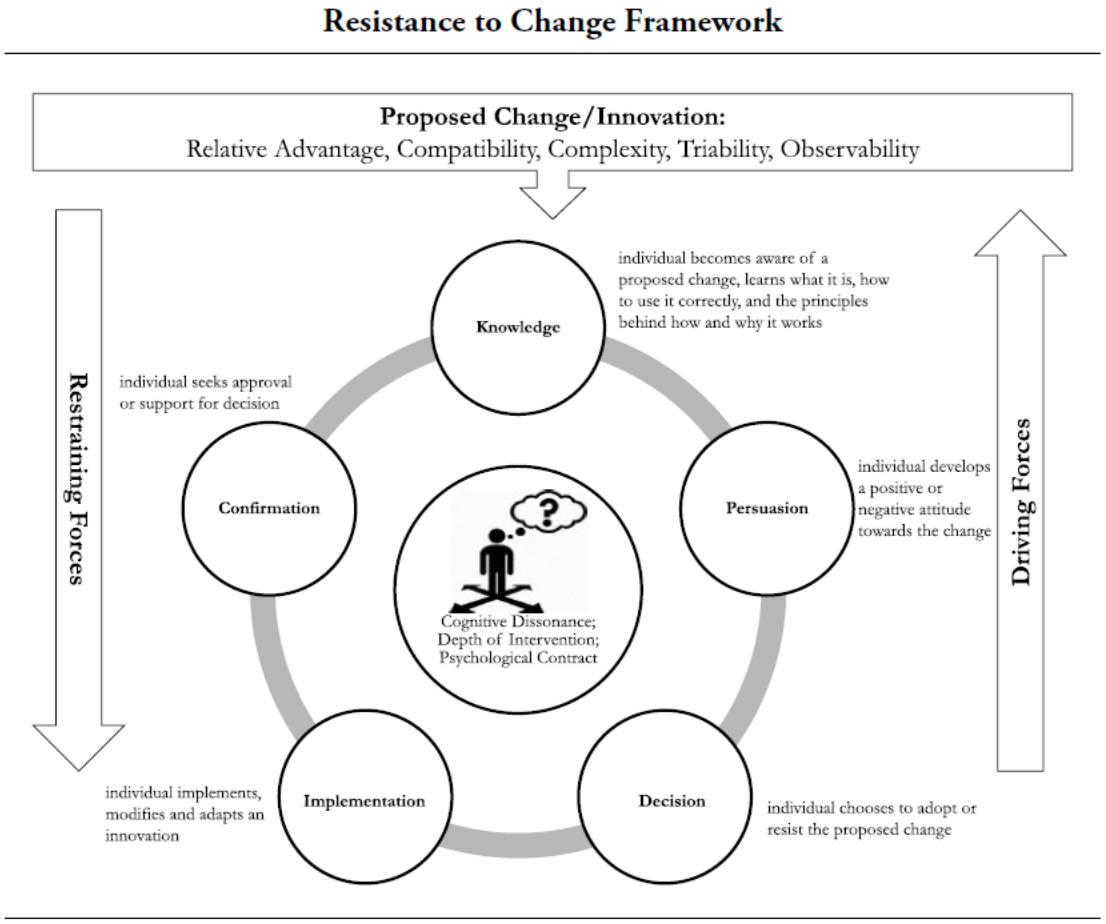
disregard for race and ethnicity interferes with students' ability to engage with others and, without conscious knowledge, can reinforce White privilege (Yull et al., 2014). "Colorblind approaches shift away from viewing structural racism as one of the primary causes of the problems that confront children of color and their families" (Yull et al., 2014, p. 13).

Boutte et al. (2011) stated that without addressing colorblindness at an early age, children are likely to develop misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior (Boutte et al., 2011). Culturally competent teachers consciously incorporate the experiences and cultural backgrounds of students from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic origins into their pedagogical approaches. Intentionality of culturally relevant experiences ensures that all students can not only engage in activities that connect to them but also minimize the number of students who are at risk (Bonner et al., 2017).

The cultural and political context in which my study will occur is one in which conceptual and practical models like culturally responsive pedagogy have become controversial, politicized, and met resistance (Serpell et al., 2020). The consequences of racism are overlooked, culture is not recognized, and a long history of unfair treatment is ignored if culturally responsive education is not authentically implemented (Freire, 2000; Kozol, 1992; Love, 2019). Resistance can be intensified when the attitudes and behaviors of the people who are resisting are not aligned with proposed change. The depth of the change or the magnitude of the impact can also affect the level of resistance with which the change is met (Neri et al., 2019). Figure 1 below from Neri et al. shows various factors that work together to influence the level of change that culturally responsive pedagogy implementation can produce among individuals in education. The figure also highlights how resistance to change can pose a unique problem and add a layer of complexity within schools and districts.

Figure 1

Resistance to Change Framework (Neri et al., 2019)



Neri et al. (2019) conclude that resistance to culturally relevant education may come from individuals, while others contend that it is proposed by the organizational context in which the proposed change takes place. Neri et al. (2019) stated that those who think that culturally relevant practices go against their psychological contract, which are unwritten rules of an organization, would more than likely find it unfair and be more resistant to engage (Neri et al., 2019).

Similar, and perhaps more virulent controversies surround critical race theory (CRT). Critical race theory (CRT) is an academic construct that offers a lens in which to view society. CRT asserts that race is a social construct, and that racism is comprised of individual biases that are embedded in the American culture (Sawchuk, 2022). Delgado et al. (2012) described the basic tenets of CRT. The first tenet asserts that racism is commonplace; it is therefore challenging to tackle or eliminate because it is not often acknowledged. The second tenet is often referred to as material determinism. Large areas of society have little incentive to eliminate racism because it serves the interests of both White elites and working-class Whites. The "social construction" thesis, which is a third critical race theory tenet, asserts that race and races are byproducts of social connections and beliefs. One further component is the idea of a distinctive voice of color. The voice-of-color thesis, which coexists in uneasy tension with antiessentialism, asserts that because of their diverse histories and experiences with oppression, people of color will be able to communicate with and share stories with their White counterparts about issues about which they are likely to be unaware.

CRT asserts that racism is ordinary and something that is an everyday experience for most people of color. Treatment of people of color that is colorblind or focused on equalness only remedies the blatant forms of discrimination such as mortgage redlining or hiring processes (Delgado et al., 2012). Secondly, Delgado et al. contend that interest convergence, or the advances that racism gives those who benefit from it, allows little motivation to eradicate it. Thirdly, Delgado et al. state that race is a social construct with no biological or genetic connections and that society continues to ignore basic scientific truths. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2017), CRT contends that education is a competitive achievement system that logically leads to racial disparity in education. The theory looks at how educational practices and

policy contribute to racial injustice and the maintenance of normative whiteness. Dixson and Rousseau (2017) also stated that the prevalent narrative that White people are normatively superior, and people of color are inherently inferior is rejected by CRT in education. Stovall (2004) asserted the importance of linking CRT to practice. A key question educators and researchers who focus on equity is "since we know this about racism, what do we do?" (p. 10). Stovall (2004) suggested using non-conventional practices to address issues that occur within schools, creating a productive space for students.

> In this sense CRT poses a call to work. It's one thing to know and analyze the functions of race. It is yet another to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining a school with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda in an age of conservative educational policy. (p. 10)

Delgado et al. (2012) go on to say that people of color suffer because of the racial social structure. According to CRT, narrating stories encourages people to unlearn widely held beliefs. Hackman and Rauscher (2004) highlighted the fact that, under the pretext of conventional curriculum, some student groups are excluded due to insensitive and unfair curriculum content and design. These authors state the following:

> …often under-funded…mandates across the nation leave many educators wondering how best to serve their students, particularly those students who do not fit into the mainstream … profile or curriculum. In today's schools, the needs of students with disabilities and members of other marginalized groups often go unmet, and as such, more inclusive educational approaches need to be adopted to ensure that all students have access to a solid education. (p. 114)

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote about an example of educational practices and policy contribute to racial injustice from a high school located in a Northern California school district:

> Of the five high schools in the district, one was located in a predominantly African American community. To entice White students to attend that school, the district funded a number of inducements including free camping and skiing trips. While the trips were available to all of the students, they were attended largely by the White students, who already owned the expensive camping and skiing equipment. However, these inducements were not enough to continuously attract White students. As enrollment began to fall, the district decided to close a school. Not surprisingly, the school in the African American community was closed and all of its students had to be (and continue to be) bused to the four White schools in the district (p.56).

Delgado et al. (2012) assert that CRT's tenets are crucial in light of the contemporary political, educational, and economic context.

According to Matias (2013), CRT suggests that if teacher education in America doesn't address the need for educators to become more culturally responsive in classrooms, teacher education will continue to be a White enterprise that produces more White teachers, White curriculum, and White standards in which future students will have to be measured (Matias, 2013). This trajectory will contribute to lack of connection for Black students within the classroom.

Culturally responsive pedagogy involves strategies that educators use with students to enhance classroom instruction and learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2014). In an article published in *Time Magazine*, Waxman discussed former President Trump's push for "patriotic education" and the call to halt any curriculum or sensitivity training that incorporated critical

race theory (2020). Culturally relevant pedagogy espouses the perspective that all feel represented in a space; however, states such as Texas and Florida have issued bans on books that address race or racism, as well as those with representations of the LBGTQ community (Najarro, 2022). North Carolina currently has a proposed Senate Bill, S700, which states, "When the viewpoint of one of the two major political parties in the United States is presented through materials, assignments, lectures, or other instruments for instruction in any classroom or other area of the school, the viewpoint of the alternative political party shall also be presented and given equal weight during the same instructional unit." (N.C. S700, 2021, p. 1).

The 1619 Project, awarded a Pulitzer Prize, has been incorporated into many curriculum units across the United States. The Project highlights the contributions of Black Americans while also showing the abuses and multi-generational impact of slavery. The Pulitzer Center has created curriculum resources for educators to use in classrooms with their students to support the reframing of US History, allowing for historical facts and events to be shared (The 1619 Project, n.d.). One of the goals of this curriculum is to support culturally responsive practices in classrooms that create students who are informed and empathetic individuals. This project has been met with resistance, including criticism from former President Trump, who stated that the 1619 Project "rewrites American history to teach our children that we were founded on the principle of oppression, not freedom" (Crowley, 2020, p.2). Given such discord over the issue of culturally responsive pedagogy and the persistence of inequitable academic and behavioral outcomes for students of color, there is a gap in the research literature that this study will attempt to address. There is a need for more research to assess the impact of relevant history and culturally responsive pedagogy on student success in classroom settings, particularly with respect to inequitable discipline practices and outcomes for students in the school setting

Theoretical Framework

"Something very magical happens in those classrooms where skilled and caring adults who celebrate diversity are committed to truly inclusive teaching and learning"

(Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014, p. 18).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

All students deserve to have a classroom environment in which they see themselves and feel as though they are important. Culturally relevant instruction focuses on empowerment of constituents in the learning process and inclusive research-based practices for students and their families closest to the opportunity gaps (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In schools, students should "experience academic success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). These perspectives are important in schools, and relevant to my research focus. Therefore, I have elected the conceptual models of culturally relevant pedagogy and engaged pedagogy to frame my study. Both pedagogies will support my inquiry into whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect the discipline outcomes of their Black students, as evidenced by the number of referrals and suspensions that occur during the span of the study.

Ladson-Billings (1995) defined cultural relevant pedagogy as a "theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate" (p. 469). She asserted that "culturally relevant pedagogy should produce students who can achieve academically, demonstrate cultural competence, and can both understand and critique the existing social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 474).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a way for schools to establish home-to-school connections and integrate cultural nuances in the classroom setting. Students should connect experiences to home and school, their cultures, values, and beliefs (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). “Teachers should realize that students who are racial or ethnic minorities see, view, and perceive themselves and others differently than those of the majority group” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 73). Therefore, understanding that students’ race and cultural differences can influence their experiences in the classroom is an important concept for educators to grasp and act upon. Structures in the classroom with a culturally relevant orientation can support student engagement, on-task behaviors, and connect the learner to what they are learning and why (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy calls for teachers to invest in students’ success to support student learning and how to choose academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) also asks that teachers know and understand students’ cultures and help them view their culture as a means of positive impact in the classroom; such practices can accelerate achievement and can minimize disruptive behaviors (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Engaged Pedagogy

When discussing engaged pedagogy, educators are facilitating experiences that are outside of what students may have learned in the past as their engagement limits and participation with students beyond the standards being taught. In 1994, hooks explained,

> Engaged pedagogy involves journeying with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson is that we can learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together with and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement. (p. 205)

The author suggested that successful teachers integrate experiences that students have outside of the classroom to ensure that they are making the time in the classroom relevant and rich for the students. Engaged pedagogy discusses the idea that not only students share their culture and take risks in the classroom, but the adults in the classroom do so as well. In 1994, hooks stated that engagement in understanding and accepting their own cultures and using pedagogical practices that incorporate all students will enhance student success. Rhodes (2021) stated that researchers have created learning outcomes that are acknowledged as crucial to students' performance in the workplace and in life.

> There is a set of highly effective and engaged pedagogies and practices that provide iterative opportunities for students to practice and develop these learning outcomes at more complex and sophisticated levels of performance in solving problems, discovering solutions to challenges, and creating innovation and progress. (Rhodes, 2021, p. 21)

The engaged pedagogy framework will guide my research protocols. It helped me frame an observational rubric as a tool to learn more about how teachers implement personal engagement within their classroom culture and to discern its effects on culturally relevant practices in their work with students. Aligned with the conclusions of a study conducted by Danowitz and Tuitt (2011), I have drawn upon the engaged pedagogy framework to help me form interview questions that support gaining a better understanding of the impact of traditional approaches to teaching, learning, and social-emotional support versus engaging in topics surrounding equity, inclusion, personal experiences, and embracing perspective. The core constructs in the theories will also inform how I approach the professional development process for the research participants and the important aspects of culturally relevant teaching that will significantly impact implementation in the classroom.

Pertinent Research and Expert Perspectives

This section will explore relevant research and expert research perspectives on the key constructs that are examined in this study. These include disciplinary trends and teacher approaches to discipline within the elementary classroom setting.

Disciplinary Trends

Students of color receive disproportionately high rates of disciplinary consequences in the United Stated. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reported that in 2017 that 46.5% of in-school suspensions were administered to Black students in the district where the participants teach. OCR also reported that 54.5% of out-of-school suspensions and 100% of expulsions were Black students (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018). According to the 2020-2021 Consolidated Data Report provided by the North Carolina Department of Instruction, male students who identified as Two or More Races reported the highest rate of short-term suspensions, followed by Black males. During the 2021-2022 school year, Black males made up 10.4 % of the student population in the district where the research will take place.; however, these Black male students comprised 25.2% of short-term suspensions in 2020-2021. They were followed by Black females at 10.8%. White students made up 44.4% of the student population while making up about 26% of the short-term suspensions (Center for Safer Schools, 2022). Not only did Black students have disproportionate amounts of short terms suspensions, but Black students also had the highest average number of days of suspension in the Repeat Offender and Substance Use Related categories and the second highest days of suspensions in the Assaults/Threats category (Center for Safer Schools, 2022).

Discipline in schools has shifted from previous punitive practices that may have occurred in the elementary school settings that had negative impacts on the Black population of students

in a disproportionate manner (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). There are decades of evidence that show how harsh discipline practices throughout school settings can be detrimental to students, especially students of color. Disproportionality within discipline practices at schools across the nation show how students of color are more likely to be receive harsher consequences, including suspensions, even for minor misconduct (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge). Exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions have been shown over time to be of a detriment to students' academic and social success within schools (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). If schools are dedicated to the success of all students, researchers like Ladson-Billings and others assert that the practices within schools need to be culturally responsive in their approaches to student discipline within schools.

Teacher Approaches to Discipline

"Maintaining a positive classroom environment free from disruption is crucial if classrooms are to be instructionally conducive for teaching and learning" (Skiba et al., 2016, p. 120). Many researchers have found correlations between positive classroom management and improved achievement, higher rates of on-task behavior, and lower discipline referrals (Brown, 2004). For students to be safe in schools, behavioral incidents should be handled effectively and, whenever possible, within the classroom. Once students with problematic behaviors leave the classroom to be disciplined by administrators, they are likely to miss instruction due to the consequences received. When teachers can de-escalate or avoid inappropriate student behaviors within the classroom, the well-being of both the students and teachers is nurtured (Skiba et al., 2016).

There are two crucial aspects of how behavior is treated, how teachers evaluate students' actions, and how they decide what form of referral will most effectively address the behavior, if

one is required, and whether the behavior warrants one (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021). Skiba et al. (2011) found that instructors are 3.78 times more likely to refer Black children to the office than White students in elementary school. Additionally, they discovered that being Black significantly strengthens the likelihood that a student will receive an out-of-school suspension; thus, school administrators become equally responsible for choosing more severe exclusionary penalties for Black students.

Dray and Wisneski (2011) discussed the importance of teachers looking inward and addressing their own assumptions and implicit biases. Although it is an emotional risk for teachers to examine their deeply rooted beliefs, not doing so can directly impact how they treat the students in their classrooms (Dray & Wisneski, 2011). McIntosh et al. (2017) stated that decisions are impacted by implicit bias subconsciously. It is more likely to influence judgements that must be made quickly. Specific to discipline in schools, implicit bias is highlighted through research on disproportionality for violations that require more subjective judgement (McIntosh et al., 2017). Specific guidance needs to be given to teachers and administrators regarding making unbiased decisions in schools. McIntosh et al. (2017) proposed that vulnerable decision points (VDPs) or contextual elements of a specific event needs to be reviewed based on individual school data. For example, the location of the incident as well as the state in which the teacher responded (fatigued vs. focused) are both important to identify precise school level VDPs.

If there are no school or district data to focus on specifically, then national discipline data could be used to analyze situations based on the disproportionate outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2017). Understanding themselves better can help teachers to honestly see their reactions to others. Teachers may also need to reconsider how they communicate with their stakeholders,

specifically students and their families. Effective communication requires work in understanding the beliefs of not only oneself but others as well (Dray & Wisneski, 2011, p. 30).

Problem Solving Rather Than Punishment

It is understood that students who are disruptive cause interruption to the teaching and learning process within the classroom. Working with students who are showing those behaviors and using restorative practices (RPs) will allow teachers to focus on problem-solving rather than punishment (Skiba et al., 2016). Educational-based RP can take many different forms along the continuum of prevention-intervention, and it should ideally aim to change school environments to foster connections and interactions between students and adults. Supporting active responsibility, genuine student voice, and student agency is another aspect of school-based RP. The old punitive punishment system should become less authoritarian because of these methods (Garnett et al., 2020). RPs in a school setting are preventative discipline practices with the intentions of building positive relationships between students and staff as well as support a more caring instructional environment (Lustick, 2020). RP has resulted in positive changes in school climates and school connectedness for students. Research from Kervick et al. (2019) shows that RP implemented early in elementary school settings supports contributes to an increase in students obtaining their high school degree a decline in negative post-secondary outcomes. Kervick et al. (2019) stated that restorative practices "became an additional tool that teachers utilized to create a positive classroom culture, build community, promote social/emotional learning, and address behavioral challenges as they arose" (p. 171).

Kervick et al. (2019) concluded that restorative practice (RP) circle processes most closely reflect indigenous teachings that values interconnectedness between people. "Schoolwide RP practices draw from the community-based restorative justice model in criminal justice,

utilizing prevention and intervention strategies to build community, strengthen relationships among students and adults, and reduce punitive discipline" (Kervick et al., 2019, p.156). RPs are often delivered through tiered interventions that respond to students' individual behavioral needs (Kervick et al., 2019). In this model, tier one focuses on community and skill building, tier two focuses on interventions that reduce harm within communities, and tier three is focused on more intense practices that focus on students who need support with reentry into their learning environment and interactions with their peers (Kervick et al., 2019, p. 157). Augustine et al. (2018) report that suspensions declined among elementary students in Pittsburgh Public Schools after two years of exposure to a restorative discipline model. They also noticed a decline in the suspension rates between students of color and White students as well as between students from high-SES and low-SES families. In comparison to control schools, schools that used restorative practices schools reported twice the reduction in the number of days of student suspensions over a two-year period.

Schoolwide Behavior Intervention Support

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is a behavioral approach that focuses on teaching, reinforcing, and applying positive behavior outcomes. PBIS focuses on objective discipline procedures including defining behaviors, specifically what they could look like and what they mean, then distinguishing between what can be handled within the classroom with the teacher versus the office with an administrator can support reducing the impact of implicit bias (McIntosh et al., 2017). Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) stated that "School Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) is a proactive, positive approach aimed at consistently teaching, reinforcing, and applying consistent behavioral consequences, while monitoring the performance of expected behaviors and collecting data for the purpose of making school-wide data driven

decisions" (p. 102). SWPBS is a strategy for enhancing a school's capacity to adopt responsible, effective, and preventative behavioral practices, make team-based decisions based on evidence, and foster a culture and environment that is conducive to the growth and success of the school (Gage et al., 2018; Horner et al., 2009).

Research has shown that schools that implement these strategies with fidelity and support them schoolwide have a significant reduction in the severity of disciplinary outcomes (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). For example, Childs et al. (2016) investigated the impact of SWPBS deployment over a 4-year period in 1,222 elementary schools. The authors used growth modeling and found that schools that implemented SWPBS more faithfully had a significant decrease in both in- and out-of-school suspensions (OSS), as well as office disciplinary referrals (ODR). A randomized controlled experiment (RCT) was carried out by Bradshaw et al. (2010) in 37 elementary schools. In order to adopt SWPBS, 21 schools got training and assistance, while 16 functioned as control schools. The authors discovered overall beneficial effects on discipline outcomes such as suspensions and ODR.

Providing educators with training regarding the office discipline referral process, especially using specific VDPs that were identified for specific schools can help support the consistency with discipline approaches and positive behavior outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2017). Similar to restorative practices, PBIS also has tiered levels of interventions that help support student behavioral needs. For PBIS, Tier 1 includes teaching schoolwide behavioral expectations, Tier 2 provides a check in/check out system with students and other adult educators in their school building, and Tier 3 focuses on wraparound supports for students who need to integrate back into their classroom setting (Kervick et al., 2019).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement within the school setting leads to positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students, especially students of color (Yull et al., 2014). Parent involvement does not always look the same. Historically, school personnel have viewed parent involvement as coming into the building and participating in school events; those parents who did not engage this way were often viewed as disengaged and uncaring. Parent involvement, especially from a cultural perspective, needs to be reciprocal, focusing on relationships between the parents, students, and classroom teachers (Yull et al., 2014). Serpell et al. (2020) found that if schools wish to address Black kids' discriminatory practices, they must address the issues surrounding parental engagement. Teachers and school counselors who were a part of the Serpell et al. (2020) research study indicated that parental involvement was deemed an important part of the intervention process but was not very obtainable in their time within the school. Parents are an important source of information and can help school administrators go away from exclusionary practices and become more involved in practices that support school-based social emotional intervention (Serpell et al., 2020).

Traditional models of parent involvement, where parents come into the school, limit parents' involvement both socially and logistically and can become a barrier for parents who are seeking ways to be engaged in their child's educational experience (Fenton et al., 2017). Parents have a crucial role in students' educational experiences, yet power dynamics in school partnerships continue to be problematic, particularly in urban schools (Fenton et al., 2017).

Despite findings that show racial disparities in the impact of home-based involvement, academic sociocultural activities, and the environmental diversity of these practices, including how Black families specifically teach coping mechanisms in response to discrimination in

schools, research in these areas often lacks the necessary context-specific detail (Huguley et al., 2020).For families with Black children, the issue of parental involvement is especially important because Black learners perform worse than their White peers on many academic measures (Delpit, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Kunjufu, 2012). Even while Black parents work hard to integrate into the school community, Black students continue to receive harsher penalties, more suspensions, and expulsions at a rate that is three times higher than that of their peers who exhibit the same behaviors (Delpit, 2012; Kunjufu, 2012). Jeynes (2005) concluded that Black parents have high expectations for their children's academic performance, and the parents' involvement in their children's education seemed to have a favorable impact on student progress. Black parents have long expressed dissatisfaction with the interactions and lines of communication between their homes and schools (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016).

School communities need to work to earn the trust of their parents and establish a rapport to foster student success (Fenton et al., 2017). Relationships with parents that are positive will likely have parents become more involved in the academic and social process, and in turn support the classroom environment within the school setting (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Yull et al., 2014). This takes commitment from teachers and school staff to invest their time in understanding different cultures and perspectives and their historical feelings towards schools and working together to make their experiences moving forward positively.

Caring Attitude

For students to finish school and be satisfied, their opinions or views of their school as a community that supports them personally are crucial (Baker, 1998). An important characteristic of successful schools for "at-risk" students is children's impressions of an attitude of caring in the classroom (Smey-Richman, 1991). Howard (2001) interviewed Black students regarding their

elementary school experiences. These participants identified three themes that contributed to their lack of success in school. The number one theme that emerged was the need for more caring teachers, followed by the need for an established community type of classroom environment (Howard, 2001). The students who participated in the research study described a caring teacher one who is willing to show concern for a student and help them reach their goals both academically and socially. Howard (2001) suggested that being a caring teacher is also being culturally responsive to students' individual needs. A teacher's commitment to making connections with students can show them that the teacher cares; it also helps build trust (Howard, 2001).

Students who feel safe within their classroom environment are more likely to be successful in that setting. Andre (1986) recognized the difficulty of "knowing another's nature, needs, and desires when one party holds power over the other or is a member of a group that has historically dominated another" (p. 3). In other words, Andre understood that different cultural groups have different conceptions of what constitutes care and what its objectives are. Brown (2004) stated that students from urban backgrounds, mostly students of color, are more successful when teachers can reach each student socially and emotionally. Students need teachers who care about them and their families, and this is shown when teachers strive to get to know their students' cultural background and their family dynamics (Brown, 2004). Research shows that students who know their teachers care about them, and their families are more likely to show academic and emotional success within their classroom setting (Brown, 2004). Flores-Koulish and Shiller (2019) stated, "Authentic care means that while teachers care about their students' academic achievement, they also care about who they are beyond the classroom and want to learn about their communities and their families" (p. 988).

Miller and Mills (2019) found that there was a clear connection between educators on staff who care and student motivation and engagement. Students who see fair treatment from teachers and school administrators as showing fairness in the classroom view them as caring (Miller & Mills, 2019). In research from Ferguson-Patrick (2020), behavioral engagement was most positive in classrooms where teachers modeled caring for others and appreciating other strengths (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020). Ferguson-Patrick (2020) concluded that, "Culturally responsive caring begins with building relationships as an avenue to better understand students" (p. 17).

Warm Demanders

The warm demander theory stems from literature connected to culturally responsive pedagogy (Sandilos et al., 2016). The term warm demander was first used by Kleinfeld (1975), and it refers to teachers who are passionate about fostering a positive learning environment and developing relationships with their students. Warm demanders balance adopted or assimilated cultural norms with educational frameworks and cultural values to build connections with students and guide them towards academic achievement. Warm demanders are teachers who expect a lot from their students, consistently tell them how capable they are, and help them to progress toward their potential in a structured environment. Teachers can communicate culturally relevant, critical care for Black pupils in several ways, including by being warm demanders (Bondy et al., 2012). According to Ware (2006), building trust among students and getting to know who they are and what they believe. It is important for educators to ensure that relationships built are reciprocal and that they are willing to share their own cultural beliefs and experiences (Ware, 2006, p. 435). Teachers who are warm demanders not only hold high expectations for their students regardless of background, but they also provide them the support

they need to progress toward their potential (Ware, 2006). Miller (2021) stated that successful teachers of color often assume the role of warm demander, having a positive attitude while at the same time having very high expectations (Miller, 2021).

Self and Collective Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as believing in one's ability to influence the outcomes of one's life, and the way events can impact and control experiences as well as one's beliefs in themselves regarding the execution or completion of certain tasks (Bandura, 1997). Applied to education, the construct addresses the level of confidence of a teacher about advancing student learning. This can depend on teachers' past experiences or the school's culture. Teachers who know and understand their impact on education will try new things within their classroom to support student success (Siwatu et al., 2017). "Several studies have found that self-efficacy in behavior management is associated with reductions in disruptive student behaviors" (Reinke et al., 2013, as cited in Larson et al., 2018, p. 155).

Efficacious teachers are also less critical of the students within their classroom. "Teacher self-efficacy beliefs increase as their sense in the collective ability of the staff to have a positive effect on students increases" (Siwatu et al., 2017, p. 15). Individual teachers believe they can succeed in instructing students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds when there is collective efficacy within a school (Siwatu et al., 2017). According to Bandura (1997), collective efficacy refers to the capacity of a group to work together to achieve a goal. Educators with high levels of collective efficacy will be able to overcome the difficulties they face through the perceptions of their own efficacy and will persevere through their work with student behaviors with the support of their school community (Aydogmus & Tukel, 2019). Groups or organizations

that have positive collective efficacy help each other, overcome difficulties together, and support each other in constructive ways (Aydogmus & Tukel, 2019).

Positive self and collective efficacy can support the cultural differences within the school setting; this increases the likelihood of increased student achievement and decreases negative behavioral outcomes (Siwatu et al., 2017). Larson et al. (2018) stated that teacher's self-efficacy regarding their ability to be culturally responsive in their classroom as well as their effectiveness with behavior management both may contribute to positive student outcomes.

Student Validation

Milner (2016) stated that cultural responsiveness within classrooms and schools "affirm and acknowledge the cultural backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, ideas, ideals, and values of students and their families" (p. 422). This validates and demonstrates appreciation for students' identities. "Validation also means that teachers understand and merge outside of school realities with those inside of school and work with and not against student preferences and interests" (Milner, 2016, p. 422).

When validating students, teachers show students that they are important, and that they are persons of immense potential. They construct knowledge within their classroom based on the things that students teach them about their cultural background and beliefs (Milner, 2016). One way to validate students' identities is through the understanding of their social experiences (Howard & Gay, 2019). Hattie (2012) stated that learning requires a welcoming, considerate environment in the classroom. Gay (2010) reaffirmed the importance of student validation in educating students. Gay (2010) advised teachers to always capitalize on their students' abilities in order to help youth succeed academically. In a study of student validation in an Oakland high school, teachers improved their instructional practices when they embraced students' experience

and culture and became aware of their students' lived realities (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). This then validated young people's lives and improved students' literacy abilities.

Summary

Significant research supports the conclusion that culturally responsive teaching practices within classroom and school settings are vital in the success of students, especially students of color from diverse backgrounds. This chapter discussed the culture and its relevance to classrooms, districts, and policy. It also discussed culturally relevant teaching practices, the resistance to change model, and how that impacts educators in the classroom. The research studies highlighted in the chapter suggest that the implementation of culturally responsive strategies with students in classrooms can lead to positive student experiences and behaviors. More studies are needed to understand and examine the strategies used collectively to dramatically reduce the need for extreme discipline measures within schools and classrooms across the country. The goal of this research study is to examine the relationship between culturally responsive teaching practices and student discipline outcomes. This information should help policymakers, districts, schools, and educators in creating the better experiences with less negative behavior outcomes for Black students, and aid in the closing of gap with disproportionality in behavioral data. It is important to know whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms will affect discipline outcomes of Black students within their classroom.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research protocol for this qualitative case study that is grounded in the practices of culturally relevant teaching and its implications for student behaviors. This study aided educators in understanding how culturally relevant practices in classrooms and schools affect students and the behaviors that they exhibit while in that setting. A qualitative approach is helpful when a researcher wants to investigate the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2013). I determined that qualitative case study, supported by some quantitative elements, was the most suitable research methodology for this study of the relationship between culturally responsive teaching techniques and student discipline results. Qualitative research can enhance comprehension of the importance individuals assign to their experiences by providing insights into the participants' thoughts and feelings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This enhanced my ability to access these inner perspectives in the data that I analyzed.

Creswell (2013) also emphasizes that qualitative research is used when further examination is needed and when it is instructive to give voice to participants who might otherwise be voiceless. The research included an analysis of data aligned with grounded theory, a "respected qualitative way of moving from individual knowledge to collective knowledge" (Stake, 2010, p. 17). The next sections cover research methods and participation sampling.

Research Design

The research design was mainly qualitative research with some quantitative elements to support. Since the research focuses upon the phenomena of concern in a single school building, it is a case study. The value of mixed methods research can be significantly increased by integrating quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). I calculated basic descriptive

statistics to test for significance differences among means to assess relationships among research variables. I also analyzed qualitative data from classroom observations and teacher interviews to answer the research questions.

The study focused first on quantitative analyses of data from classroom observations in a large North Carolina school district. Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the number of negative interactions for each subgroup represented in the observed classrooms. These sources of analyses were followed by the analysis of qualitative data drawn from two semi-structured interviews with participants. These two sources of information provided detailed accounts from the perspectives of classroom teachers within the school district.

According to Creswell (2013), quantitative research is used to examine theories and to make comparisons between variables. A qualitative research design involves emerging questions and procedures, collecting data in the participants setting, building themes based on participants, and making interpretations based on the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) define qualitative research as:

> … an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

Case studies enable researchers to perform a comprehensive examination of a specific instance, which could be a program, event, activity, process, or one or several individuals, as noted by Creswell (2013, p. 14). Teachers participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The teachers had range of experience teaching, as well as a range in their knowledge and implementation of culturally relevant practices in the classroom setting. The location of the participants was chosen on the basis of demographic location of the school in the urban school district central North Carolina, as well as access to a range of participants.

Data collected included classroom, school, district, and state archival behavioral data as well as individual pre- and post-interview responses, and observational data. Consistent with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018), the data analyzed needed to be segmented and then put back together. Because this study looked at the behavioral and social approaches taken by teachers in classroom settings, and the impact of these approaches on students, this design is appropriate for this research. Qualitative analysis was used to code the data and precisely identify themes occurring throughout the data gathered in this research process.

Case Study

A case study methodology studies the phenomenon in the real-world context (Yin, 2015). Yin (2018) stated, "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context" (p. 13). Likewise, Merriam's (1998) definition of a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). Case study methodology was chosen for this study due to the makeup of the research problem. When a study takes place within its natural setting and engages natural behavior, as this study does, it is probable the research will have an influence on practice

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This specific case study included one collective case that was be descriptive and explanatory in nature.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research question and sub-questions. The central research question is: How do participants describe the influence of culturally relevant teaching practices on discipline outcomes among students of color in an elementary school setting?

1. What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students?
2. Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions?
3. How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?
4. What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?
5. How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy?

Participants

The research study took place at a public K-5 elementary school within a large school district, located in central North Carolina. The school had student population of about 700 students. The research focused on Black students, who make up at least 10% of the school population. Research from Curry et al. (2018), stated that there is an impact on student success and teacher experience related to professional learning (Curry et al., 2018). The school researched had at least 5% of their teacher population that hold credentials from the National

Board for Professional Teaching Standards within the school population, and at least 80% of the teachers were considered experienced teachers in the state of North Carolina.

Purposeful sampling was used during the research study. Teacher participants included elementary school teachers in a selected school in a large school district in North Carolina. Students served as indirect participants in the research; their interactions with the teachers were observed and recorded. Parents of the students in this classroom were notified of the research study and assured that there was no identifying information used in the study regarding their children.

To safeguard confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to protect the name of the school district. Correspondence was sent to secure permission from the school district's superintendent to proceed with the research protocol (Appendix A). Once the superintendent approved the research in the district, an email was sent to school's that met the criteria to begin the process of finding a school with willing participants. Once I identified the school, I assigned the school a pseudonym and I began a recruitment process to engage teacher participants. My goal was to have six participants who taught in grades 3-5 general education classrooms. The experience level of participants in education ranged from teachers who had been teaching from 8 years to a veteran teachers who had been teaching for 16 years. Participants were at the research school for at least one full school year prior to opting into the research study.

I did not have a supervisory relationship with any of the participants. Participation in the study was voluntary. I sent an email to all teachers at the participating school who met the criteria and asked for their consent to participate. Three teachers were identified from those who showed interest in the study. Participants were assigned a pseudonym; their actual names were

not used during the study and will not be shared at any time. Similarly, participants' information from interviews and observations will remain confidential and will not be shared with others.

Participants were required to sign an informed consent form, which confirmed their understanding of the study's objectives, the procedures for collecting data, any potential risks involved, and the acknowledgment that there are no direct benefits to them for participating, aside from contributing to the broader research on culturally responsive teaching and its effects on student disciplinary outcomes. Participants were not required to include their names on any materials related to the study. All participants agreed to be audio-recorded. There was acknowledgement by all study participants that recordings would be transcribed. All who participated understood that once the recordings were transcribed and the research study had been concluded, all audio recordings would be destroyed. Participant confidentiality was protected throughout the research study.

Research Variables

This section describes the structure of the study that helped me answer the research questions. The study consisted of one primary research question with five sub questions. Two questions had a quantitative research approach, and three questions had a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research query in the Central Question read as follows: How do participants describe the influence of culturally relevant teaching practices on discipline outcomes among students of color in an elementary school setting?

The quantitative query in Research Sub Question 1 read as follows: What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students? The variable in this question was the set of documented student subgroup data for the school and district disciplinary consequences administered to subgroups of students. The variable

was operationalized through district and school behavioral data available in the Every Child Accountability and Tracking System (ECATS).

The quantitative query in Research Sub Question 2 read as follows: Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions? The variables in this question are disciplinary actions and the behavioral interactions by subgroups. These variables were operationalized through ECATS data for the district and the school, through classroom observation rubric scores from the classroom seating chart data, and through self-reported classroom referrals.

The query in Research Sub Question 3 read as follows: How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that they adopt to support behavior management in the classroom? The independent variable in this question was culturally relevant pedagogy. This variable was operationalized through teacher descriptions of knowledge and application of culturally relevant practices and through data from the observation tool. The dependent variable was the discipline practices that are adopted to support behavior management in the classroom. This variable was operationalized through teacher descriptions of the behavior management system implemented within the classroom and anecdotal notes through classroom observations and the classroom observation tool. Thus, this research question coded interview responses and collected descriptive qualitative data from the classroom observations which showed the number of instances of the use of culturally relevant teaching practices.

The qualitative query in Research Sub Question 4 read as follows: What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom? The independent variable in this question was culturally relevant practices implemented by the teacher. This variable was operationalized through description of skills and knowledge from the

classroom teacher participants through their interview responses and through data from the observation rubric. The dependent variable was the frequency of disruptive behaviors that resulted in a referral. This variable was operationalized through teacher descriptions, incorporating ECATS data, of the number of disruptive behaviors that resulted in referrals before and after the activities associated with this study. I also operationalized the variable through data from the classroom seating chart notes and through qualitative data from each teacher interview.

The qualitative query in Research Sub Question 5 read as follows: How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy? The variables in this question were the school behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy. These variables were operationalized through responses of classroom teacher participants to the interview questions.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain information regarding teaching practices grounded in the implementation of culturally relevant teaching and its implications for student behaviors, a phenomenon in its natural setting. The research will involve a case study that incorporated a research design that was predominantly qualitative. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "Qualitative researchers often acquire many data types, such as interviews, observations, and documents rather than rely on a single data source," the use of mixed techniques is not new to qualitative work (p. 43).

Archival data reporting minor and major referrals submitted for the elementary schools within the district as well as the school in which the research took place were reported in a table. The table shows the raw data of reported behavior incidences among the student subgroups being

researched. This data were also calculated using descriptive statistics to calculate the differences in the means among subgroups within the district and school level ECATS data. These data were used to answer Research Sub Question 1. These data were also used to provide part of the answer to Research Sub Question 2.

The classroom observation rubric (Appendix B) was utilized to address Research Sub Questions 2, 3, and 4. This rubric was adapted from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and used with permission. I collected data on the content that the students are engaged in as well as the material the students are analyzing and discussing. The observation tool let me gather data on the social dynamics and relationships that can be seen between a teacher and their students as well as between students and their classmates. Lastly, data on the classroom's culture and climate were also collected.

The classroom seating chart (Appendix C) will also be utilized to address Research Sub Questions 2, 3, and 4. The seating chart was used to collect individual interactions within the classroom between the classroom teacher and each of the students. The student gender and subgroup data were also collected and noted on the seating list.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe data collected during qualitative research as "rich in description of people, places, and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (p. 2). Through qualitative research, the researcher can portray the opinions and viewpoints of the study's participants (Yin, 2015). Qualitative research also gathers data in the form of words or images. Data can be collected from sources as interview transcripts, memos, field notes, documents, photographs, and other records. Yin (2015) asserts, "In its simplest form, conducting an empirical study means: 25 - defining something to investigate; - collecting relevant data; -

analyzing and interpreting the results - and drawing conclusions based on the empirical findings" (p. 49).

In order to answer Research Sub Questions 2-5, I collected data through one-on-one interviews. Qualitative interviews are used when the researcher wants to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about their experiences. To assist in obtaining this knowledge, implementation of this method of data collection was contingent on the researcher developing a rapport with the interview participants (deMarrias, 2004). In the collection of the data for my study, the fact that I am an educator significantly contributes to the goal of learning about the aspects of culturally relevant practices being studied.

A preliminary individual interview (Appendix D) and a concluding interview (Appendix E) was conducted with each of the teacher participants. Consistent with the conclusions of Ritchie et al. (2003), individual interviews will provide for a thorough examination of participants' viewpoints, a thorough comprehension of the personal environment in which the study phenomena are located, and very thorough subject coverage. The interview protocols included standardized instructions, opening questions, probing questions and a concluding question. To answer Research Sub Questions 2-5, I used data from the interviews in combination with the data from the classroom observation rubric observation protocol (Appendix B) and the classroom seating list (Appendix C), along with anecdotal notes on student and teacher interactions during observed lessons.

Table 1 details each research question and the related data sources and data analysis methods for that question.

Table 1

Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analysis Techniques

	Research Question	Data Source	Analysis Technique
1	What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students?	Archival Data Set	Descriptive quantitative statistics
2	Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions?	Archival Data Set Classroom Observation Rubric Classroom Seating List Self-Reported ECATS data	Descriptive quantitative statistics Transcribing, coding. Atlas.ti coding software (Student edition)
3	How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that they adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?	Classroom Observation Rubric Classroom Seating List Interviews	Descriptive quantitative statistics Transcribing, coding. Atlas.ti coding software (Student edition)
4	What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?	Classroom Observation Rubric Classroom Seating List Self-Reported ECATS data Interviews	Descriptive quantitative statistics Transcribing, coding. Atlas.ti coding software (Student edition)
5	How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy?	Interviews	Transcribing, coding. Atlas.ti coding software (Student edition)

The instruments were reviewed by a panel of experts, including a former state superintendent, an expert in qualitative research protocols, an expert with a background in equity affairs, and an individual with expertise in culturally responsive pedagogy. The protocol that the panelists used provided feedback about the instruments is in Appendix F. I made appropriate adjustments to the instruments in response to their feedback.

Data Collection

After I secured the approval of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I gained the permission of the superintendent via a letter stating who I am, the topic of my dissertation, and the research steps that will be taken with the voluntary participants. I also seeked permission from an elementary school principal within the district to conduct research at their school. I ensured that throughout the research process and within the dissertation, that the district, school, and participants would not be identifiable anywhere within the reports of the findings. A copy of the superintendent approval was provided to the principal and participants of the school in which the research was conducted.

Archival data for the district and the school were gathered; this information included data on subgroups as it is related to suspensions, expulsions, behavior infractions, and demographics. These data were drawn from multiple sources, including the Civil Rights Data Collection and the school district. Historical data at the school level were provided by the school's administrators.

Prior to engaging in the research, participants who agreed to contribute to the research study were given the details of their participation, which took a total of about six hours of their time. Each participant who agreed to an interview and observation received a letter outlining the purpose of the study and noting that participation was voluntary. Participants signed an informed consent document before proceeding with the elements of the research protocol. Participants

were notified that the interview was expected to last no longer than thirty minutes and that, unless they preferred otherwise, it would be recorded and transcribed. They were also made aware that participation involved minimal risks and offered no direct benefits, with the option to withdraw at any moment. Confidentiality of all responses were maintained, and recordings were disposed of upon the study's conclusion. A multi-stage approach was used to engage with participants. This process was conceptualized as a collection of single-stage processes with input from a previous stage, input from the current stage, and output as the outcome of the current stage (Park & Tsui, 2019). Each participant participated in an initial announced observation during core instruction. The observation aimed to document the interactions of students from various subgroups with the content they are engaging in, as well as the nature of the materials they were examining and discussing. The observation rubric also allowed me to collect information regarding the observable relationships and social dynamics that exist between the teacher and their students, as well as the relationships that exist between the students and their peers. Via the rubric, I also collected data on the classroom's climate and environment, observable artifacts, rituals and routines, and structures. The rubric is in Appendix B. A seating list was used to identify students by subgroup only. The seating list is in Appendix C. The participants were observed two times in their classroom setting. The second observation was followed by a concluding interview (Appendix E).

As is noted above, participants were observed in their classroom settings prior to the preliminary interview. As the observer, I engaged as a volunteer with the teacher and students in the classroom twice prior to the first observation. The purpose of these visits was to help ensure that students were less likely to be distracted by my presence during the first observation. This observation was one of the two times that the participants were observed in their classroom

setting. The purpose of the observations will be to look specifically for the degree to which culturally relevant teaching practices were implemented in the classroom. A rubric was used with the observations; the criteria specifically addressed culturally relevant teaching practices used with students in the classroom setting, along with responses to any behavioral issues that may arise during the observation period.

Following the preliminary observation, the three teachers participated in a preliminary interview. The primary purpose of the preliminary interview, which was one-on-one with me in the role of researcher, was to gather information on 1) instructional approaches in the participant's classrooms, with a particular focus on discerning those that are consistent with culturally relevant teaching practices, 2) the participant's level of understanding of such practices in a school setting, and 3) the developmental needs of participants if they were to be more successful with behavioral outcomes in their classrooms. Participants were given a choice of an interview setting outside of the school environment that worked for them and their schedules. Interviews were audio recorded with written consent from participants. Recordings from the interviews were transcribed, saved, and uploaded into Atlas.ti coding software. These interviews with participants enabled me to gain a better understanding of their experiences as educators, their understanding of culturally relevant teaching practices, and the amount of professional training they have had to support their implementation of culturally relevant teaching strategies in the classroom.

After a period of 3 weeks following the first observation, the second observation occurred in the teacher's classroom. The purpose of the second observation will be to determine if there were any adjustments to how the classroom teacher interacted with the students during a core lesson and if their classroom management techniques minimized classroom disruptions. The race

and gender of the teacher and the students in each classroom were captured as a component of the classroom seating chart (Appendix C).

Following the second observation, participants engaged in a final one-on-one interview; the protocol for this interview is in Appendix E. The final interviews were shorter in time than the first observations, typically taking 15-20 minutes; this was due to some content having been addressed in the previous interview that did not need to be addressed again. The purpose of the final interview was to collect participants' perspectives on the degree to which the culturally relevant practices were implemented in the classroom, the degree to which they impacted the participant's instructional approaches, the degree to which the participant's level of understanding of culturally relevant practices in a school setting increased over time, and the degree to which behavioral outcomes were affected by the implementation of culturally relevant practices. All data collected were analyzed for emerging themes to indicate the impact of culturally relevant teaching practices on student behaviors. The responses were coded into common themes. Data collected from the interviews and observations throughout the study gave insight into the impact of the practices on all students.

Data Analysis

Archival behavioral data were collected; these data reflected minor and major behavioral incidents reported in the ECATS system for the past two years. For Research Sub Question 1, descriptive data were displayed by student subgroups identified within the school district and the school in which the research will be conducted. For Research Sub Question 2, I assessed the significance of the differences among means for referrals among subgroups in the school district, as well as in the school in which the research was conducted. I also calculated the frequency and

percentage data for adverse behavioral interactions from the classroom observation rubric and the classroom seating chart to answer this question.

Data gathered from the two observations and interviews were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis of interview outcomes involved coding procedures and the detection of emerging themes. Interview recordings were transcribed into rich text format and uploaded into the Atlas.ti coding software for further examination. Based on the repetitive words and phrases from documents uploaded into Atlas.ti, I developed themes based on the topics that occurred and connected most frequently. I conducted multiple reviews of the documents to achieve a deeper comprehension of the data. Subsequently, the transcripts have undergone coding based on emerging themes. These codes were organized according to themes to facilitate the presentation of findings. Consistent with the guidance of Creswell (2013) I used participant quotes to illustrate the theme descriptions. Observations were analyzed using a rubric and scores were compared based on the implementation of culturally relevant practices and discipline practices observed. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the data on adverse behavioral interactions that occurred during the classroom observations. Descriptive statistics were also used to draw conclusions about culturally relevant teaching practices and the impact on teacher/student behaviors. The relationship to be assessed was that between the use of specific culturally responsive practices, as quantified within the classroom observation rubric (Appendix B) and the dependent variable measuring student engagement and interactions through the classroom seating chart (Appendix C).

Subjectivity Statement

Researcher bias was a potential pitfall in studies that involved significant reliance of qualitative data. Having the perspective of a career educator and current school administrator, in

addition to having reviewed extensive literature on the subject, brought preconceived notions of how culturally relevant teaching practices could affect discipline outcomes of Black students. During this research, I was pursuing a doctoral degree to continue my own professional development as I continued to grow as a school leader. To reduce the likelihood that my biases would be introduced into the study, I intend to be guided by the interview protocol to keep the focus of the conversation on the research questions while I assumed the role of a discussion facilitator. A semi-structured interview process was used to allow me to probe beyond the interview protocol to gain insight into the responses to research questions. The semi-structured interview process was advantageous due to the professional background of the researcher. As a qualitative researcher, I recognize my personal biases and adhered to a specific protocol for conducting interviews, gathering scores from observational rubrics, and utilizing various data sources to guarantee the validity of the findings. I analyzed and cross-referenced two data sets to confirm the results. To further validate and establish the credibility of the research outcomes, I employed data triangulation. Both archival data and participant feedback were authentically represented to accurately acknowledge their contributions to the study.

Ethical Considerations

This study was undertaken with a commitment to ethical research practices. I complied with the standards of the IRB for treatment of human subjects throughout the research study. Comprehensive and accurate informed consent information was provided to participants who choose to participate in the research study. All district, school, and participant identities were kept confidential in the acquisition of data and in the reporting of research results.

Prior to data collection, I consulted with staff in the technology department of the College of Education at North Carolina State University to develop strategies for data security. Digital

data were maintained on a password protected computer. I used North Carolina State University's data storage and resources. I encrypted data as appropriate. I used a locked file cabinet at my home for all hard copy materials used within the research process.

Delimitations

This study was located in a single southeastern state, North Carolina. Participants in the research study were limited to one school within the school district who voluntarily agreed to interviews and observations. Generalization of the information gained from this research should be reviewed with this limited participation in mind. This study covered the impact of culturally relevant practices on student academic outcomes. Participants from all demographics were welcome to engage in the study. As the study only included volunteers, there was the possibility that the perspectives toward study constructs would not be representative of the larger population of teachers. The student interactions and outcomes were observed for all subgroups within the classroom setting in order to analyze if there are any differences among subgroups.

Assumptions

During the completion of this study, I made the following assumptions.

1. During the interview, I assumed that participants understood the questions and that they answered truthfully.
2. I assumed that participants answered without fear of retribution for their responses.
3. I assumed that observations between the participants and their students were authentic reflections of everyday classroom interactions.
4. I assumed that the participants, interviews, and observations were representative of the perspectives of the district population.

Summary

The goal of this study was to gain insight into the impacts of culturally relevant approaches at the elementary school level. The data collected from preliminary and concluding interviews as well as classroom observations supported the understanding of culturally relevant teaching and behavior management strategies in diverse school settings. Open-ended questions asked during the interview process to obtain detailed descriptions from the participants. Data analyzed and interpreted to ensure validity and reliability. Assessing whether the knowledge and skills related to culturally relevant pedagogy provided to teachers impacts behavior outcomes with Black students will expand the understanding of the utility of culturally relevant pedagogy.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter Introduction

This chapter describes the results from my study of Black students' behavior outcomes in primary school settings. It further provides data concerning the connection between reported office discipline referrals and the intentional use of culturally relevant instructional strategies. These results from the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study that are included in Research Questions 1–5 are covered in the following sections. That content includes the analysis and reporting of data relative to each research question.

The purpose of this dissertation study was to determine whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect the discipline outcomes of Black students. The study further examined whether such practices affect the number of referrals and suspensions that occur throughout the school year as evidenced by the information gained from the participants and their classroom practices and how that is reflected in their classroom discipline outcomes. These insights were gained from the perspectives and beliefs of elementary public-school educators and from observations of their classrooms as well as observations of their classroom. A qualitative case study approach with quantitative elements enabled me to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students?
2. Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions?
3. How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?

4. What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?
5. How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy?

Qualitative research is used to gain an understanding of complex experiences, behaviors, and social contexts (Zoltowski et al., 2017). Participants in this study had an opportunity to share their thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions through one-on-one interviews. Additional insights about their practice were gleaned from classroom observations.

Summary of Methods

In order to begin collecting data, I gained approval to research in a large urban school district in North Carolina. After approval to conduct research, I reached out to four elementary school principals through email communication. The elementary school that I chose had about 700 students, with about 15% of the students identifying their race as Black. An email was sent to all the classroom teachers in the school who had taught at least one year in this school. Ninety-five percent of the teachers at the school in which the research was conducted were considered experienced and at least ten of the teachers were National Board Certified. Three teachers who met the criteria consented to participate in the study.

Each of the three teachers was interviewed one-on-one via Zoom prior to any classroom observations being conducted. Once each initial interview was completed, two classroom observations were scheduled and completed for each participant. Classroom observation data and related notes were gathered on a secured device. Students were not identified by name in the observation notes, and the notes were only accessed by the researcher.

The study results were derived, in part, from archived discipline statistics at the district and school site offices. Additional quantitative analyses were performed with data from classroom observations in the school. Additionally, qualitative analyses of data obtained from interviews and classroom observations were conducted. Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the number of negative interactions for students in each subgroup represented in the observed classrooms. Negative interactions, for purposes of this study, were instances in which students were reprimanded or corrected in a way that decreased the positive interactions in the classroom and increased adverse behaviors.

Responses from the interviews were analyzed using Atlas.ti., a qualitative software program that assists in data organization and analysis. I reviewed transcripts of these interviews that were generated from the audio recordings. This enabled me to familiarize myself more thoroughly with the responses of each of the participants in order to gain more insight into their use of culturally relevant practices and the impact of these practices on discipline outcomes. For data analysis, I chose the approach of identifying themes based on coding. Coding allowed me to gain meaning from the data collected at an earlier stage. Consistent with the guidance of Younas et al. (2022), this helped me to create themes based on participants shared meanings.

Participant Profiles

The study involved three participants. I sent an email to elementary school teachers in an urban school district. The email with the link to show participant interest was sent to all 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade classroom teachers at the participating elementary school. All three participants met the requirements for participation. Two of the participants taught in a 4th grade classroom and one participant taught in a 5th grade classroom. Each of the three participants identified their race as White and their gender as female. Participant years of teaching experience ranged from

eight years to sixteen years of teaching in the public-school setting. Each of the teachers met the minimum requirements for participation. All had a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education, and one of the participants had a Master of Arts degree in reading education. The disclosure and research focus information that preceded the start of the data collection provided teachers with the knowledge that culturally relevant teaching practices and their impact on discipline outcomes for Black students would be the focus of the study. Table 2 shows the breakdown of participant demographic characteristics.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Characteristics

Race	Gender	Grade Level	Years of Teaching Experience
White	Female	4th	8
White	Female	4th	10
White	Female	4th	16

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 read as follows: What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students? To address this query, I evaluated student subgroup data for the district and school. These data related to disciplinary consequences administered to students. Information was gathered from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), the participating school district, and the participating elementary school.

An analysis of the discipline data for the 2022-2023 school year for the school district showed that over 340,000 behavior incidents were reported for all of the elementary schools in the district. These incidents ranged from Level 1, 2, and 3 according to the district's code of conduct. Level 1 incidents were classified as a those resulting in limited disciplinary action or no exclusionary consequence that can generally be addressed with respect to infringements. Level 2 incidents were classified as those involving more serious misconduct that may warrant short-term suspension of up to five school days when, in the judgement of the principal or designee, non-disciplinary interventions and non-exclusionary discipline consequences are insufficient. Level 3 incidents were classified as more severe in nature and may warrant a long-term suspension. Based on the incidents reported for the district, approximately 180,000 of the incidents were identified as involving Black students, thus making up 53% of reported incidents.

During the 2022-2023 school year, 21% of the elementary students in the district identified with the race Black. However, Black students in the district accounted for just over 50% of the incidents reported at the elementary school level; this is a disproportionate representation of Black elementary school students among those who reported for misconduct. During the same school year, approximately 57% of short-term out-of-school suspensions were assigned to Black students. This is, again, a disproportionate number of Black students given exclusionary discipline for behavior incidents. It should be noted that out-of-school suspensions for the district where the research school is located were reported in aggregate for all schools in the district, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Separate suspension data for elementary schools were not available.

The research school reported 1,325 behavior incidents for the 2022-2023 school year. This number accounted for 0.4% of the incidents reported among the total number for

elementary schools in the district for the school year. The research school identified 430 of the 1,325 reported incidents as having involved Black students. The proportion of the students who identified as Black at the school was 15%; however, Black students were involved in a disproportionate ratio of 32% of reported incidents. As was noted in the previous paragraph, the district did not provide suspension data by school level for exclusionary discipline outcomes, but the research schools for exclusionary discipline showed that Black students were suspended in four (67%) of the schools six suspensions. These data again showed the disproportionate number of Black students being given disciplinary consequences in the research school. Table 3 provides the number of incidents reported in 2022-23 for the district and the research school by subgroup.

Table 3

Incidents Reported for District and Research School 2022-2023

	Students other than Black students	Black students
District Data		
Level 1-3 infractions, elementary	79%	21%
Level 1-3 infractions, elementary	50%	50%
Suspensions, K-12	43%	57%
Research School		
Student enrollment/ratios	598 (85%)	102 (15%)
Level 1-3 infractions	895 (68%)	430 (32%)
Suspensions	2 (37%)	4 (67%)

The data collected for the 2022-23 school year show that although Black students in the research district made up 21% of the elementary student population, the Black subgroup had a disproportionate number of discipline infractions, making up over 50% of reported behaviors during the 2022-2023 school year. This percentage is more than any other subgroup that the district reported. The disparate number of Black students in the district that had reported behaviors for the 2022-2023 school year in the district was similar to what was reported in the research school, which again showed that Black students were disproportionately cited for discipline infractions for behaviors shown in the school setting.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 read as follows: Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions? To address this query, I reviewed the district and school discipline data for the top four subgroups that construct the student population. Table 4.3 shows the comparison of Black students and the percentage of behavior infractions in the district and research school compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian students during the 2022-2023 school year.

Table 4 shows in grayscale the disproportionate findings from the discipline reports in the research district. The table highlights the disproportionate number of infraction citations for Black students at the district level as well as at the research school level. Black students made up 21% of the district population during the 2022-2023 school year, but 50% of level 1-3 infractions and 57% of suspensions. The research school shows similar data; Black students made up only 15% of the school population, but 32% if the level 1-3 infractions and 67% of the suspensions. The table also shows a disproportionate amount of level 1-3 infractions at the research school for Hispanic students; however, the 23% infraction rate for the Hispanic students at the research

school is still well below the 32% of infractions that involved Black students. It is also important to note that in every instance at the district level and the research school level, the ratio of Black students involved in these disciplinary matters is higher than that of any other subgroup.

Table 4

Discipline Data by Race

	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian
District population	21%	42%	19%	13%
Infractions	50%	27%	15%	3%
Suspensions	57%	17%	20%	1%
School population	15%	55%	20%	1%
Infractions	32%	37%	23%	0.2%
Suspensions	67%	33%	0%	0%

Note: Grayscale shading shows disproportionately higher percentage of infractions than percentage of enrollment.

The data to support this research question and whether there are differences between subgroups and disciplinary infractions show that there were disproportionate numbers of disciplinary consequences for behavior infractions administered to Black students at both the district level and the school level. The data also show that the White and Asian student subgroups, while together making up much of the school and district populations, received consequences for behavior infractions at substantially lower rates than their proportion of representation in the student population.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 read as follows: How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom? This question examined the processes and strategies used in the classroom and their relationship to culturally relevant practices. To address this query, I conducted classroom observations, as well as one-on-one interviews. To gather the classroom observational data, I observed the three teacher participants. These observations occurred on two different days for each teacher. I thus conducted six observations in all.

The teachers were identified through data collection as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C. During the classroom observations, I used a rubric in order to determine when culturally relevant teaching practices were being implemented with students and when culturally relevant materials were used for instruction. A seating list was also used to collect anecdotal notes regarding student interactions by racial subgroup. Table 5 shows classroom observation data collected from the two classroom observations with items ranging from *rarely observed* to *occasionally*, *roughly half the time, often,* and *always* observed. Rubric scores of *often* and *always observed* denote positive demonstration of the related practices. The assessment rubric for culturally responsive teaching in this study was characterized by a degree of subjectivity and was primarily grounded in observable classroom interactions and materials. The selection of specific indicators was contingent upon the frequency of their occurrence during the observational phase. The assessment rubric categorized frequency on a continuum from "always" to "often," where "always" denoted a consistent presence at 100% of observed instances, and "often" indicated an approximate occurrence of 75% of the observed instances. Similarly, the criteria designated as "sometimes" encompassed roughly 25% of the time, while "roughly half of

the time" represented a frequency of around 50%. These criteria played a crucial role in determining each teacher's overall score on the rubric, with a tally mark recorded in the corresponding box each time a specific criterion was observed. Table 6 includes the open-ended questions asked of the participants.

Table 5

Classroom Observation Rubric

Indicator	Rarely	Occasionally	Roughly Half the Time	Often	Always
1. Students engage with relevant content that centers issues of equity, power, race, and identity	A=2 B=2 C=1 Total=5	C=1 Total=1			
2. Lesson is aligned NC Curriculum Standards and includes rigorous tasks that are cognitively demanding			B=2 Total=2	A=2 C=2 Total=4	
3. The material itself reflects and affirms students' identities, raises awareness of global variety, and enables students to critically analyze the data that is provided	A=2 B=2 Total=4	C=2 Total=2			
4. Teachers and students are attuned to their strengths, gaps, and biases, and respond to them in constructive ways		B=1 C=1 Total=2	A=2 B=1 C=1 Total=4		
5. Mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established amongst and across all students			A=1 B=1 Total=2	A=1 B=1 C=2 Total=4	
6. Mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established between **the teacher** and all students				A=2 B=2 C=2 Total=6	
7. The learning environment supports students' cultural and social identities and raises awareness of the diversity of the world	A=2 B=2 Total=4	C=2 Total=2			
8. Routines and rituals are reassuring, have a purpose, and foster both independence and community			B=2 Total=2	A=2 C=2 Total=4	
9. Expectations are co-constructed with a diverse group of stakeholders; they are ambitious, asset based, clear, and widely practiced in classroom		A=2 B=2 Total=4	C=2 Total=2		
Total	13	9	12	20	0

Note: Teachers are identified as Teacher A, B, and C

Table 6

Research Question 3 and Participant Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ3: How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?	5. What communication methods do you use with the students in your classroom to address behaviors?
	6. What does your classroom management plan look like in your classroom?
	7. Tell me about your background in mentoring and educating students from various cultural backgrounds.
	8. What kinds of experiences have you had in relating with people whose backgrounds are different from your own?
	9. What do you think about the need of tailoring your instruction to the various cultures and learning preferences of your students? What, if any, are your methods for doing so?

Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed recordings of each in order to identify common themes or patterns that emerged from the content. I read and re-read transcripts utilizing Atlas.ti to capture codes. Quotes were captured from a code family that I created based on the research questions. From this process, I was able to identify emergent themes and topics related to the questions discussed. I analyzed the themes and topics that emerged to help determine how teachers described the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom and the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom. The three themes were positive relationships, application of teacher-defined elements of cultural responsiveness,

and the importance of conversations. Each of these themes is detailed in the sub-subsections that follow.

Positive Relationships

One theme that was prominent across all three interviews with the participants was the impact that relationships had on student behaviors in the classroom. This was the strongest theme that emerged; participants felt that having intentional connections with students had the most positive impact in their classroom environment. Building positive relationships with students helps support the use of experiences learned in the context of teaching and learning.

The use of culturally relevant practices indicates recognition that students have different learning styles and preferences based on their cultural backgrounds. Teachers who incorporate these practices into their classroom settings are more likely to adapt their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of their students. Also, by acknowledging and respecting students' cultural identities teachers build trust with their students. Trust is necessary for effective communication and collaboration, and it contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere. A culturally relevant classroom is also more likely to have positive dynamics that facilitate student and teacher collaboration with and support of each other in the learning process. Positive relationships contribute to a more effective and enjoyable learning experience for those involved.

This theme emerged in different ways. Teacher A stated that she begins her school year by sending all her students and their families a positive postcard in order to establish initial positive communication. Teacher A also believed that this initial contact with her students and families made any difficult conversations in the future much more acceptable and meaningful to the families. She stated, “Number one, first and foremost, it’s the relationships built. It comes down to them knowing that you believe in them and that you will always be there.” Teacher A

shared that in her experience, when students know that they are supported and feel validated, they have a more positive experience in the classroom; this leads to minimal negative behaviors. During a math lesson, Teacher A showed a positive connection with a student when that student said that they were not smart enough to be a teacher. Teacher A ensured that the student knew that they could be a teacher or whatever they wanted. Teacher C stated that she wanted her students to be eager to come to school; building relationships was key to that happening. Teacher C further noted that building relationships and minimizing negative behaviors in the classroom was one of her strengths. "I just think that we've created a good bond where I respect them, they respect me, and we don't want to get to that place…. If I have to talk to someone more than a few times in the same day, then we will address it and if it still continues, then I'll involve family."

Teacher B highlighted the importance of not only building relationships to minimize negative behaviors with the students who were currently in the classroom, but also the importance of maintaining those relationships when students move on to the next grade level. She explained that this priority was about "…just keeping up relationships with kids in other grades, or in fifth grade that I've taught before. Then also, I have a couple of third graders that I know that will be coming up to me that I built a relationship as well." Teacher B asserted that no matter who teaches the students, the students need to know that their teacher cares about them and that they are valued, not just someone who's primary job is to make them do academic tasks.

The sixth criterion on the teacher observation rubric in Table 4.4 reads as follows: mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established between the teacher and all students. All three teachers were observed during both observation sessions to *often* show the respect that is needed to build relationships with their students. My ratings on the teacher observation rubric also

showed that the relationships between students were important as well. I observed that students *roughly half the time* and *often* had positive relationships with each other; this added to their positivity within the classroom environment. The fifth criterion on the teacher observation rubric in Table 4.4 reads as follows: mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established amongst and across all students. All three classrooms were observed to *often* have positive relationships and interactions between the students in the classroom. This is evidence that the practices and procedures implemented in the classroom are a model for the students that contribute to a shared understanding of each other, their cultures, and their beliefs.

The third criterion on the teacher observation rubric in table 4.4 reads as follows: The material itself reflects and affirms students' identities, raises awareness of global variety, and enables students to critically analyze the data that is provided. The observations of the materials used in the classroom showed that, although teachers had positive relationships, the materials that mirrored the identities represented in the classroom used *rarely* or *occasionally*. The lack of inclusion of materials that reflect the diversity of students in the classroom was also confirmed through teacher interviews. Teacher C stated, “We need to differentiate…but we also need to teach the standards. It is hard to make sure that everybody is represented in the materials that we use and the focus on that can create learning gaps with the standards being taught.”

In the one-on-one teacher interviews and classroom observations, a clear and consistent theme emerged regarding the explicit connections between teacher-student relationships and the strengthening of behavior management in the classroom. Teachers emphasized the foundational role of trust, highlighting that establishing strong connections with students fosters a sense of belonging and encourages understanding of behavioral expectations. The individualized approach, understanding each student's background and needs, emerged as a key strategy in

building positive relationships. Teachers also stressed the positive impact of cultural relevance, recognizing that an understanding of students' backgrounds contributes to the positive classroom environment; however, as was noted, culturally relevant sources were not prevalent in materials used for instruction. Overall, teachers consistently expressed that investing in positive relationships with students was vital to promoting a well-managed and culturally responsive learning environment.

Application of Teacher-Defined Elements of Cultural Responsiveness

During the interviews another theme that emerged from the participating teachers was the importance of cultural responsiveness with the students in the classroom. Throughout their participation in the research, the participants appeared confident about their understanding of cultural responsiveness. Teacher C stated that cultural responsiveness meant that all of her students felt represented in their classroom environment "regardless of their background, ability, or personal circumstance." Teacher B shared that cultural responsiveness is "taking into account students' cultures when you are teaching and planning to teach them. Not only taking into account what you know about the culture, but having the mindset of trying to incorporate their culture when possible, and having it in your mind to know how to react in certain situations."

Teacher A stated that she had not had as much experience with learning specifically about cultural responsiveness, but she had concluded that it is based on "making everyone feel included." She stated that at the beginning of every school year she took time to understand where students were coming from and their backgrounds because every student is different and brings something different to the classroom. Teacher A also stated the importance of recognizing that she didn't know everything and apologizing if there was something said or done in the classroom that could be taken offensively. She stated "I used the statement once in class that I

would ‘make a bet’ with them to complete a lesson and I had one student break down crying. That student stated that it was against his beliefs to make bets and that he did not want to be left out. I automatically apologized and told the student I had no idea. It made me stop and think about the things I say or do in the classroom and how they affect my students.”

Teacher B stated that in the classroom, she tried to highlight and celebrate everyone’s cultures and beliefs without perpetuating negative sterotypes. She stated that there were a lot of students who bring their beliefs from home about other races or cultures and that in the class she did her best to “have conversations without discrediting their family beliefs, making sure that they have conversations that are respectful and kind.” She stated that having a culturally caring classroom could sometimes become devisive when students shared things that they had heard at home or experienced outside of the school.

Teacher C stated that it is the job of teachers to “make sure that every student feels welcomed, loved, and cared for in their classroom and school.” She asserted that this approach should be supported through the materials that are selected for use in the classroom and in the ways that they are included in classroom enviornment and outcomes. She further noted that cutural responsiveness in the classroom is “about having the mindset to be inclusive in everything that you say and do.” Teacher B stated that she saw the benefit of making the classroom inclusive in both academic outcomes and behaviors. “…seeing the benefit that it has on the kids as well is another positive…when I see my class sharing about their culture, or learning something from another student, I can tell that that's obviously a positive thing for them. Then that's helping them to be open-minded and able to accept and appreciate people from all cultures.”

The first criterion on the teacher observation rubric in table 4.4 reads as follows: Students engage with relevant content that centers issues of equity, power, race, and identity. All but one of the six teacher observations provided evidence that the teachers rarely included content in the classroom that centered on equity, power, race, or identity. The seventh criterion on the teacher observation rubric in Table 4.4 reads as follows: The learning environment supports students' cultural and social identities and raises awareness of the diversity of the world. The teachers were observed to rarely or *occasionally* ensure that the classroom environment and discussions included conversations that were sensitive to social identity and diversity. These observations were reinforced by Teacher B during the one-on-one interviews when she stated, "As a staff we have not talked about these things in the past-prior to this school year—and it was definitely discussed much more openly and honestly. We are a low-performing school as of last year, and so when we had different staff meetings and different professional development, we talked about the inequity between all races, all achievement levels…and looked at the discrepancies and had conversations." Although there were conversations regarding how the learning environment should support students' cultural and social identities, the teachers who were a part of the research process had not yet fully implemented such practices into their classroom enviornments.

Teachers' interview responses and classroom observations indicated a noteworthy pattern of the educators being more comfortable linking their understanding of culturally responsiveness to conversations in the classroom; however, they *rarely* or *occasionally* showed representation through materials used with the students. Teachers consistently highlighted the significance of integrating culturally responsive practices as a strategic approach to fostering positive student behavior. They communicated that the school staff are at the beginning stages of having conversations about race and the impact on classroom outcomes. There was an emphasis on the

role of cultural understanding and inclusivity in creating a supportive learning environment in which students feel valued and understood.

The Importance of Conversations

All participants expressed the importance of having conversations with their students and families to support appropriate behavior and the decrease of negative behaviors. They similarly noted the value of conversations with colleagues about these issues. Conversations with students and families support dimensions of culturally responsive practices, serving as fundamental tools for effective communication and understanding within educational settings. These conversations provide valuable insights into the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that students bring to the learning environment. Recognizing and valuing diverse cultural perspectives through intentional conversations is an important part of fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive educational experience.

Teacher A stated that she had conversations about many topics with her students, including even seeking their advice on how to even pronounce words and seeking their explanation of what certain statements meant. She observed that saying something as simple as "I apologize if I am butchering that word" created a space where her students felt comfortable sharing things about their cultures. Teacher A stated that the conversations that she has in the classroom to include others can be simple as what their favorite meal is to eat at home with their family. "The amount of information students share with their peers that they identify with can be profound if they are just given the space and time to do so. Morning Meeting is important to us because we get to have those types of conversations and my kids make connections to each other that they may not have on their own." Teacher A was observed to have a conversation with a

student about types of books that they wanted to try reading. Teacher A had a conversation with the student about different chapter book series and helped the student find a book.

Both Teacher B and Teacher C stated that at their school they had begun to have more conversations about academic and behavioral performance of subgroups of students. Teacher B stated that the conversations helped her be more conscious of the approaches she chose to take in the classroom with instruction and materials, as well as "checking my own unconscious biases that may affect how I respond to behaviors in the classroom." She stated "I think those tough and frank conversations need to happen, but there has to be accountability too... Some teachers I know just say, 'Okay, yeah, I'll incorporate this, I'll do this, I'll learn about this. I'll make a connection; I'll change the name in a word problem to match this student.' That's not really solving the problem. That's putting a Band-Aid on it and it's not going to change anything."

Teacher C stated that there are behaviors that happen in the classroom that are not always positive, but she noted that pulling students aside to converse privately and individually has helped to minimize the number of negative behaviors that occur during the day. She said that when a student has done something inappropriate, "I want to talk to them about it, pulling them aside in the hallway, or talking to them privately about it, and asking them, 'Why did you do this?' or 'What made you do that?'" Teacher C also stated that having conversations with families is important. She described such contact as "…parent communication, calling the parent, messaging the parent with what happened that day, and then just talking with the student, and trying to figure out what we can do to come up with a plan to help a specific behavior not continue."

The ninth criterion on the teacher observation rubric in Table 4.4 reads as follows: Expectations are co-constructed with a diverse group of stakeholders; they are ambitious, asset

based, clear, and widely practiced in classroom. The teachers were observed to *occasionally* and *roughly half the time* display expectations created by all individuals invested in the students' success. This practice, while acknowledged as important, was not consistently observed in the participants' classrooms.

The findings from the one-on-one interviews emphasized the significance of communication with students and families as a key element in creating a supportive educational atmosphere that acknowledges and respects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. The teachers emphasized that they were trying to give students an opportunity to share and see their culture in the classroom but might also have been fearful of divisiveness that doing so might have caused. The teachers were also very aware that their response or approach to student cultures was important, and that apologizing for statements or actions that might unknowingly be offensive was important to build communication and trust. The classroom observations also showed that incorporating different cultures and identities in the classroom was not something that was done at a high level; this appeared to be an area of needed growth for all of the teachers in terms of their cultural responsiveness.

Summary, Research Question 3

In summary, Research Question 3 was an examination of how culturally relevant pedagogy influenced the discipline practices that these teachers adopted to support behavior management in the classroom. The participants asserted in the interviews that practices like positive relationships, cultural responsiveness, and meaningful conversations strengthened their management of classroom behaviors. The teachers overall expressed the importance of students feeling important and included within the classroom environment. Teachers emphasized the integration of culturally responsive strategies to create an inclusive learning environment and

support minimizing disruptive behaviors. By incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into disciplinary approaches, these educators aimed to establish connections that fostered a sense of belonging and understanding. The teachers' commitment to cultural relevance was evident in their efforts to engage students in a way that reflected their identities, fostering a more positive and respectful disciplinary framework. The teachers also shared that they were overall beginning to feel more comfortable having conversations as a staff about race and culture and the impact they had on the classroom environment and outcomes. When observing teachers in the research school setting, I found that there were inconsistencies in the application of culturally responsive teaching practices. None of the teachers showed consistency in effectively incorporating these practices into their instruction. Their lessons lacked multicultural content, and there was minimal recognition of the cultural diversity in their classrooms. Ultimately, there was a resounding response to the importance of cultural responsiveness promoting a more effective and equitable behavior management system within the classroom and an observed need for cultural and social identities to be more representative within the classroom environment and materials used with students.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 read as follows: What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom? To address this query, I conducted one-on-one interviews with each teacher participant, conducted classroom observations, and collected self-reported discipline infractions from each classroom teacher in the research study. Table 7 includes the open-ended questions asked of the participants.

Data from classroom observations were also used to address this inquiry. Each teacher participant was observed two times in the classroom setting. Each observation was a minimum of

an hour each. Prior to the research observations, I visited each classroom two times informally to support the teachers and students being comfortable with me in their classroom setting. A classroom seating list was used for the formal observations of the classrooms. The seating lists used the students race and gender in order to identify the number of negative interactions for different groups of students. Table 8 provides the numbers and percent of population for students in each student subgroup. Table 9 shows the negative interactions observed in each classroom during each observation.

Table 7

Research Question 4 and Participant Interview Questions

Research Question	**Interview Questions**
RQ4: What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?	5. What communication methods do you use with the students in your classroom to address behaviors?
	6. What does your classroom management plan look like in your classroom?
	7. Tell me about your background in mentoring and educating students from various cultural backgrounds.
	8. What kinds of experiences have you had in relating with people whose backgrounds are different from your own?
	9. What do you think about the need of tailoring your instruction to the various cultures and learning preferences of your students? What, if any, are your methods for doing so?

Table 8

Subgroup Population by Classroom and School

	Black Males	Black Females	White Males	White Females	Hispanic Males	Hispanic Females	Asian Males	Asian Females	Total
Teacher A	8%	8%	25%	33%	13%	13%	0%	0%	24
Teacher B	5%	10%	25%	20%	20%	5%	5%	10%	20
Teacher C	9%	13%	22%	26%	22%	8%	0%	0%	23
Research School	6%	8%	28%	27%	13%	13%	1%	2%	*678

Note: Approximately 22 students in the research school did not identify in these racial/ethnic categories

Table 9

Negative Interactions During Classroom Observations

	Black Male	Black Female	White Male	White Female	Hispanic Male	Hispanic Female	Asian Male	Asian Female	Totals
Teacher A, Obs. 1	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
Teacher A, Obs. 1	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	6
Sub-Totals	3	0	3	3	0	2	0	0	11
Percent	27%	0%	27%	27%	0%	19%	0%	0%	100%
Teacher B, Obs. 1	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	6
Teacher B, Obs. 2	2	0	4	1	1	0	1	0	9
Sub-Totals	2	2	5	4	1	0	1	0	15
Percent	13%	13%	33%	27%	7%	0%	7%	0%	100%
Teacher C, Obs. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teacher C, Obs. 2	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
Sub-Totals	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
Percent	0%	0%	80%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Total Negative Interactions	5	2	12	7	2	2	1	0	31
Percent	*16%	6%	*39%	23%	6%	6%	3%	0%	100%

Note: Grayscale shading indicates a disproportionately high percentage of infractions relative to the subgroup's representation in the teacher's classroom. The asterisk indicates a disproportionately high percentage of infractions relative to the subgroup's schoolwide representation.

There was a total of 31 negative interactions observed during the six observations, two observations in each of the three teachers' classrooms. Teacher A had 35% of the observed negative interactions, Teacher B had 48% of the observed negative interactions, and Teacher C had 17% of the observed negative interactions. White male students had 39% of the negative interactions with teachers during the observations, the highest number of negative interactions observed. White females had the second highest percentage of negative interactions at 23% observed. Black males had the third highest percentage of negative interactions at 16%. All other student subgroups had minimal to no negative interactions observed.

A joint examination of the data in Tables 8 and 9 was instructive. While Black male students did not represent the majority of negative classroom interactions overall, they were involved in such interactions at a rate not proportionate to their presence in Teacher A's classroom. Specifically, Black males accounted for 27% of negative interactions, despite encompassing only 8% of the Black make students in that classroom. This rate was also disproportionate compared to the overall percentage of Black males in the research school, where Black males and females together constituted only 15% of the student enrollment, and only 21% in the research district.

Teacher B's classroom did exhibit a disproportion in negative interactions with Black males and females total at 26% which was higher than the Black student enrollment for both the research school and research district. Teacher B's class, Black males were involved in 13% of negative interactions but only made up 5% of the Black make students in the classroom. Teacher C, on the other hand, had no recorded negative interactions with Black males. The distribution of negative interactions in Teacher C's classroom was skewed towards White males, who, while making up 22% of the class, were involved in 80% of these interactions.

The self-reported discipline data about the number of discipline infractions were collected from the participating teachers and reported in Table 10. These discipline data were also used to address this part of the inquiry. Table 10 shows the self-reported discipline infractions for the participating teachers in the research study as well as the overall data for the research school. Teacher A made up 1.2% of the total infractions recorded in the research school during the 2022-2023 school year, Techer B made up 0.4% of the recorded infractions in the research school in the 2022-2023 school year, and Teacher C made up 0.3% of the recorded infractions in the research school during the 2022-2023 school year. The participating teachers did not have any students who were suspended during the 2022-2023 school year.

Table 10

Self-reported Major and Minor Infractions from Teacher Participants

	Level 1-3 infractions	Percentage of Level 1-3 infractions	Suspensions
Teacher A	50	4	0
Teacher B	18	1	0
Teacher C	15	1	0
Research School	1,325		

I analyzed the themes and topics that emerged to help determine the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The two themes that emerged were student engagement and inclusivity as well as behavioral expectations and norms. Each of these themes is detailed in the sub-subsections that follow.

Student Engagement and Inclusivity

Culturally relevant teaching can support increasing student engagement, which may consequently decrease disruptive behaviors due to higher levels of interest and participation (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Based on observed classroom interactions, I found that, overall, students rarely engaged in content that centered around issues of equity, race, or identity. Materials used in the classroom *rarely* or *roughly half the time* reflected student identities or raised global awareness content for students to critically analyze. The learning environment was also *roughly half the time* or *rarely* observed to support students' cultural or social identities or to raise awareness of the diversity of the world in which they live. The observations in the classroom also showed in all settings that there was *often* mutual respect and healthy boundaries between the classroom teacher and the students. The results from the observational rubric also showed that there was *often* mutual respect shown among the students in the classroom when they interacted with each other. I observed that the routines and procedures established in the classroom were *roughly half the time* and *often* purposeful, fostering student independence and community building. The classroom teachers were also rated as *roughly half the time* and *often* being accustomed to students' strengths and responding to students in a constructive and positive manner.

According to data recorded on the rubric, Teacher C demonstrated the practices at a higher level than occurred with Teachers A and B. Teacher C had two consistent observations in which lessons were aligned with curriculum, mutual respect was shown between the students, and mutual respect was shown between the students and teacher. Teacher C also had two observations in which routines and procedures in the classroom were routine and fostered a sense of community among the students. Teacher C was also the only teacher to be *occasionally*

observed engaging students in content that centered around issues of equity and race as well as *occasionally* using materials that affirmed students' identities. During the observation, Teacher C presented students with an assignment that was choice-based and relevant to the students in the classroom. The assignment also had connections to tasks that were completed prior to the observation and students were invested in the continuation of the lesson.

During the first observation, Teacher B led the students in a circle conversation that led to less negative interactions. During the second observation of Teacher B, students were given an assignment that was new for them, not culturally responsive or inclusive; these deficits appeared to lead to lack of student engagement in the assignment. The students did not see the connection or importance of the assignment, and more negative interactions were observed during that time. Teacher A was observed teaching and interacting in the classroom in small groups which supported fewer negative interactions than what was observed with Teacher B. Teacher A was also observed to have students creating and presenting review lessons to their peers in small groups; this strategy was more likely to result in students feeling included in the classroom environment and instruction.

Behavioral Expectations and Norms

During the observations, I noted that the teachers who had more negative interactions with students had displayed fewer classroom management expectations that were visible or noticeable in the classroom. Teacher B had 48% of the negative interactions that were observed. In the classroom during the second observation of Teacher B, directions given to the students were sometimes unclear and often lacked appropriate follow-up. When students asked clarifying questions, the teacher responded critically with comments such as "were you listening or were you talking" as well as "I have already answered that question." One student's response to

Teacher B was “I am still confused, but ok, whatever.” One student asked Teacher B if they were allowed to work with other students on the assignment. The response from Teacher B was “I gave that answer already, go sit down.” The unclear expectations as well as lack of appropriate follow-up on questions about the assignment led to an increase in negative interaction with students during Teacher B’s second observation.

Teacher A, with 35% of the total, had fewer negative interactions than Teacher B. Teacher A had more positive responses to student questions such as “you can get more paper, sure” when a student asked for more paper for the assignment. Teacher A also had fewer observed questions regarding the assignment and expectations from students. Teacher A had observed negative interactions that were mostly in response to student-to-student relationships. For example, one student yelled out “I hate you, [expletive?]!” to another student. Teacher A immediately reprimanded the student for the outburst and words used towards the other student. Teacher A also had an incident in which one student was trying to correct another students’ actions in the classroom. The student who was trying to correct the behavior was given a verbal warning to “mind their own business and worry about themselves.” Teacher C had the least amount of negative interactions, with zero being observed during the first observation. The students in Teacher C’s classroom were aware of classroom expectations and norms and, as a result, very few had questions about how to engage in assignments, get materials, and interact with other students. Teacher C’s observed negative interactions were based around students getting started on the assignment and staying on topic versus knowing what to do and how to do it. Teacher C had more redirections, such as stating to a student “we are not talking about that TV show right now, you need to continue with your work.”

During interviews Teacher A stated that “With major [incidents of misconduct], personally, I've only had to do three this entire year. They were three different kids of different races…minor [incidents] I feel like happen more *often*, but I had 50 total. Again, it's different kids. The minor behaviors are really tough for me because at my old school I was the PBIS co-chair, and we do PBIS here differently. I think the biggest problem is that behaviors are so subjective. What I tolerate in my class, you might not tolerate in yours and vice versa.” Teacher B stated that if she codes a behavior as a minor offense, those are things “that the parent needs to be called for…if it is something that can be addressed between the students and myself, there is no need to count that as a behavior incident.” Teacher C emphasized the impact of her relationships on her lower bahavior infractions. She stated “Well, I'll toot my own horn. I have two boys in my class this year who were like known problem children last year and they've had an amazing school year. They've really turned their behavior around. One of them in particular is on grade level in everything and he did little to no school work last year and was in trouble every day. I think he's not been in trouble once with me this school year. The other student has gotten a couple of minors of different things, but has really excelled this school year.”

In summary, the results for Research Question 4 disclosed that students were rarely engaged in content related to equity, race, or identity. The materials used in the classrooms also rarely reflected student identities or raised awareness of global diversity. In all settings, there was *often* mutual respect and healthy boundaries observed between the classroom teacher and students. Mutual respect was also commonly observed between students when interacting with each other. Routines and procedures in the classrooms were purposeful and *often* fostered student independence and community building. According to the rubric, Teacher C showed more positive trends compared to Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher C had consistent observations

with lessons aligned with the curriculum. Her classroom was characterized by mutual respect between students and between students and the teacher. Teacher C also *occasionally* engaged students in content related to equity, race, and used materials that affirmed students' identities.

An analysis of the participants self-reported discipline infractions also helped give insight into strategies that were used to diminish negative behaviors in the classroom. Teachers also reported through one-on-one interviews that, within their school setting, decisions about reportable behavior incidents are subjective and at times based on the tolerance of each teacher in the classroom. An analysis of the observed negative interactions between the teachers and students showed that teachers who gave students clear behavioral expectations and norms and provided content for students that was engaging and inclusive had fewer negative interactions than teachers who did not consistently do so.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 read as follows: How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy? To address this query, I conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant. The participants all addressed their schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system and how it impacts the behaviors in their classroom. The participants also shared that their school participates in circle processes as a staff and with their students to support building community.

Positive Behavior Intervention Systems

All teacher participants at the research school reported that their school promotes a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) with the intention that all staff members within the school would implement the system with their students in their classroom settings. Teacher A explained that the school has a program in which the students can earn rewards as a class as well

as the individual tickets that they can collect and turn in for incentives from a reward chart. Teacher A was observed giving her students reward tickets while they were working in their small groups as a way to encourage the behaviors the students were exhibiting. This practice appeared to be something that students were used to, and they were happy to receive the tickets from the teacher. When Teacher A asked her students to line up to transition to the cafeteria for lunch, a few students asked her "can we use our tickets for teacher lunch today?" Teacher A responded, "Yes, absolutely." It was apparent that Teacher A used the PBIS system of incentives and rewards regularly in the classroom and the students were motivated to earn and use the tickets they received.

Teacher B explained that in her classroom the individual tickets are given out when she has students who are showing positive behaviors and being role models to others. She also stated that "some of my students don't always get the individual tickets from other teachers or staff in the building which emphasizes more the need for more understanding of students and how to be culturally responsive or just managing them based on their needs." During the classroom observations for Teacher B, there were no individual tickets given out for any positive or preferred behaviors that were shown in the classroom.

Teacher C stated that although the school has a named PBIS system "there's different ways people do it and it is not consistent across the school. I think the biggest problem is it's so subjective, behavior is so subjective. What I tolerate in my class, you might not tolerate in yours and vice versa." Teacher C stated that when she gave students minor or major behavior referrals, she felt "justified, as most situations, with reminding students about appropriate behaviors do not always need to end in a referral." Teacher C was observed to have a class point system in which the students earned points together for showing preferred classroom behaviors and engagement

in activities. It was unclear if the point system in Teacher C's classroom aligned with the school's already established ticket system. Teacher C did remind students to always show their best behavior? in the hallway and to try and earn a point as a class as they were preparing to transition to the cafeteria for lunch. The students responded well to the reminder by adjusting the way they were standing in line and making sure they were not talking to their peers at that time.

Teacher A, B, and C each described inconsistency with the implementation of PBIS schoolwide and noted that this makes it harder for them to earn whole class incentives because of the difference in behavioral expectations. Teacher A stated that more cultural relevancy for teachers would mean "being aware of culture and individual students, things that are specific to individual students, and kind of keeping that in your mind, and then responding appropriately." She stated that there needs to be more professional development on cultural responsive practices to help support her students when they are in different settings throughout the school building.

Circle Processes

Restorative practices and circle process in the classroom focus on repairing harm and building relationships rather than on disciplinary measures, reflecting the values of culturally relevant pedagogy, which prioritize empathy, understanding, and community-building (Gregory et al., 2016). Teachers A, B, and C each mentioned using circles with their students during one-on-one interviews. Teacher B was observed during the first class session engaging in a restorative circle process at the request of the school administrator; the topic was taking care of the school environment and those who clean it daily. Teacher B was observed to have fewer negative behavior interactions with students during the observation of the circle process than in the second observation, where this teacher was observed giving students an assignment to work on in class. Teacher C was observed in her first session ending a morning meeting with students

that she had concluded with a circle conversation. The students were sharing with their classmates something that they were looking forward to that week. The circle was not observed as restorative practice but had the purpose of building community and relationships. Teacher C was observed to have zero negative interactions with students during the first session.

In summary, the results for Research Question 5 disclosed that although the research school promotes a PBIS system as well as restorative circle processes, there were inconsistences with the implementation of the positive reward system throughout the school at the time of the interviews. The teachers also expressed the need for more professional development and communication about whole-class and individual incentives so that teachers are better able to help students feel successful across all school settings. The research teachers also expressed a need for more professional development around culturally relevant practices in the classroom with students. The research teachers, however, did feel that they implemented the PBIS plan in their classrooms, even though it varied in each setting. There were also observations of circle processes in action, although the consistency of engaging in a circle with students and how to be culturally relevant in doing so was not observed across all settings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings revealed by the research investigation. The findings are organized around the research questions. In the case of questions that relied on qualitative analyses, the themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding the culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms, along with how such practices affect the discipline outcomes of Black students, were reported. The data were acquired through archival data sets, classroom observations, one-on-one interviews, and self-reported discipline data. Three teachers were interviewed virtually. Once each initial interview

was completed, two classroom observations were scheduled and completed for each participant. A final interview with each teacher in the research study was conducted following the conclusion of the second observation.

Archival data for the school and district showed that Black students were disproportionately cited for discipline infractions. The findings also showed that the White and Asian student subgroups, while together making up the majority of the school and district populations, received consequences for behavior infractions at substantially lower rates than their proportion of representation in the student population. Even though Black male students did not constitute the majority of negative classroom interactions overall, they were disproportionately involved in such incidents with Teacher A. The proportion of negative interactions with Black males in Teachers A's classroom was unbalanced when considering the broader classroom population, where Black males comprised of 8% of the students in the classroom but accounted for 27% of the negative interactions. Teachers B also showed disproportionality with Black males and negative interactions as Teacher B's classroom had 5% of students being Black males while making up 13% of the negative interactions observed in the classroom. Teacher C, although not observed as an expert with including culturally relevant practices in their classroom, appeared to have knowledge and understanding of the importance of inclusivity within their classroom setting.

Teachers A, B, and C all expressed how building the necessary relationships with the students helped to minimize negative or disruptive behaviors that could lead to discipline referrals. Classroom observations also revealed that mutual respect between the teachers and students as well as meaningful content that students connected to support the overall classroom management and positive student engagement, leading to the teacher participants having

significantly small percentages of negative discipline infractions compared to the research school and district. Teacher C consistently showed procedures and routines in her classroom that were more aligned with culturally responsive practices.

Classroom observations also showed that negative interactions between the research teachers and students varied depending on the behavior management norms in each classroom as well as the materials used and the level of inclusion that students associated with the assignments. The teachers also felt that there was a lack of consistency with PBIS implementation and circle processes throughout the research school; this led to inconsistencies with the use of culturally responsive practices schoolwide.

During the research study, observations in various classrooms revealed notable inconsistencies in the application of culturally responsive teaching practices. Despite the fact that these participants recognized the importance of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum, there was a lack of uniformity in how these practices were implemented. Some classrooms showed minimal integration of multicultural content and inclusion of the students' diverse cultural identities. This inconsistency was evident in both the delivery of lessons and the selection and use of educational materials. The inconsistency in culturally responsive approaches highlighted a gap between the ideal practices that Teachers A, B, and C espoused and their actual implementation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter Introduction

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings reported in Chapter 4 and the conclusions that I drew from the study. The chapter also addresses the implications of these findings as policymakers and practitioners review current practices, procedures, and policies. I conclude with the delimitations/limitations of the study and with recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect the discipline outcomes of Black students, as evidenced by the number of referrals and suspensions that occur throughout the school year. I explored the perspectives of elementary classroom teachers through one-on-one interviews conducted prior to and after classroom observations. The study further examined the culturally relevant teaching practices that occur in the classrooms and the impact of those practices on negative interactions between the students and the classroom teachers.

This study took place in an elementary school in a large school district in Central North Carolina. The research site was an urban elementary school where approximately 55% of the students are White. One-fourth of the students at the school received free and/or reduced-price school lunches.

The research focused on the effect of culturally responsive teaching on disciplinary outcomes for Black students. The research assessed participants' strategies for reducing behavior incidents within their classrooms. Three teachers participated in the study on a voluntary basis. These teachers had a range of experience with implementing culturally relevant practices in the classroom setting. The school in which the research was conducted had not had any formal

professional development within at least the past ten years regarding culturally relevant teaching strategies.

The research design was a qualitative case study. I interviewed and observed the teacher participants within the school setting. All observations were conducted with rubrics created to guide the gathering of specific information about classroom practices related to culturally relevant pedagogy. Responses from the interviews and observational data from classrooms were analyzed to determine the answers to the research questions that were posed in this study. Each participant took part in an announced initial observation during core instruction; this observation was followed by a preliminary interview. Near the end of the study engagement at the school, I observed participants a second time during instruction within their classroom setting. I conducted a final one-to-one interview with each participant to conclude the research activities at the school.

Research that addresses cultural responsiveness and its impacts on Black students within the classroom setting is timely and important. This study was responsive to the limited body of knowledge in which the relationships among engagement, response to behaviors in the classroom prior to the disciplinary infraction or consequence, and discipline outcomes for Black students are analyzed.

Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the results for the study. In order to answer the research questions, I secured archival data about discipline among subgroups. I also secured self-reported data from the teachers. These data and the findings the two classroom observations as well as the two one-on-one interviews were analyzed. To gain deeper insights into teacher perspectives about culturally relevant teaching practices and their impact on behavior incidents in the

classroom setting, I analyzed the emergent themes from an examination of responses to the interview questions as well data I collected through the use of a culturally relevant teaching rubric and the observation/tallying of the negative behavior incidences that I observed. The study addressed the central question and five research questions.

The central question that the study addressed was: How do participants describe the influence of culturally relevant teaching practices on discipline outcomes among students of color in an elementary school setting? Five related research questions were posed; they are listed below.

1. What are the student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students?
2. Are there differences among student subgroup means for disciplinary consequences and adverse behavioral interactions?
3. How does culturally relevant pedagogy influence the discipline practices that teachers adopt to support behavior management in the classroom?
4. What is the impact of culturally relevant practices upon the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom?
5. How do teachers describe schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy?

To address Research Question 1, I evaluated student subgroup data for the district and school. These data related to disciplinary consequences administered to students. Information was gathered from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), the participating school district, and the participating elementary school. Quantitative data from the 2022-23 academic year revealed a significant disparity in discipline incidents among different

student groups within the research district. Black students, who constituted 21% of the elementary school population within the research district, were reported to have over 50% of all discipline infractions, a proportion higher than that of any other subgroup. This disproportionality in reported behaviors for Black students was not confined to the district level but was also evident in the research school; these data underscored a consistent trend of more frequent disciplinary citations for Black students compared to those of other groups in the school environment.

For Research Question 2, I examined the discipline data from both the district and the research school, focusing on the four largest student subgroups. This quantitative analysis compared the proportion of behavioral infractions among Black students to those of White, Hispanic, and Asian students during the 2022-2023 academic year. The investigation associated with Research Question 2 regarding subgroup differences in disciplinary infractions revealed significant disparities in the administration of disciplinary actions. Black students, both at the district and school levels, faced a disproportionately high number of consequences for behavior infractions. Conversely, White, and Asian students, who collectively constitute a large part of the school and district student populations, received disciplinary actions at rates notably lower than their representation in the student population.

Qualitative Research Question 3 was a qualitative query that focused on exploring the methods and strategies implemented in classrooms to influence discipline practices; the question further examined the connection of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy. In order to examine these teacher behaviors, I carried out a series of classroom observations and individual interviews. For the observational perspective, I monitored the activities of three teacher participants. Each teacher was observed on two separate occasions, resulting in a total of six

observations. I also conducted two interviews with each participant. In the interviews, the participants emphasized that strategies such as fostering positive relationships, being culturally responsive, and engaging in meaningful conversations were key to effective classroom behavior management. They highlighted the significance of making students feel valued and included in the classroom. The teachers also stressed the use of culturally responsive techniques to create an inclusive learning atmosphere, which they concluded helped to reduce disruptive behaviors. They aimed to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into disciplinary methods, thereby building connections that encouraged a sense of belonging and understanding. This approach was part of a broader commitment to cultural relevance, seeking to engage students in ways that resonate with their identities and establish a more positive, respectful approach to discipline.

Although the perspectives and intentions outlined in the previous paragraph were embraced by the teachers in the participant interviews, my notations in the culturally responsive rubric showed that during observations, such practices were inconsistently followed. Student materials did not often represent and include the cultures of students in the classroom. Additionally, the teachers expressed a growing comfort in discussing issues of race and culture among staff, recognizing their impact on the classroom environment and student outcomes. However, observations in the research school revealed inconsistencies in applying culturally responsive teaching methods. Despite recognizing the importance of cultural responsiveness in creating a more effective and equitable behavior management system, there was a noticeable gap in representing cultural and social identities within the classroom environment and the educational materials used.

Research Question 4 was also largely qualitative in nature, though some quasi-quantitative elements were employed. Data collection occurred through individual interviews

with each teacher involved in the study and through observations of classroom instruction, materials, and student engagement. I observed interactions between the students and teachers. I also gathered data on discipline infractions reported by each teacher in the research study. The findings for Research Question 4 revealed that topics such as equity, race, and identity were infrequently addressed. Additionally, the classroom materials seldom mirrored the students' identities or promoted awareness of worldwide diversity. That said, in all observed settings, there was a notable presence of mutual respect and well-defined boundaries between teachers and students. This respect was also evident in student-to-student interactions.

The analysis of self-reported disciplinary infractions provided further insights into the strategies used to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom. Teachers disclosed in one-on-one interviews that behavior reporting including minor and major behavior referrals within their school context is subjective, often depending on each teacher's tolerance level. When I examined the numerical data on negative interactions between teachers and students, I observed that when participants set clear behavioral expectations and norms and ensured that content was engaging and inclusive, they experienced fewer negative interactions than was the case when teachers were inconsistent with the use of these practices.

Qualitative Research Question 5 focused on schoolwide behavior management initiatives and the alignment of these practices to culturally relevant pedagogy. Data from the individual interviews that were held with each participant, during which they discussed the impact of their school's Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system on classroom behavior, were examined for pertinent themes. In addition to reflections on the PBIS model, the teachers also discussed the use of circle processes, both among the staff and students, as a means of fostering community building. The circle processes offered a collaborative platform for addressing

behavioral issues within the research school. Circles that were implemented in classrooms supported developing a sense of community and fairness, allowing each child to feel seen and heard. This approach encouraged students to express their feelings and perspectives, leading to a deeper understanding among peers and a more empathetic classroom environment. The analyses revealed that despite the research school's adoption of a Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system and restorative circle processes, there were inconsistencies in applying the positive reward system across the school setting at the time of the interviews.

The teacher participants highlighted the need for enhanced professional development and improved communication regarding incentives for both individual and whole-class achievements in order to ensure student success in the school environment. Additionally, they expressed a desire for more training in culturally relevant practices within the classroom. Teachers also asserted a need for increased support in implementing diverse teaching strategies that cater to the varied learning styles and cultural backgrounds of students. They expressed an interest in collaborative learning sessions that focus on integrating cultural awareness into everyday teaching practices. They also expressed need for more resources and guidance in applying these practices, not just in academic subjects, but also in extracurricular and social-emotional learning contexts. This comprehensive approach, as voiced by the research teachers, is deemed essential for nurturing an educational environment that is both culturally responsive and conducive to the development of students.

Discussion of the Study Findings

The research questions in my study focused on culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms and the effect these practices on discipline outcomes of Black students. Neri et al. (2019) suggested that resistance to culturally relevant

education can originate from individuals or be influenced by the organizational environment where the change is introduced. According to Neri et al., individuals who perceive culturally relevant practices as a violation of their psychological contract, the implicit expectations within an organization, are likely to deem these practices as unfair and show greater resistance (Neri et al.). In related context, the debate around critical race theory (CRT) is even more contentious. CRT is an academic framework that provides a perspective for understanding society. It posits that race is a socially constructed concept and that racism in America is not only a result of individual prejudices but is also deeply ingrained in the culture (Sawchuk, 2022). These theoretical frameworks guided me in the development of qualitative inquiry with some quantitative elements to support the evaluation of culturally relevant teaching practices and their impact on discipline outcomes for Black students.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 inquired into student subgroup data for the district and school related to disciplinary consequences administered to students. The findings revealed that Black students were cited for disciplinary issues at a rate that was disproportionate compared to their presence in the school population. Black students, who made up 21% of the elementary student body in the district, were involved in over 50% of the reported disciplinary incidents at the elementary level. This indicates an overrepresentation of Black students in misconduct cases. Additionally, around 57% of the short-term suspensions outside of school during the year for which data were examined were given to Black students. This further highlighted a disproportionate application of exclusionary disciplinary measures based on Black student behavior.

My study confirmed and supported previous reports and studies that show that Black and some other groups of minority students are given negative discipline outcomes at a disproportionate rate compared to their White counterparts. Students of color, particularly in American schools, face a higher rate of disciplinary actions, as noted by Skiba et al. (2011). Noltemeyer and McLoughlin's (2010) study revealed that in urban schools, Black students are overrepresented in negative disciplinary measures relative to their White peers. In a similar inquiry, Bradshaw et al.'s (2010) research demonstrated that in elementary school settings, Black boys were 55% more likely to be sent for an office discipline referral than White boys. Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) noted that there is a clear disparity in disciplinary practices, indicating that students of color, particularly Black students, are more often subject to stricter punishments, such as suspensions, for even minor infractions.

My findings revealed that the Black male subgroup was involved in the majority of the reported behavior incidences. This aligns to with prior research focused on disproportionate outcomes for behaviors in elementary school settings.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 addressed whether there were variations in disciplinary outcomes and negative behavioral interactions among different student subgroups. The study examined discipline data from the district and research school, focusing on the four largest student subgroups that made up the student population. Disciplinary actions for behavioral infractions were disproportionately handed down to Black students at both the district and school levels. Conversely, the data revealed that White and Asian student subgroups, despite constituting a significant portion of the school and district populations, faced disciplinary consequences at rates considerably lower than their representation in the student population.

The findings in this study are supported by the results of research conducted by Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2010) who discovered an overrepresentation of Black students in exclusionary disciplinary measures in urban schools, particularly in comparison to their White peers. In a related finding, Bradshaw et al. (2010) observed that in elementary classroom settings, Black boys were 55% more likely to be sent for an office discipline referral than their White counterparts. My findings confirmed the importance of decreasing disproportionate outcomes for students of color, particularly Black males in the elementary school setting.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 focused on the methods and strategies used in classrooms and how they correlated with culturally relevant practices. The analysis for this question identified three key themes: the significance of positive relationships, the implementation of culturally responsive elements as defined by teachers, and the value of dialogues.

Positive Relationships

Teachers in the study underscored the importance of prioritizing trust in student-to-teacher and student-to-student relationships and helping to establish strong student connections; such elements in the classroom's climate help to foster a sense of inclusion and to clarify behavioral expectations (Lustick, 2020). In my study, the teacher participants acknowledged that tailoring approaches to accommodate each student's unique background and needs was a crucial aspect of nurturing positive relationships. Furthermore, they acknowledged the beneficial effects of incorporating cultural relevance in education, noting that an awareness of students' cultural backgrounds enhances the classroom atmosphere. However, I observed that culturally relevant materials were not widely used in instructional content. Overall, teachers unanimously agreed on

the importance of cultivating positive student relationships as a fundamental aspect of maintaining an effectively managed and culturally responsive educational setting.

Ladson-Billings (1995) observed that teachers who had a more significant positive effect on student learning and behavior tended to treat all students equitably and fostered a sense of unity across the class, rather than cultivating individual relationships that could lead to competition among students. Ferguson-Patrick's 2020 study found that behavioral engagement was highest in classrooms where teachers demonstrated care for others and recognized the strengths of different individuals. Ferguson-Patrick summarized this finding, stating, "The foundation of culturally responsive caring lies in establishing relationships as a means to gain a deeper understanding of students" (p. 17). My findings also showed that, although teachers may not be experts in culturally relevant and responsive practices that support student success, established relationships do support the students and their families.

Application of Teacher-Defined Elements of Cultural Responsiveness

Interviews with teachers and observations in the classroom revealed a significant trend: educators were largely at ease connecting their comprehension of cultural responsiveness to classroom discussions, yet they infrequently or only sometimes incorporated this understanding through the materials that they used with students. The teachers uniformly underscored the importance of incorporating culturally responsive methods as a key strategy for encouraging positive student behavior. They noted that their colleagues in the school are just starting to engage in discussions about race and its influence on classroom results. Additionally, there was a strong focus on the importance of cultural awareness and inclusion in establishing a nurturing educational atmosphere where students feel appreciated and comprehended. However, the recognition of cultural awareness in these instances was inadequately reinforced by the

integration of materials focusing on race, culture, and identity. Additionally, teachers irregularly utilized resources that validated the identities of their students. Also, the learning settings observed rarely or only occasionally promoted awareness of global diversity.

Gay (2002) pointed out that although American schools often have a diverse student population, there is a prevalent challenge in incorporating cultural responsiveness into the curriculum. The author stated that many teachers lack the necessary preparation to effectively teach students from various backgrounds and cultures. Gay emphasized the need for teachers to have access to resources and support that enable them to learn about different ethnic groups, which is crucial for fostering a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural education. Milner (2016) described cultural responsiveness in classrooms and schools as a practice that "recognizes, embraces, and reflects the cultural backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, thoughts, principles, and values of students and their families" (p. 422).

The Importance of Conversations

The responses from teachers' interviews and classroom observations revealed a distinct trend. While the participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of adopting culturally responsive practices strategically to promote positive student behavior, these educators indicated that they felt more at ease incorporating their knowledge of cultural responsiveness into classroom discussions. However, this greater facility with verbalizing culturally responsive messages was seldom or only intermittently reflected in the materials used with students. It is important to note that the school staff was just starting to engage in dialogue about race and its effects on classroom dynamics. A strong emphasis was placed on the importance of the need for cultural awareness and inclusiveness in establishing an educational setting where students feel acknowledged and understood. This connects well with the need for relationships within the

school setting. Observations indicated that teachers sometimes or in roughly half of observed instances demonstrated expectations set by everyone involved in the students' success. Although recognized is a significant practice, this was not a consistent occurrence in the classrooms of the participants. Observations of the teachers revealed inconsistencies in the use of culturally responsive teaching methods. During the classroom observations, none of the teachers consistently applied these practices in more than seventy-five percent of the cases. Furthermore, their lessons often did not include multicultural content, and there was a limited acknowledgment of the cultural diversity present in their classrooms.

Hamre and Pianta (2001) suggest that the interactions and communication between educators and students in the early stages of elementary school can significantly influence the students' academic and behavioral outcomes, particularly if these relationships are negative. Parsonson (2012), among others, advocates for a reformation of classroom management strategies and the development of new methods to engage students effectively in the classroom. The research findings in the study support the need for ongoing connections and meaningful conversations in the school setting to help minimize negative interactions.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 focused on the impact of culturally responsive teaching on the frequency of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The findings for Research Question 4 revealed that student engagement with content pertaining to equity, race, or identity was infrequent. Similarly, classroom materials seldom reflected the students' identities or promoted awareness of global diversity. Across all observed settings, mutual respect and appropriate boundaries were noted between teachers and students. This mutual respect was also a common feature in student interactions.

My notations on the observation rubric indicated that Teacher C consistently aligned lessons with the curriculum and maintained an environment of mutual respect among students and between students and herself. Additionally, Teacher C at times involved students in discussions about equity, race, and used materials that validated their identities. Although Teacher C did not have negative interaction disproportionality with Black males in the classroom it is important to note that Teacher C did have disproportionate negative interactions with White males within the classroom setting. During the observation period, it was noted that 35% of the negative interactions involved Teacher A, while Teacher B was associated with 48% of such interactions. Teacher C accounted for 17% of the observed negative interactions. Among the students, White male students were involved in 39% of these negative interactions with teachers, representing the highest observed rate. This founding contradicts prior research which trends towards disproportionality with Black males; however, the disproportionate number of White males involved in negative interactions, while also of concern, occurred in only one of the three classrooms observed.

The findings from the study conducted in the three classrooms largely align with existing research that highlights an increased frequency of negative behavioral interactions between teachers and male students, particularly male students of color. Bradshaw et al.'s 2010 research revealed that in elementary school settings, Black boys were 55% more likely to be sent to the office for disciplinary action compared to their White peers. As was noted by Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014), this disparity in disciplinary practices across various schools in the nation suggests that students of color are often subjected to stricter punishments, such as suspensions, for even minor infractions.

The research study also identified two key themes: student engagement and inclusivity as well as behavioral expectations and norms. These themes are discussed in the following subsections.

Student Engagement and Inclusivity

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests that culturally relevant teaching can enhance student engagement, potentially leading to a reduction in disruptive behaviors as a result of increased interest and participation. From the classroom interactions I observed, it was apparent that students infrequently engaged with content focusing on equity, race, or identity. That said, classroom observations across all settings consistently revealed a predominant atmosphere of mutual respect and appropriate boundaries between the teacher and students. Additionally, the data from the observational rubric indicated that mutual respect was frequently observed among students during their interactions with one another. In terms of routines and procedures, it was noted that about half the time, these were often intentionally designed to promote student independence and facilitate community building. Classroom materials rarely or about half of the time mirrored student identities or included content that promoted global awareness for critical analysis by the students. Similarly, the learning environment was observed to support students' cultural or social identities or to enhance awareness of global diversity either approximately half of the time or rarely at all.

In 1994, hooks emphasized that students' success can be enhanced through engagement in understanding and accepting their own cultures, coupled with the use of teaching methods that include and embrace all students. During the classroom observations, some students struggled to grasp the lesson’s relevance, leading to an increase in negative interactions in some settings.

Teacher C, observed working with small groups in the classroom, experienced fewer negative interactions compared to Teachers A and B.

Behavioral Expectations and Norms

Ware (2006) points out that numerous disciplinary issues faced by students of color in classrooms and school environments arise from a lack in understanding the various cultures and norms among diverse student populations, as well as a lack of effort by teachers to incorporate varied perspectives into their teaching approaches. Bonner et al. (2017) emphasize that educators who are culturally sensitive recognize the wider structural factors that have historically disadvantaged marginalized groups, hindering their access to fair educational opportunities.

Castillo-Montoya (2020) notes that the norms established in schools often reflect dominant White cultural standards, leading to disciplinary issues when students fail to meet these expectations. Therefore, it's crucial for educators and practitioners to consider how to reshape school norms to foster equity, as Castillo-Montoya (2020) suggests. Cruz et al. (2019) argued that teachers committed to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices can serve as catalysts for change in their schools, helping to ensure equitable opportunities for all students, especially those of color.

The curriculum that I observed being delivered seldom included topics related to equity, race, or identity, and the classroom materials rarely mirrored the students' identities or promoted global diversity awareness. Despite this, a general atmosphere of mutual respect and appropriate boundaries was noted between teachers and students, and among students themselves. Classroom routines and procedures were observed to be purposeful, often encouraging student autonomy and community development. The observation revealed that teachers who set clear behavioral

expectations and norms and delivered engaging, inclusive content experienced fewer negative interactions than those who did not maintain this consistency.

Beckett (2011) asserts that teachers who recognize the significance of culture often adopt an approach of being "all things to all people." This involves striving to create a mutual comprehension of the world shared by both students and teachers. Beckett emphasized the necessity for children to feel a sense of acceptance in their educational environment, including the materials and curriculum used for their education, as well as within the norms established by their family's beliefs. My research findings confirmed that teachers who set clear behavioral guidelines and norms, and offered students engaging and inclusive content, experienced fewer negative interactions compared to those who did not consistently implement these practices.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 showed that despite the research school advocating for a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system and restorative circle processes, there were inconsistencies in applying the positive reward system across the whole school environment during the research period. Furthermore, teachers highlighted a need for enhanced professional development and improved communication regarding incentives for both whole-class and individual incentives, to assist students more effectively in feeling successful in different school environments. The research study also identified two key themes: positive behavior intervention systems and circle processes.

Positive Behavior Intervention Systems

McIntosh et al. (2017) explains that PBIS emphasizes clear and objective disciplinary procedures. This involves specifically defining behaviors, clarifying their manifestations and implications, and differentiating between issues that can be addressed by the teacher in the

classroom and those that require intervention by an administrator in the office. Teachers A, B, and C each reported inconsistencies in the school-wide application of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), observing that this variability in behavioral expectations complicated their ability to achieve whole class incentives. Teacher A emphasized that cultural relevance for teachers involved being aware of the unique cultural backgrounds and specific needs of individual students and responding appropriately. There was an emphasized need for increased professional development in culturally responsive practices to equip her to better assist her students in various settings within the school.

Circle Processes

Gregory et al. (2016) highlighted that restorative practices and circle processes in the classroom are centered on mending harm and fostering relationships, as opposed to emphasizing disciplinary actions. Engaging with students exhibiting certain behaviors through the use of restorative practices shifts the focus from punishment to problem-solving (Skiba et al., 2016). Educational restorative practices vary widely across the spectrum of prevention and intervention, aiming to transform school environments into spaces that enhance connections and interactions between students and adults (Skiba et al., 2016). These practices also emphasize the importance of fostering active responsibility, authentic student participation, and student empowerment. According to Garnett et al. (2020), the implementation of these methods should lead to a reduction in authoritarian disciplinary approaches. Lustick (2020) notes that restorative practices in schools serve as proactive disciplinary measures, intended to cultivate positive relationships between students and staff and to nurture a more compassionate instructional atmosphere.

The research teachers identified a need for further professional training in culturally relevant practices within the classroom. Despite variations in each setting, the teachers believed

that they effectively implemented the PBIS plan in their individual classrooms, but that stronger schoolwide consistency in its implementation would support their overall classroom environments. Observations did disclose instances of circle processes being utilized, yet the uniformity in conducting these circles with students and the integration of culturally relevant methods within these processes were not consistently observed. My findings supported the previous research that such an approach can help minimize the effects of implicit bias. This approach aligns with my findings and the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, which places a high value on empathy, comprehension, and the cultivation of community.

Reflections on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

Every student has the right to a classroom environment where they see their own reflections and feel valued (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching emphasizes empowering those involved in the learning process and adopting inclusive, research-backed methods for students and their families, especially those closest to educational disparities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It's vital for students in educational settings to achieve academic success, maintain or develop cultural competence, and cultivate a critical awareness to question and potentially transform the existing societal norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

In light of these assertions, I found that Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy served as an invaluable guide for formulating the research questions, creating the interview questions, and selecting and using the appropriate observation rubric for this study. The established principles of culturally relevant framework positively supported developing a study protocol that allowed participants to articulate their needs effectively. However, after examining the in-depth responses from participants and observing classroom dynamics, it became evident that a more strategic emphasis is required on behavioral incidents that result in

negative interactions. This approach should consider how culturally relevant practices significantly influence not only academic achievement but also the social-emotional well-being of students and the resulting behavioral outcomes. It is essential for educators to grasp the impact of a student's racial and cultural traditions on their classroom experiences. Implementing culturally relevant methods in classrooms can boost student involvement, attention, and the connection of educational content to its relevance in the students' personal lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Reflections on Engaged Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

Engaged pedagogy refers to the process in which educators create learning experiences that extend beyond students' previous knowledge, encouraging broader participation and engagement that surpasses standard curriculum. Author/activist bell hooks (1994) advocated for the integration of students' additional experiences into classroom learning to make their time more relevant and enriching. This approach also emphasizes the mutual sharing of cultural experiences and risk-taking, not just by students but also by the adults in the classroom.

Aligned with these insights, I found that hooks' (1994) culturally relevant pedagogy was an essential reference in developing the research questions, crafting the interview questions, and selecting the observation rubric for this study. The fundamental principles of the engaged pedagogy were instrumental as I constructed a study protocol that effectively enabled participants to express their perspectives about instruction, engagement, and behavior. Consistent with the observations of hooks (1994), I found that the theory of engaged pedagogy helped me to understand the importance of student representation in the classroom, to discern when related practices were being employed, and to see how such representation could support positive classroom engagement and involvement.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This research enhances the body of knowledge that addresses how culturally relevant methods, applied by teachers in elementary school classrooms, influence the disciplinary outcomes for Black students and other minorities compared to their White counterparts. It also investigated whether these practices impact the frequency of minor and/or major referrals as well as suspensions during the school year. This is evidenced by data gathered from participant responses regarding their classroom practices and assessment of how this correlated with their classroom discipline results. The findings drew from the viewpoints and beliefs of elementary public-school educators, coupled with observations of their teaching environments.

Delimitations of this study were related to the parameters for the study that were set before the study began. This study was limited to the perceptions of the participants in a single southeastern state, North Carolina. Participants in the research study were limited to teachers in one school within the school district who voluntarily agreed to interviews and observations. The findings are likely not generalizable to areas of differing socio-economic statuses (SES) as well as other varying demographics.

Additionally, the participants were confined to one elementary school within the school district, excluding middle and high school levels. Consequently, the findings are pertinent to a specific segment of students within a K-12 North Carolina school district, focusing solely on the elementary level with a high SES.

Limitations of the study include factors that occurred after study implementation that were beyond my control and may have impacted the outcomes. The study's limitations stem from multiple sources. These include the specific grade levels and participants involved, which were comprised of only 4th and 5th grade teachers and students. A significant limitation was the

homogeneity in the racial identity of the teachers, all of whom were White. The research might also have been enhanced by including classrooms with a higher number of Black students.

Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice

This chapter's discussion of the results provided insights into the impact of disciplinary outcomes for Black students and the frequency of negative behavioral interactions between teachers and students during instruction. These findings suggest the need to develop and review policies and professional practices. The following subsections address the implications of the study findings for local educational agencies, school administrators, teachers, school support staff, and central service district leaders.

Implications for Policy

Teachers often report a significantly higher number of behavioral incidents involving students of color, especially Black male students, compared to those involving White students, including incidents based on more subjective judgments (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Brown (2004) emphasized the importance of fostering a classroom social environment where students feel included in the collective quest for academic, social, and emotional development to reduce disruptive behaviors. This study's outcomes are recommended for review when leaders assess district and state policies related to culturally responsive pedagogy and its impact in classrooms. This is especially important given the potential impact of these practices on Black students and the obligation to limit adverse behavior outcomes in the elementary school setting. The findings should be considered as potential modifications that could enhance the effectiveness of these policies are addressed. Specific recommendations for policy follow. It should be noted that the recommendations related to professional development for practitioners arose from the reflections of my study’s participants that their training in culturally responsive practices was inadequate:

- School districts should implement mandatory training for educators and staff that strengthens their capacities to recognize and mitigate implicit biases and understand cultural competencies to better ensure fair treatment of all students.
- There should be an extensive review of restorative justice practices within the school, district, and state as an alternative to traditional disciplinary actions. Restorative justice focuses on repairing harm and restoring relationships, which can improve the school climate.
- School districts should implement policies to implement professional development that focuses on behavioral intervention strategies that are culturally responsive and sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds. Behavioral intervention strategies include creating support systems that address the root causes of behavioral issues, such as social, emotional, or academic challenges.
- Districts should establish pertinent data collection models and analyze disciplinary actions to identify disparities and biases in behavior incident reporting and management similar to the research done in this study. Policies should ensure transparency and accountability in how disciplinary data are reported and used to make informed decisions about curriculum, instruction, and supportive practices.
- State and district policymakers should adopt curriculum and pedagogical practices that reflect the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. An inclusive educational environment can enhance students' sense of belonging and reduce behavioral incidents within the classroom and school settings.

- Schools should engage parents, students, and community members in policy development and decision-making processes to ensure that disciplinary policies are equitable and reflect community values and needs.

Implications for Practice

Nationwide, disparities in school discipline practices reveal that, compared to their peers, students of color face harsher consequences, including suspensions, for minor infractions compared to their peers (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Exclusionary disciplinary measures, such as suspensions and expulsions, have been consistently linked to adverse outcomes for students' academic and social success in schools (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). To help schools commit to the success of every student, scholars such as Ladson-Billings emphasize the importance of schools adopting culturally responsive behavior management approaches that acknowledge and respect students' diverse backgrounds. Research demonstrates that effective classroom management correlates with enhanced academic performance, increased on-task behavior, and fewer disciplinary referrals (Brown, 2004). Ensuring student safety in schools necessitates efficiently handling behavioral issues, preferably within the classroom setting. When teachers can manage or prevent disruptive behaviors in the classroom, the well-being of both students and teachers is more effectively supported (Skiba et al., 2016). The significant disproportion in the reporting of behavioral incidents involving students of color, notably Black male students, compared to their White counterparts, including those based on subjectivity, suggests the need for several critical changes in school practices. Related recommendations follow. As was the case in the recommendations for policy, it should be noted that the recommendations related to professional development for practitioners arose from both the conclusions of key researchers and from the reflections of my own study’s participants.

These sources concur that practitioner training in culturally responsive practices is often inadequate:

- Schools should implement training in culturally responsive teaching practices to help educators connect with students from diverse backgrounds, and better ensure a more inclusive learning environment that respects and values all students' cultural histories.
- Schools should provide ongoing professional development for all staff on recognizing and addressing implicit biases and stereotypes. This training can help educators understand how their perceptions may influence disciplinary actions and student interactions.
- Schools should shift from punitive disciplinary measures to restorative practices that can help address the root causes of behavioral incidents.
- Schools should review and revise their disciplinary policies and practices to ensure they are equitable and do not disproportionately impact students of color. Updating the school's disciplinary policies and practices involves analyzing disciplinary data to identify and address disparities.
- My review of the literature undergirds a recommendation that schools find ways to empower students, particularly those from minority subgroups, by involving them in decision-making processes related to school policies and practices. Cultivating student-led initiatives that address school and classroom climate issues will aid in student empowerment (Garnett et al., 2020).
- Schools should establish systems for regularly monitoring disciplinary practices and outcomes to ensure fairness and equity. Developing a system to stay abreast of disciplinary actions involves tracking data on behavioral incidents and disciplinary

actions by race and ethnicity to identify trends and make informed adjustments to policies and practices.

- Engaging families and communities in the education process can create a supportive student network. Schools should build strong partnerships with parents and community organizations to support students' holistic development.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study, while useful, suggests the need for additional scholarly inquiry into the topics that I addressed. Recommendations for future research include:

- Expanding student population: Exploring various grade levels under the same research protocols could yield a more comprehensive understanding of how culturally relevant practices are implemented and their widespread effect on disciplinary outcomes, particularly for Black students and the student body as a whole. This approach would allow for an examination of age-specific impacts and the adaptability of these practices across different educational settings.
- Expanded diversity with research location and participants: Expanding this research to encompass districts with varying socioeconomic status (SES) profiles, alongside classrooms that reflect a richer diversity in terms of student race, gender, and cultural backgrounds, as well as a more varied teacher demographic, could significantly deepen our understanding of culturally responsive practices and the impact on the classroom setting. Engaging with a diverse teacher population would provide insights into how educators' backgrounds and experiences shape their approach to culturally relevant pedagogy and their ability to meet the needs of a diverse student body.

- Longitudinal studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to track the effectiveness of implemented policies and practices over time. The longitudinal study would provide insight into the sustainability of changes in response to the findings and help identify emerging trends or challenges.
- Comparative analysis: Compare the outcomes of schools/districts that are implementing the recommended policies and practices with those that are not. This comparative analysis could shed light on the impact of specific interventions on disciplinary outcomes for Black students and the frequency of negative behavioral interactions.
- Case studies: Conduct case studies of schools or districts that have successfully reduced disciplinary disparities and fostered inclusive learning environments. These studies could offer detailed accounts of the strategies and processes employed and serve as models for other educational institutions seeking to implement similar changes.
- Policy analysis: Conduct in-depth policy analyses to examine the impact of local, state, and federal policies on disciplinary practices and outcomes. In-depth policy analysis involves analyzing policy documents, conducting interviews with policymakers, and assessing the alignment between policy goals and on-the-ground implementation.
- Teacher training evaluation: Evaluate the effectiveness of mandatory training programs for educators that address recognizing and mitigating implicit biases and understanding cultural competencies. This should include implementing pre-and post-

training assessments of teacher attitudes and behaviors and follow-up surveys or interviews to gauge the long-term impact of training on classroom practices.

- Community-driven research: Engage stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including students, parents, educators, and community members, in collaborative research efforts. This participatory approach ensures that research priorities, methodologies, and findings are responsive to the needs and perspectives of those directly affected by disciplinary practices.

Chapter Summary

My dissertation explored the impact of culturally relevant teaching strategies in elementary classrooms on the disciplinary outcomes for Black students. This was assessed through an analysis of referral and suspension rates throughout the academic year, as well as the frequency of negative interactions that were observed between teachers and students during instructional times. In the context of American society's growing demand for a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse actions and beliefs, and amid some resistance, it is crucial that this comprehension of culturally relevant teaching practices extends beyond superficial acknowledgment. Cultural awareness is vital, starting from an early age, to prepare students adequately in public education systems that strive for high academic standards. However, developing meaningful relationships between students and educators can be challenging if there is a lack of genuine connection and understanding (Gay, 2002).

The study was conducted in a public K-5 elementary school in a large district in central North Carolina. The school served approximately 700 students and Black students comprised about 15% of the population. Among the three participants, two taught in fourth-grade classrooms, while one taught in a fifth-grade classroom. All three participants were White

females. Their teaching experience in the public-school context varied, ranging from eight to sixteen years. They all fulfilled the minimum criteria for participation in the study. Additionally, one participant also possessed a Master of Arts degree in reading education.

I gathered quantitative data in the form of school and district discipline statistics, quasi-quantitative data in the form of enumerated interactions that I observed between teachers and students, and qualitative data from interviews with the teacher participants. Observations across these classrooms indicated a lack of consistency in applying culturally responsive teaching methods. The interactions between teachers and students, and the effectiveness of behavior management strategies, varied significantly based on the classroom environment, instructional materials, and the degree to which students felt included in the learning process. Teachers expressed concerns over the sporadic use of PBIS and circle time processes, contributing to the uneven application of culturally relevant practices throughout the school.

Although there was recognition of the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into teaching, the implementation of such practices varied widely. In some cases, there was minimal effort to incorporate multicultural content or to acknowledge the students' diverse cultural identities, leading to more negative interactions in certain classrooms. The research highlighted the disproportionately high incidence of behavioral issues among students of color, especially Black males, and suggested that subjective biases might influence disciplinary decisions. The findings call for policy and practice changes aimed at ensuring equitable treatment and minimizing negative behavioral incidents among elementary students. The findings also served to undergird recommendations for future research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Superintendent Permission Letter and Study Consent Form

January 3, 2023

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Jennifer Danielle McKinnon, and I am a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University. I am writing to request your permission to interview teachers in an elementary school in your in your district about their thoughts and perceptions regarding culturally relevant teaching and the impacts on student discipline outcomes. I am also asking permission to observe the classrooms of the teachers who volunteer to participate. The student group that will be the focus of the research study will be Black students.

My dissertation title is *Culturally Relevant Teaching in Diverse Communities and the Impact on Discipline Outcomes.* My goal is to examine the issue of student discipline outcomes for Black students in elementary school settings and the relationship between reported office discipline referrals and culturally relevant teaching practices being taught with intention in classrooms. The findings may serve to be beneficial as district and school leaders make curriculum and schoolwide behavior management programming decisions to better serve students.

I will interview the teachers using a structured interview protocol in which the teachers respond to questions about their experiences in the classroom with culturally responsive teaching practices and classroom management. All interview responses will remain confidential. I will also use a rubric for classroom observations that is focused on culturally responsive teaching practices and student responses. Neither the district, schools, nor participants will be identified anywhere in the research findings.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns at (919) 332-5622 jdmckin2@ncsu.edu. Prior to implementing the study, it will be approved by the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University. My dissertation chair is Dr. Mike Ward. He can be contacted at meward@ncsu.edu, respectively.

If you agree to my request, please sign the attached form, date it, and send it back to me. Please scan and email the permission form to me at jdmckin2@ncsu.edu.

Thank you so much for your consideration. I will be happy to give you a copy of the final report upon your request. I am excited about the opportunity to learn about culturally responsive teaching practices in your district.

Thank you in advance,

Jennifer Danielle McKinnon

STUDY CONSENT FORM

By signing and returning this form, I give Jennifer Danielle McKinnon, a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University, permission to conduct a research study in the Wake County Public School System. I acknowledge that Jennifer Danielle McKinnon may conduct an interview with teachers and observe classrooms during the months of March 2023-May 2023.

Approved by:

_____ _____

Signature Date

Superintendent name: _____

Superintendent address: _____

Appendix B: Classroom Observation Rubric

Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric

Category	Indicator	(5) Rarely	(4) Occasionally	(3) Roughly half the time	(2) Often	(1) Always
Content The subject matter that students are engaging with, and the substance of the materials that students are analyzing and discussing	Students engage with relevant content that centers issues of equity, power, race, and identity					
	Lesson is aligned NC Curriculum Standards and includes rigorous tasks that are cognitively demanding					
	The material itself reflects and affirms students' identities, raises awareness of global variety, and enables students to critically analyze the data that is provided					
Interpersonal The observable relationships and social dynamics that exist between the teacher and their students, as well as the relationships that exist between the students and their peers	Teachers and students are attuned to their strengths, gaps, and biases, and respond to them in constructive ways					
	Mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established amongst and across all students					
	Mutual respect and healthy boundaries are established between **the teacher** and all students					
Culture The classroom's climate and environment, observable artifacts, rituals and routines, and structures	The learning environment supports students' cultural and social identities and raises awareness of the diversity of the world					
	Routines and rituals are reassuring, have a purpose, and foster both independence and community					
	Expectations are co-constructed with a diverse group of stakeholders; they are ambitious, asset based, clear, and widely practiced in classroom					

Adapted from DESE (https://dese.mo.gov/) and used with permission

Appendix C: Classroom Seating Chart

Front of Classroom

Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:
Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:
Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:
Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:	Student: Gender: Subgroup: Notes:

Appendix D: Initial Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym:
Time of Interview:
Date:

Opening Script: Discuss purpose of research, what I am studying, and why. Discuss informed consent. Prior to the interview, I will ask each participant to share their ECATS behavioral data from 1st and 3rd Quarter.

Researcher:
Hello! As we discussed before, I am in the process of conducting research on student discipline outcomes for Black students in elementary school settings and the relationship between reported office discipline referrals and culturally relevant teaching practices being taught with intention in classrooms. This interview was designed to discuss the factors that lead to the success of student behaviors as well as the perceived impacts of cultural responsiveness for students and teachers. Before we begin the discussion, I would like to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form, that you understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, your identity will not be disclosed, and you may withdraw at any time. Also, this interview will last 30 minutes.

Do you agree to be recorded at this time for the purpose of being able to transcribe this discussion for my notes only?

Are there any questions before we proceed?

Collect Informed Consent: Gain informed consent by giving the participant a participant information sheet as well as an informed consent form to read through and then sign before beginning the interview.

Start With the Basics

1. How many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?
2. Throughout your educational career, how many hours of professional development (district provided, school provided, etc.) have you completed around culturally responsive teaching?
3. What is your current understanding of culturally responsive teaching? Do you have any examples to share? (Will share brief synopsis of culturally responsive pedagogy if needed)
4. How many hours have you personally invested in learning about culturally responsive teaching over your academic career?

Open-Ended Questions:

5. What communication methods do you use with the students in your classroom to address behaviors?

6. What does your classroom management plan look like in your classroom?
7. Tell me about your background in mentoring and educating students from various cultural backgrounds.
8. What kinds of experiences have you had in relating with people whose backgrounds are different from your own?
9. What do you think about the need of tailoring your instruction to the various cultures and learning preferences of your students? What, if any, are your methods for doing so?
10. How do you give behavioral feedback to students in your classroom?
11. How often do students and/or staff at your school have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?
12. Give examples of times when your values and beliefs impacted your relationships with your students.
13. In your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to the success of students?
14. Would you be willing to share your ECATS referral data for this school year as a part of the research process?

Closing: Share additional thoughts that haven't yet been discussed in the interview.

Thank the participant.

Appendix E: Concluding Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym:
Time of Interview:
Date:

Opening Script: Welcome the participant back to the space and thank them for their contribution to the research study.

Researcher:
Hello! As we discussed before, I am in the process of conducting research on student discipline outcomes for Black students in elementary school settings and the relationship between reported office discipline referrals and culturally relevant teaching practices being taught with intention in classrooms. This final interview will give you an opportunity to reflect on the past couple of months and connections made to culturally responsive practices that you may want to share. Before we begin the discussion, I would like to confirm again that you have read and signed the informed consent form, that you understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, your identity will not be disclosed, and you may withdraw at any time. Also, this interview will last 30 minutes.

Do you agree to be recorded at this time for the purpose of being able to transcribe this discussion for my notes only?

Are there any questions before we proceed?

Collect Informed Consent: *This will be on file* Gain informed consent by giving the participant a participant information sheet as well as an informed consent form to read through and then sign before beginning the interview.

1. What is your current understanding of culturally responsive teaching? Do you have any examples to share? Do you feel as though anything has changed from the 1st interview?
2. You have shared your ECATS data from the 1st three quarters of this school year. Is there anything that you have reflected on based on the data you shared?
3. Has your communication method changed or adjusted since the 1st interview?
4. Has your classroom management plan adjusted in your classroom since the beginning of the school year? If so, what changes have been made and how have they impacted your classroom?
5. Have your interactions with different culture within your classroom and school environment changed or remain the same?
6. What do you think about the need of tailoring your instruction to the various cultures and learning preferences of your students? What, if any, are your methods for doing so? Do you still feel the same about this?

7. How do you give behavioral feedback to students in your classroom? (looking for any changes or if there were none)
8. How often do students and/or staff at your school have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable? (looking for any changes or if there were none)
9. Is there a difference between student behaviors in your classroom from the beginning of the year until now? If so, what do you believe accounts for the change in student behaviors?
10. In your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to the success of students?
11. Is there a difference between student behaviors in your classroom from the beginning of the year until now? If so, what do you believe accounts for the change in student behaviors?

Closing: Share additional thoughts that haven't yet been discussed in the interview.

Thank the participant.

Appendix F: Expert Panel Review Protocol

Culturally Relevant Teaching in Diverse Communities and the Impact on Discipline Outcomes

Thank you for volunteering to serve on the expert panel for evaluating the interview protocol designed for this study. The purpose of my dissertation study is to determine whether culturally relevant practices that teachers implement within their elementary school classrooms affect the discipline outcomes of Black students, as evidenced by the number of referrals and suspensions that occur throughout the school year in an urban school district in North Carolina. As part of my study, I will interview the teachers in the district regarding their understanding and implementation of culturally relevant teaching practices and the impact that they have on student discipline outcomes within their classroom. I will also be observing student responses to culturally relevant practices within the classroom setting.

Your time, expertise, and assistance are needed to evaluate the content validity of the interview protocol. The attached structured interview protocol in which the teachers will respond to questions about their experiences in the classroom with culturally responsive teaching practices and classroom management.

Your input and feedback are extremely important, greatly appreciated, and will provide useful information about the clarity, appropriateness, and relevance of the interview questions. Your knowledge and experience in education qualifies you to serve as an expert panel member. Your input and feedback will provide valuable insight for possible adjustments or revisions to the interview protocol.

Please take your time and critique the attached interview protocol by answering either "Yes" or "No" to the questions below, as well as providing your reasoning behind any responses that receive a "No" on the lines that follow.

Questions	**Yes**	**No**	**If you selected No, please write why, and provide any feedback and/or suggestions that you feel would correct this aspect of the survey.** ***This section of feedback will be most helpful.***
1. Are the interview questions/statements direct and specific?			

2. Are the questions/statements designed in such a way that participants can understand them?			
3. Do you feel additional information is needed for participants to answer these questions regarding the degree to culturally responsive teaching presents itself in the classroom and its impacts of behavior? If so, please indicate the type of additional information that is needed in the box to the right.			
4. Do the interview questions adequately address factors that will allow the researcher to obtain sufficient information regarding culturally relevant strategies that the teachers use within the classroom to minimize negative behaviors?			
5. Do the interviews adequately address factors that will allow the researcher to obtain sufficient information regarding the perceptions of the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student success?			
6. Are there any items within the interview questions that you would modify?			**Please specify the item number(s) with your response if you selected "Yes".*
7. Are there any items within the interview questions that you believe should be excluded?			**Please specify the item number(s) with your response if you selected "Yes".*

8. Are there any interview questions that you feel should be included that are **not** currently included on the questionnaire attached?			**If you selected "Yes" please write your suggested statement(s) below:*
10. Do you have any suggestions related to the 'readability' of the interview questions (i.e.: wording of the questions, the layout of the questions, etc.)? If so, please write them in the box to the right.			