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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Strategies Teachers Implement That Support Mixed-Race Students in Schools in Rural Southeast
Texas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Tara Michelle Marshall

August 2022

Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful children, Brooklynn and Carter. To their fathers, Chad and Zane, thank you for creating life with me and for the two most precious beings in my life. It is also dedicated to my mom and dad for always believing in me, speaking life into me, and reminding me that *Tara* means “Strong Tower.” Through this doctorate full of life’s adversities, I have remained a strong tower and finished this season of life. To my sisters, Lauren and Shanna, I hope this dissertation inspires you to be all you were born to be.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in rural southeast Texas schools. This study is framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy and social emotional learning. Seven middle-school teachers were interviewed and provided artifacts to support the interviews. The primary findings identified strategies for teachers to examine their biases, intentionally plan social emotional lessons, remain open-minded and nonjudgmental, and engage in authentic professional development. Using equitable language, learning cultural norms, and being transparent to build trust with students are strategies teachers were implementing regarding equity. Supporting student organizations and identifying with the students' natural abilities to adapt helps teachers understand how to give their mixed-race students a sense of belonging. An exploration of how to foster relationships in the classroom revealed that leaders must increase professional development in teaching programs and address cultural diversity to close the gap for mixed-race students. This study is important because the multiracial population is rapidly increasing, and this study provides needed information for mixed-race students to be successful in the classroom.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally proficient teaching, cultural inclusiveness, multiracial students, mixed-race students, classroom community, social and emotional learning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Vespa et al. (2018), the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 Projections identified multiracial individuals as the fastest growing population. In fact, demographics for multiracial individuals are expected to increase by more than 200% between 2016 and 2060. This projection included an expected increase of multiracial children under the age of 18 to reach "11.3% of the population by 2060" (p. 4). As a result, the population of multiracial students in the public school system will increase. More specifically, one in every three students is predicted to be listed as *multiracial* by 2060 (Ivanich et al., 2018). This growth in multiracial students will increase the need for teachers to facilitate culturally relevant teaching, and to offer social and emotional support for diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Albuja et al. (2019) found that multiracial individuals frequently struggle with making choices about their own identity, which leads to identity denial, anxiety, stress, and even depression. Due to this basic need of belonging, Nenonene et al. (2019) asserted that social and emotional support helps multiracial students feel understood and able to embrace their identity, resulting in an improved sense of self and, therefore, improved academic performances.

Over 25 years ago, Ladson-Billings (1995) examined the theories and practices of culturally competent teachers of African American students and introduced the theory of cultural relevant teaching. In addition, Ladson-Billings (2012) laid the foundation for culturally responsive pedagogy, which addressed the unique issues of social inclusiveness for African American students within the classroom and established ways to mitigate and respond to the social and emotional needs of these students (Samuels, 2018). These mitigations enhanced student performance by allowing them to feel a sense of security (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Nishina and Witkow (2020) underscored the benefits of being multiracial and determined that the development of multiracial youths should be recognized not as an intersection of multiple parts, but rather as a whole. They also noted that although these students have a hard time feeling a sense of belonging, they are accustomed to having the grit to overcome adversity. Consequently, multiracial youth should be recognized within their own demographics, but research that is targeting the social emotional needs of multiracial students is limited. In fact, Nishina and Witkow (2020) confirmed that “multiracial youth were often grouped with *other*, either explicitly or implicitly (24%) or not mentioned at all (30%)” in three articles on child development dated from 2008 to 2018 (p. 173). With this projected increase of multiracial students in mind, it becomes vitally important to explore teachers’ perceptions of the school experiences of multiracial children within their classroom community. This chapter includes the following: background, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and research questions, the definition of key terms and the summary and organization of this chapter.

Background

Albuja et al. (2019) argued multiracial individuals frequently struggle with self-identification because they fall between monoracial groups. As a result, they are often denied membership into monoracial groups, which results in identity denial and difficulty making choices about their own identity. Additionally, the decision-making process among multiracial children is often more challenging due to their overall basic need of acceptance, which is paramount to feeling socially accepted and safe in a learning environment (Turan, 2021). Echols et al. (2018) asserted that self-identity is fluid, especially for multiracial youth, and it is influenced by social contextual factors. These social contextual factors contribute to the ability to

blend within two subgroups and finding a sense of identity outside of the racial group. This socially reflective practice is a hard concept and can often take until adulthood for one to comprehend. Therefore, the need for students to have the tools, support, and process in place for their emotional success is essential to their cognitive and physiological acceptance.

Nenonene et al. (2019) argued social and emotional learning helps support students succeed within the classroom and may also lower incidences of anxiety and depression among students. When students feel understood and have a sense of identity, they are more willing to perform academically. According to Samuels (2018), in a society that has become increasingly racially diverse, the question of how to ensure social emotional success pertaining to multiracial students presents unique issues, both for those individuals and for the general population. In response to the unique issues of social inclusiveness within the classroom, the culturally responsive theory mitigates and responds to social and emotional needs by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Gay and Howard (2000) added to foundational research and asserted that by using cultural knowledge to gauge students' experiences, performances, and how to make their learning environment more effective was called *culturally responsive teaching*. This process in the classroom creates opportunities for students to attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities by understanding their own experiences (Samuels, 2018). Furthermore, McCallops et al. (2019) suggested that cultural responsiveness in the classroom must occur prior to social emotional support being implemented due to various cultural interpretations of information. Consequently, culturally responsive pedagogy should be examined prior to social emotional interventions to determine which direction to take to offer

support with students who are having a hard time making decisions in the classroom (Bates et al., 2019).

According to Echols et al. (2018), the culturally responsive pedagogy theory validates the notion that multiracial students long for a sense of belonging. This can be addressed by future research, which should search for a connection between multiracial students and how they identify with their own ethnic background, as well as the specific racial groups that are available in their immediate social environments as well as how this plays a factor in how the student identifies themselves. In fact, over 25 years ago, Root (1996) declared that school is the first place where multiracial students realize they are perceived differently. Therefore, understanding how the school system may serve multicultural students can empower youth by creating meaningful and empowering cultural connections (Samuels, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

According to Potgieter-Groot et al. (2012), the social and emotional theory was designed to create opportunities for emotional literacy and emotional awareness. Emotional literacy works to enhance coping skills in individuals for emotional competence and self-control. Emotional awareness increases overall self-awareness and allows individuals to adjust to adversity. Furthermore, the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) should be tested to understand how these measures relate to one another by using the model and comparing the variances to measure the evidence (Ross & Tolan, 2018). The CASEL model continues to emphasize the idea that educators must understand the emotional intelligences of students to fully educate them appropriately (Ross & Tolan, 2018). By identifying this factor, proper collaboration for academic and social success is possible (Potgieter-Groot et al., 2012). Gathering intentional and personal information about all students within the classroom allows the

whole child to be addressed; and by implementing this tactic, it allows community to form and classroom community to evolve (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

According to Samuels (2018), culturally responsive pedagogy involves a “student-centered approach that intentionally places cultural awareness within the classroom” (p. 22). Implementing proper student-centered culturally relevant pedagogy allows the teacher to understand and adapt to the students’ needs. Thus, the teacher should recognize strategies that would promote success of all students within the classroom that cultivates cultural responsiveness in the classroom. The social emotional learning theory recognizes emotions, provides problem-solving methods, and establishes systems to support positive relationships with others (Cristóvão et al., 2017). The social emotional framework supports mental health and improves students’ academic performance through problem solving. Combining culturally responsive pedagogy and social emotional learning together enhances the effectiveness of classroom community and promoting self-identification for multiracial students (Samuels, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Due to the increase in multiracial students and the lack of information on how to integrate multicultural education into the curriculum of teacher education, teachers struggle to make decisions that are culturally responsive (Erbaş et al., 2019; McCallops et al., 2019). Samuels (2018) argued that culturally relevant pedagogy is not provided in the classroom in the way it should be. In fact, novice and veteran teachers have reported that such training is seen as a deficit within public education (Ladson-Billings, 2012). Hugh-Pennie et al. (2021) emphasized the need for educators to address the concerns of marginalized students by implementing culturally responsive practices. Furthermore, many teachers do not know what culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is or how to make it meaningful in the classroom.

The component of culturally responsive teaching consists of ensuring personal biases are not present and understanding the pervasive influences of culture (Gay & Howard, 2000). According to Freund and Giabbanelli (2021), biases cause individuals to interpret data differently based on one's personal experiences, which stresses the translation of evidence instead of factual desegregation. Therefore, it is essential to accurately describe how effective teachers build classroom community through social emotional learning to attain cultural congruence (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Tomlinson (1995) established that classroom community involves differentiating instruction, creating an opportunity for mixed-ability classrooms, and paying attention to the relevance of everyone in the room. However, while classroom community is essential for all learners, this study is specific to mixed-race students due to the confusion engendered by them identifying with more than one race and not being monoracial. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2012) posited that classroom community instills equity and belonging among all students. Ladson-Billings pointed to the basic needs of Bloom's Taxonomy's sense of belonging. Therefore, a child must sense they are safe and that they belong within their own community before they can begin learning. This fundamental practice is a driving force for positive student experiences and must be intentional for social and emotional support within the classroom.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. This study is framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000) and social emotional learning (SEL; Ross & Tolan, 2018). Additionally, this study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What strategies are teachers implementing to examine their own biases?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding equity for mixed-race students?

RQ3: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging?

RQ4: What challenges do teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed-race students?

Definitions of Key Terms

At this stage of the research, in order to enhance the reader's comprehension of subject matter, key terms utilized throughout this study are generally defined as follows.

Biases. Interpreting data differently based on one's personal experiences, which stresses the translation of evidence instead of factual desegregation (Freund & Giabbanelli, 2021).

Classroom community. Combining culturally responsive pedagogy and social emotional learning together enhances the effectiveness of classroom community and promoting self-identification for multiracial students (Samuels, 2018).

Cultural efficiency. This term refers to the ability to serve diverse students in an efficient capacity they can understand (Causton & MacLeod, 2020).

Cultural inclusiveness. Familiarity with students' race, culture, gender, and other roles of diversity that exist in respect to teaching and learning processes associated with diversity and inclusion (Sauder et al., 2021).

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach that intentionally places cultural awareness within the classroom (Samuels, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching. Cultural knowledge to gauge students' experiences, performances, and how to make their learning environment more effective was called *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay & Howard, 2000).

Empathy. Empathy as having the ability to obtain and understand the perceptions of others around them (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019).

Minority. A “student who is Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Black/African American, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander” (Strengthening Institution Programs, 2021).

Multicultural education. An intentional practice of creating systems to avoid racism (Erbas et al., 2019).

Multiracial students. Students who are born into two or more races (Shokri et al., 2017).

Rural community. The Texas definition for rural schools as defined by TEA is “a school district with a school of fewer than 600 students, or a town of less than 2500 people” (Alvarado, 2020).

Self-identification. The classification of personal self as defined by the individual (Erbas et al., 2019).

Social emotional learning. To monitor one's own responses and emotions by having the emotional intelligence to predict positive social outcomes (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

The whole child. The whole child focuses on the policies and procedures implemented within the academic framework and social emotional theory within the infrastructure of an organization (Willgerodt et al., 2021).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the background and statement of the problem, the rationale and significance of the study, the purpose of the study and research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature. The methodology is explained in Chapter 3, while findings are presented in Chapter 4. A summary of the study, conclusions, implications, and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. For the purposes of this study, middle school students are defined by sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The review of the literature is organized to include a background of social emotional learning theory, culturally responsive teaching theory, cultural inclusiveness, building relationships, collaboration, individualized instructions, mixed-race students, and the challenges these students face.

The literature compiled for this study included databases such as the Abilene Christian University Margaret and Herman Brown Library, scholarly articles, and key phrases and concepts from seminal literature. These keywords and phrases to conduct this review included information from veteran teachers, teachers who have had experience with multiracial students, and teachers who have used culturally relevant pedagogy.

Social and Emotional Learning Theory

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process through which students acquire unmeasurable cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skillsets that are essential for academic, personal, and social success (Alvarado, 2020; Brackett et al., 2011; Ross & Tolan, 2018). In 1994, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the term *social and emotional learning* (SEL) were established in New Haven, Connecticut, in response to educators asking questions about how to develop the whole child, both socially and emotionally.

As a result of this collaboration, Elias et al. (1997) identified 39 SEL guidelines for educators to follow to support the social and emotional learning of students from elementary through high school. In addition, Elias et al. (1997) explained that SEL cannot be simply an add-

on to a curriculum to be effective, but SEL must be adopted as an integrated component of the education system. In fact, with the support of federal law known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), TEA requires the implementation of SEL to help students “understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Alvarado, 2020).

Ross and Tolan (2018) illustrated five core competencies for the SEL framework, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This framework was updated to include a focus on social identity and cultural competence as well as to place an emphasis on examining biases and systemic inequities. The competencies are frequently referred to as “the CASEL wheel,” which is an illustration of not only the competencies, but also where they may be used (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

CASEL's SEL Framework: The CASEL Wheel



Note. From CASEL'S SEL Framework: *What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?* by Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020, (<https://casel.org/casel-sel-framework-11-2020/>).

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Social emotional learning theory recognizes emotions, provides problem-solving methods, and establishes systems to support positive relationships with others (Cristóvão et al., 2017). According to Ross and Tolan (2018), the CASEL social emotional framework supports mental health and improves students' academic performance through aligned learning opportunities, authentic partnerships, schoolwide culture, and social and emotional instruction.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory

Ladson-Billings (1995) described culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) 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 (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Swift et al. (2018) used narrative inquiry to present evidence that, although American educators present unity within the structure of globalization and create a platform to represent unity as the main goal, educators in America still practice separation and inequality within society. Swift et al. collected and told stories of Ladson-Billings, who is the driving force behind culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is advocating for unity within an academic setting, and the author discussed the differences between the teachers who teach with passion and beyond the four walls of the classroom and the teachers who teach to receive a paycheck. Furthermore, Swift et al. (2018) asserted that although the hurdles of achieving student excellence is high, it is attainable with Brown and Black students by understanding them culturally. The interest must be made outside of academics and the relation must be made in the classroom to eliminate social boundaries in the classroom.

In the early 2000s, Bates et al. (2019) explored how teachers should implement culturally responsive pedagogy. Bates et al.’s examination was done prior to the implementations of social emotional interventions so that he could determine which direction to take to offer support with students who were having a hard time making decisions in the classroom. According to Samuels (2018), *culturally responsive pedagogy* is a “student- centered approach that intentionally places cultural awareness within the classroom” (p. 7). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers to engage students in a meaningful way and create opportunities for them academically despite their cultural differences (Stake, 2013).

Ladson-Billings (1992) suggested providing opportunities for observation of novice teachers in culturally diverse settings so they can see how cooperating teachers sustain and meet

the needs of children in spite of cultural biases, differences, and natural unhealthy behaviors. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings suggested conducting student teaching for a longer period would benefit new teachers in culturally diverse settings. Placing these novice teachers in controlled environments where they would have adequate opportunities to get to know the students, understand the community, and get to know stakeholders would be a true apprenticeship, and it would build retention within the district. Real apprenticeships would last the same length of time as a contract teacher so the intern could experience the same ups and downs the contracted teacher gets to experience. These experiences would establish what the intern knew, and what they needed to know to truly reach students to improve the learning environment. Leichter (1973) described culturally responsive education as a discussion that enhances the community's development and compliments cultural differences to give students an experience over a lifetime.

Taylor and Sobel (2011) referenced responsive pedagogy interchangeably with culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally compatible teaching. They also noted that teachers who have this desire are the same ones who want to give their students equal opportunity no matter the language, race, or background. Taylor and Sobel suggested the study of culturally responsive pedagogy has resulted in the development of the conceptual framework theory. Great teachers create connections with all students. Connections must be integrated into the classroom for relevance. This concept is just as important as rigor. Therefore, this connection must be made for students to gauge curriculum. Furthermore, Taylor and Sobel emphasized that culturally relevant pedagogy involves a commitment to reach all students.

Park et al. (2017) examined teachers' perceptions on their CRPD (culturally responsive professional development) and what their perceptions were regarding cultural responsiveness. Park et al. concluded that teachers wanted more insight into what culturally responsiveness

entailed, teachers genuinely wanted students to feel secure and safe, and teachers felt there was a gap in their beliefs and their behaviors regarding culturally responsive teaching. The study moved the theory into practice and noted, although teachers had their own opinions, they needed to reflect more in depth on the adverse effects if they did not implement culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in the classroom.

McCallops et al. (2019) suggested that cultural responsiveness must occur prior to social emotional support being implemented due to various cultural interpretations of information. The social and emotional implementation for mixed-race students could be very beneficial for the intervention these students could be facing due to their possible issues with their cultural identity (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Additionally, according to Albuja et al. (2019), biracial students share the experiences of having identities with both races because they respectfully fall in between the two cultural groups. As a result, these individuals are frequently not accepted into groups they may attempt to identify with, and the social denial from group membership could threaten the student's self-concept. Tajfel and Turner (2004) presented social identity theory, which established that belonging to social groups helps create self-definition. This points to students' needs for belonging (Ettema et al., 1998) and to the importance of relationship building (Neck et al., 2020).

Twenty-five years ago, Root (1996) argued the first place where multiracial students realize they are perceived differently is in school because this is the first time a child is presented to an organization outside of their natural cultural society and mainstreamed into a diverse setting. Samuels (2018) argued that understanding how the school system can serve multicultural students empowers youth by creating meaningful and powerful cultural connections and establishes appropriate norms for students. Thus, cultural connections between teachers and

students are established through intentional cultural integration and intentional educational experiences as supported by local, state, and federal guideline. Implementing practices that create cultural connections must be distinctively developed through community efforts to assist schools, and the community must become key players in the success of this subgroup of students (Gurin et al., 2002).

Providing opportunities for these personal conversations to occur supports the needs of all cultural identities. This is a self-reflection practice that eases identity issues and supports individuals in their most vulnerable space. These conversations allow students to relate to one another, feel heard in the classroom, and identify with their peers (Samuels, 2018).

Multicultural education may not address the need for including the needs of multiracial students, which leaves a gap for the multiracial students to effectively communicate without barriers within their classrooms when among their peers (Echols et al., 2018). Therefore, research is needed to help teachers understand how to implement classroom culture to multiracial students to better understand how cultural congruency is maintained (Nenonene et al., 2019).

Almager (2018) added an approach to cultural pedagogy by narrating five personal stories about the oppression the author experienced in the public school system due to teachers' personal biases on mixed races. Almager used these personal experiences as an inspiration and shaped the study to demonstrate how the public school system is not designed to service immigrant and multiracial students. Due to a majority of the teachers in public education being White, the biases of teachers create an unfair educational system (Kibler & Chapman, 2019). Furthermore, according to Almager, because White teachers experienced school differently, the approaches to how they see various cultures build walls that keep them from truly reaching those students. Thus, Almager concluded, due to teachers' apathetic and sociocentric way of thinking,

students would never reach their full potential. Teachers must reshape their thought pattern to fully believe in the capability of their students.

Cultural Inclusiveness/Classroom Community

Combining culturally responsive pedagogy and social emotional learning together enhances the effectiveness of classroom community and promotes self-identification for multiracial students (Samuels, 2018). Additionally, Ward (2018) suggested that to understand the potential challenges of cultures, people must seek to understand by being empathetic and sensitive to cultural barriers, biases, and climate. Ward also stated that there must be a community built between the home and the school by setting expectations and boundaries for students in the classroom and at home that align. The importance of collaboration is essential to building educational inclusiveness.

Furthermore, according to the data included in the United States Census Bureau (Vespa et al., 2018), the population of minority and mixed-race individuals will rise and therefore must be accommodated with a collaborative effort of parents and school community as noted by Ladson-Billings (2012). Ladson-Billings further explained that educators must learn to set the tone with their local communities by building parenting programs and practices that promote school improvement and parent involvement for inclusiveness within all races. By doing so, the concepts of educational styles often are perceived as disjointed and not fluid. This is due to the lack of intentional implementation by the policymakers in education that do not advocate for low-income families, but rather in cultural isolation that does not pertain to the growing population of multicultural students. Ladson-Billings (2012) also posited that giving students choices provides active periods where students can expend their energy and feel physically involved in their own learning.

According to Sauder et al. (2021), students have a greater sensitivity to all areas of diversity. Therefore, Ladson-Billings (2012) noted some underlying misconceptions directly related to diversity and inclusion. These misconceptions have laid the framework that outlines their frustrations in respect to teaching and learning processes associated with diversity and building an inclusive community. Building community means to create a sense of inclusive belonging. Diversity in socioeconomic status and ethnicity has grown rapidly in the United States and will continue to increase by 200% by 2060 (Vespa et al., 2018). Therefore, the notion that diversity should be understood, and biases should be diminished to foster a true sense of inclusiveness, is what students voiced (Van der Werf et al., 2021).

Davis and Allen (2020) surveyed 174 students and 40 instructors and observed 18 classrooms and found that students and teachers alike discussed social injustice and felt that learning about cultural diversity in the classroom could be beneficial for all involved. As a result, the teachers and mentors that had the greatest success within their classrooms were the teachers that related to them on a personal and cultural level. These teachers listened, cared, asked about what they were interested, and took an interest in their extracurricular events.

Furthermore, Broughton (2016) identified the perceptions from the critical race theory education to help support the children academically. To accurately understand how classroom community happened in the classroom, the data were collected through dissecting culturally relevant practices upon these individuals based on their interests. He did this by creating hip-hop pedagogy that directly related the students interests in basketball, music, Black history, and other cultural characteristics.

Biases

Social emotional learning requires biases to be examined. In recent decades various scholars have worked toward defining what true biases are and how they have affected society (Clarke, 2018). Broughton (2016) asserted due to the recent chain of events based upon discriminatory attacks on race, ethnicity, and social groups, it is now more important than ever to find out how these biases affect others and identify how these subconscious emotions cause rage, anger, and hate to then manifest through actions. These actions are called *explicit biases* (Smith-Barrow, 2019). Expressed biases stem from the resentment that has manifested through the subconscious, to expressive emotions, and then manifest toward an outward appearance. It is also important to note that if biases against race, ethnicity, or sex are acted out, then the legalities are insubordinate to any public educational institution (Clarke, 2018).

Smith-Barrow (2019) suggested that biases against ingroups are not seen as being discriminatory. An ingroup consists of friends, schoolmates, or preferences toward a particular interest. However, biases against social groups, races, gender, or ethnicities become unacceptable when they create and manifest boundaries within the subpopulations. These boundaries stimulate a disassociation from the subgroup and negative perceptions. These boundaries caused by biases are also very unsettling when they exclude others, build resentment, and cause reactions toward the other subgroup. This level of bias is unhealthy and is labeled *implicit biases*. Implicit biases manifest in the subconscious in the early part of life often by parents, social groups, or social influence. These influences begin to create social impressions and “theoretical perceptions” (p. 173). These perceptions cause others to create negative behaviors and emotions toward the other person. Throughout education, the notion that educators must rid themselves of all biases to truly be effective with all children has been proven valid.

Building Relationships

Ettema et al. (1998) provided a framework of choice theory, which is a major component for building relationships in the classroom. The researchers emphasized that all students are unique; however, they are all driven by the same five basic needs. Consequently, all students chose behaviors to meet these five basic needs, which include survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Thus, teachers are in a position to help ensure students' needs are met, and they can contribute to a student's need to belong or feel valued by creating a classroom community through collaboration and relationship building.

The seminal evaluation of Peters et al. (2006) challenged teachers to ask probing questions to get to know their students and explained why knowing them is important. Peters et al. questioned what teachers know rather than what teachers think about their students. Asking these questions increased relationships and promoted relationship within the classrooms. Peters et al. initially proposed that teachers all need to understand the basic level of Bloom's taxonomy, which is to provide basic needs before the student can learn. The author also stated that to respond to extraneous circumstances, relationships help fight the adversity that students experience to help with academic success.

Bedford and Bonura (2017) suggested that due to personal values playing a significant role on obtaining relationships, alignment within socio-demographic, personal values, and differences must be understood when building relationships. Neck et al. (2020) asserted that relationships are essential to the growth and the overall wellness of an individual. Furthermore, Fitzgerald et al. (2021) found that intentional morning meetings with the classroom improved belonging and identity in the classroom. In fact, 2-to-5-minute intentional engagements decreased anxieties and collaboration with the classroom. Fitzgerald et al. also discussed active

reflection, which allowed students to disarm from their own perceptions and hear the reality of their peers.

The reality of self was also mentioned in the seminal research of Ladson-Billings (1995) through these three key points:

1. Parents should not be labeled as roadblocks to truly engage students, and it is the teacher's job to build the relationship with the child despite the hinderance or lack of effort contributed by the parent.
2. Provide opportunities for students to critique the organizational system and give constructive feedback to the educational practices that would best suit their needs so that students feel heard and understood.
3. Provide educational self-determination so teachers and students understand the local, state, and federal mandates. This helps cultures understand the expectation and rigor that is beyond just the teacher, but that comes from an organizational hierarchy.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that by implementing these opportunities, various cultures would have buy-in for their child's education, and this relational piece would sustain the organization.

Equity

Pruitt (2008) argued that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted as an education reform plan in 2001 changed the Federal government's role in public education to improve student achievement and to close the achievement gap by providing equity for all students. NCLB created this system to provide equity with highly qualified teachers and to give families the opportunity to leave a poorly performing school. These highly qualified teachers were to be equally divided among the districts. However, Pruitt noted through this process, there have been

many negative effects. Equity has not been deemed true in poorer districts with less resources and lower pay. Therefore, the quality of teachers in the heavily diverse areas often have teachers who are not certified or whose degree was not intended for education. These teachers are not highly qualified and the area of schools that could be transferred into are not necessarily any better performing.

Even over 30 years ago, Berne and Stiefel (1984) initiated the notion that equity in public education should recognize students who were different racially and socioeconomically. In a later study, Berne et al. (1999) asserted that horizontal and vertical equity are determined by recognizing when students are not upheld equally and by identifying the differentially situated, respectively. According to Pruitt (2008), efficacy and equity are both heavily used in education policy. Although there is a massive body of research on the efficiency-equity trade-off, recent studies have little to no consensus on whether efficiency and equity as policy goals are conflicting. However, in education, equity continues to be the most studied due to the issues of fairness and justice amongst students in education (Education Law Center, 2018). Gaddis and Lauen (2014) found that academic injustices are related to the Black-White achievement gaps, which can be closed in affluent areas due to the resources. In fact, the equity is not the same in poorer communities due to the lack of resources provided to close the gaps (Gaddis & Lauen, 2014). Additionally, when these students are two or more races, the inequality is higher due to the commonality that diverse populations have fewer resources (Education Law Center, 2018).

Empathy

Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) explored the benefits of empathy for school children as related to both project-based learning and classroom culture. The researchers described empathy as having the ability to obtain and understand the perceptions of others around them.

They also argued that if teachers cultivate empathy among students, then peer relationships, communication, and collaboration among the students may increase. In fact, when students gain empathy and improve relationships, communication, and collaboration, students begin to demonstrate these positive attributes both inside and outside of the classroom. Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) also concluded that teachers who practice empathy create a comfortable and embracing classroom culture on a regular basis, and this increases students' trust and guides them to express their personal feelings related to their perceptions of learning (p. 161).

According to Yamanoi et al. (2021), school has an important role in administering experiences for children. However, often teachers do not have empathy for others and place their own personal biases on the judgement of children. These judgements are often subconscious and not intentional. However, if teachers do not intentionally suppress their biases from students, the projection onto the student could emotionally harm the students. Yamanoi et al. also asserted that classroom performance is highly influenced by the teacher's *emotional relatedness*. If the teacher is not able to relate to students in a positive way, then the basic levels of nature are not being met through nurture.

Collaboration

The Association of Studies of Higher Education (ASHE; 2012) emphasized that intentional practices increase cultural competence among students of all ages. The researchers explained, "Collaborative learning activities are uniquely suited for the goal of fostering intercultural competence by supporting students' interaction with classmates and content" (p. 71). Hermann et al. (2021) added that due to many differences in education culturally, socially, demographically, and linguistically, teachers must work together with the students through collaboration in order for students to succeed. Collaboration within the classroom allows for

students of a variety of backgrounds to intentionally socialize and work together through active learning (Eickholt et al., 2020).

According to Eickholt et al. (2020), active learning is a cheap, inclusive way to intentionally place students together and build relationship. Examples of active learning include centers, stations, group work, collective responses, and flex-seating arrangements. These activities provide gateways for students to collaborate in a natural environment through play. Moylett (2014) defined the process ‘development matters’ in early education by explaining that although children thrive off independent play, collaborative play is also essential for children to thrive. Collaborative play is necessary for imitation, noticing patterns in other children, and learning to make predictions; therefore, teachers must incorporate the discovery for students’ long-term memory by grouping children together to incorporate collaboration to learn from one another’s experiences (Lopez, 2017).

Individualized Instruction

Individualized instruction, introduced by Gardner’s (1983) approach to multiple intelligences, argued that there are multiple ways to learn, and educators must respond to individualized instruction based on each child’s multiple intelligences. Multiple intelligences (MI) improve social skills, provide emotional support to students, and help engage students’ perceptions in the classroom (Kibler & Chapman, 2019). Wood (2020) added that teachers do not only need to focus on the students MI, but recommended teachers in public education need to remain focused on the needs within their communities and their campuses to adequately reach students in their emotional state. Furthermore, Wood suggested authentic engagement is better than forced engagement. Therefore, genuinely reaching the students within their own learning style and engaging within their community shows genuine intent to individualize instruction.

Wood recommended teachers in public education need to remain focused on the needs within their communities and their campuses to adequately reach students in their emotional state.

Kibler and Chapman (2019) stated the notion that inclusiveness comes when there is intention in relating to the students through culturally relevant texts. They suggested allowing students to read culturally relevant texts to create an individualized instruction technique that should intentionally relate to them. This enhances students' engagement because the texts align with their backgrounds and beliefs. Culturally relevant texts give students an understanding their background matters and promotes the second tip of creating a safe environment. Wood (2020) recommended teachers need to gain more self-reflection, student observation, and know where they teach. Teachers need to be aware of who they are servicing. Additionally, Bacon and Kearney (2020) claimed the pursuits of self-reflection, student observation, and knowing where they teach are worthwhile for the return of success in the classroom. Learning students' backgrounds and carefully selecting culturally relevant texts draws on students' own experiences and promotes their culture in the learning environment. Authentic engagement is better than forced engagement. Therefore, schools need to challenge views that do not align with social and emotional well-being.

Mixed-Race Students

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) defined the term *mixed-race* as being specific to “the offspring of Black/White interracial unions” for specific reasons (p. 58). The definition allowed the researchers to focus on the “stigmatization of intermarriage between blacks/whites” (p. 67). In contrast, the term *multiracial* is broad because it includes people of all combinations (p. 38). However, they asserted other groups should not rigorously be defined, and the term *mixed race* is limited to biracial individuals who are Black and White. This identity has dilemmas according to

where they are located within the United States. Not only has this increase in the multicultural population caused confusion in the identification of themselves within the public school system due to the possibility that an individual may have a mixture of heritages that cannot be neatly separated for an immersion experience (De Silva et al., 2018). Therefore, even confusion of terms *multicultural*, *mixed race*, and *biracial* (among others) need clarification (Ladson-Billings, 2018).

According to Vespa et al. (2018), the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 Projections identified multiracial individuals as the fastest growing population. In fact, demographics for multiracial individuals are expected to increase by more than 200% between 2016 and 2060. This projection included an expected increase of multiracial children under the age of 18 to reach "11.3% of the population by 2060" (p. 4). As a result, the population of multiracial students in the public school system will increase. More specifically, one in every three students is predicted to be listed as *multiracial* by 2060 (Echols et al., 2018).

Challenges

According to Ross and Tolan (2018), even though multiracial children are among the top 10% who were born within the last 10 years, these children still face many challenges. Among these challenges are social emotional challenges, high divorce rates from parents, and public identity challenges. These challenges are contributed to by the continued pressures of society and fellow peers that want them to identify with one race. Students often have a hard time with this because they do not want to identify with one race because it makes them uncomfortable with their other race. This struggle is often portrayed through negative behaviors, self-isolation, or struggling to expressive themselves to their authority. Ross and Tolan (2018) also suggested the best way to support multiracial children through this process is to teach open communication and

allow the conversations to arise about hair, skin color, cultural preferences, and physical features. These conversations can resolve inner struggles directly related to multiracial children and strengthen their confidence related to their identity.

Albuja et al. (2019) found that multiracial individuals frequently struggle with making choices about their own identity, which leads to identity denial, anxiety, stress, and even depression. These students often have a hard time identifying socially and tend to become a chameleon in their attempt to adapt in every situation (Samuels, 2018). The need to adapt is a result of the basic need of acceptance, which makes the decision-making process about cultural identity even more difficult. In fact, the basic need of acceptance is paramount to feeling socially accepted and safe in a learning environment (Turan, 2021). Due to this basic need of belonging, Nenonene et al. (2019) asserted that social and emotional support helps multiracial students feel understood and able to embrace their identity, resulting in an improved sense of self and, therefore, improved academic performances.

Echols et al. (2018) asserted that self-identity is fluid, especially for multiracial youth, and it is influenced by social contextual factors. These social contextual factors contribute to the ability to blend within two subgroups and finding a sense of identity outside of the racial group. For this reason, it is important to understand the communities in which students learn and grow.

Rural Communities

Building collaboration between the home, the local community, educators, and students is imperative to building educational inclusiveness (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Sauder et al., 2021; Ward, 2018). According to Vespa et al. (2018), the population of mixed-race students has increased and will continue to increase in rural communities. Ladson-Billings (2012) explained that educators must learn to set the tone with their local communities by building parenting

programs and practices that promote school improvement and parent involvement for inclusiveness within all races. Therefore, it is essential to understand challenges specific to rural communities.

Rural is defined by Webster's dictionary as "in, relating to, or characteristic of the countryside rather than the town" (Merriam-Webster, 2021, n.p.). However, Ticken and Montgomery (2021) explained that the U.S. Census Bureau uses 15 different definitions to classify rural areas, and each state has its own definition. For example, a rural community may be defined by the number of its population, its location, or the simple fact that it is outside of a metropolitan area. Nonetheless, Ticken and Montgomery argued that connotations of rural communities include images of affluent White communities or poor Black and minority communities.

The Texas definition for rural schools as defined by TEA is "a school district with a school of less than 600 students, or a town of less than 2500 people" (Alvarado, 2020). However, as diversity increases and as the population of mixed-race students continues to grow, rural America has experienced an "unprecedented demographic change" (p. 10). As a result, racial and class inequalities divide rural areas, which makes community engagement and professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy essential for student success.

Teachers

Over 25 years ago, Ladson-Billings (1995) supported the need for teachers to intentionally address multiracial student concerns. Teachers who have culturally relevant practices are careful to connect with each of their students and assure each student of their individual importance regardless of their self-perception. Ladson-Billings also suggested each teacher should begin with beginning of the year questionnaires so the teacher can learn to relate

to each student's interests despite cultural differences. This practice allowed for small acts of kindness to be established in the classroom with various cultures because most students do not experience intentional kindness in schools by building a community of learners who believe they can attain higher levels of achievement just by intentionally being told they can. Therefore, teachers are essential to the process of empowering cultural connections among youth to establish their own identity and self-acceptance in the classroom through the prospective of first level cognition and establish hope and aspiration (Samuels, 2018).

Social emotional pedagogy addresses the unique issues that mixed-race students experience, including the need for social inclusiveness as well as feeling a sense of security and belonging (Echols et al., 2018; Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Samuels, 2018). Culturally responsive teachers make learning environments more effective, build classroom community, and create more opportunities for students to learn (Gay & Howard, 2000; McCallops et al., 2019; Samuels, 2018).

Consequently, teacher education programs are created to teach pedagogy and teaching strategies (Van der Werf et al., 2021). However, adequate love and attention significantly increase students' success within the classroom outside of academics (Davis & Allen, 2020). Shalander et al. (2020) noted that multiracial students have increased within the education system, and they have caused tension in the classrooms because teachers are not sure how to give them the same love and affection because of their own biases. Shalander et al. also stated the increase of multiracial students within the classrooms allows for subconscious barriers because of the lack of comfort. However, if simulation of the natural environment was implemented within the classroom and an invitation of their own culture was presented, then the classroom would be affirming for diverse learners (De Silva et al., 2018).

Summary

Chapter 2 has provided a review of literature. The methodology is explained in Chapter 3. Research findings are presented in Chapter 4, and a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. This study is framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000) and SEL (Ross & Tolan, 2018). In Chapter 3 I present the purpose statement and the research questions, the design of the study, information on the participants, the setting, and the data collection as well as treatment of the data and provisions for trustworthiness. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the study.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in middle schools in rural southeast Texas. For the purposes of this study, middle school included students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The following questions guided this research:

RQ1: What strategies are teachers implementing to examine their own biases?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding equity for mixed-race students?

RQ3: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging?

RQ4: What challenges do teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed-race students?

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative case study research was conducted utilizing a descriptive case study and narrative design that relates to the case study design (Stake, 1995). Teachers were asked about

the personal experiences they have had in the classroom with multiracial students (Creswell, 2013).

In an instrumental case study, the researcher's role is to gather an understanding through a variety of data sources to provide greater insight into a particular issue, trend, or theme (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The gathering of this evidence allowed me to focus on the knowledge, opinions, individualized perceptions, feelings, and detailed descriptions rather than solely on numerical data (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Yin (2003, 2018) suggested that a case study approach in qualitative methodology is best suited for answering the how or why something is happening. To understand the why, the interpretation of other experiences is essential.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach is the method of sampling data collection based on perception. This method is desirable when descriptions of phenomena are needed (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334). Colorafi and Evans (2016) stated, "Qualitative descriptive studies focus on low-inference description, which increases the likelihood of agreement among multiple researchers" (p. 17). Colorafi and Evans also supported the seminal attributes of the qualitative descriptive approach. This approach allowed for a range of theoretical frameworks with various sampling techniques.

This qualitative case study was not designed to generalize to the entire population of teachers, but to purposefully collect specific information from a sample of middle-school teachers in southeast Texas who have experiences teaching multiracial students that adequately facilitate classroom acceptance and cultural awareness. In the process of collecting their narrative experiences, I embraced my own role as an active participant in the process by diversifying the observations and documenting reactions accurately (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Participants

Creswell and Poth (2016) explained the qualitative case study focuses on describing what several individuals have in common based on their lived experiences. The researchers collect data and look for universal themes of the participants' individual experiences. Therefore, once data were collected from a sample of teachers, I analyzed the data to identify commonalities in the lived experiences of middle school teachers who implement culturally responsive practices to meet the social, emotional, and learning needs of multiracial students.

A purposeful sampling of seven veteran middle school teachers who have taught at least 7 years and have experience in teaching multiracial students in a variety of southeast Texas rural school districts was utilized. Additionally, these participants were screened in the beginning by having them define cultural efficiency to determine if they understand cultural relevance. Table 1 depicts an overview of participant demographics.

Table 1*Overview of Participant Demographics*

CPT	Ethnicity	Gender	Years taught
CPT1	White	Female	14
CPT2	White	Male	17
CPT3	White	Male	11
CPT4	White	Male	8
CPT5	White	Male	9
CPT6	White	Female	7
CPT7	Black	Male	15

Note. Table 1 presents the ethnicity, gender, and number of years of teaching experience for each participant in this study. Specifically, the participants included two White women with 7–14 years of teaching experience, four White men with 8–17 years of teaching experience, and one Black man with 15 years of teaching experience.

Participating teachers were interviewed using a guided protocol based on the research questions. Teachers who self-identified as being culturally responsive were selected for this study using a snowball strategy. Snowball is a common sampling strategy used to identify participants from people who know people who have experienced the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Noy, 2008). Once I received names of potential candidates, I submitted an email with the template asking what cultural proficiency is prior to requesting participation in the study to ensure they were a good candidate (see Appendix B). However, names of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 1 (CPT1) was originally from out of state. She has over 14 years of educational experience in rural and suburban areas and 6 years in middle school. This

teacher is a current department head and has a unique culturally diverse background herself that made her an excellent selection for this study. She has an eclectic sense of style that naturally draws kids to her and breaks down barriers.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 2 (CPT2) is the husband of Culturally Proficient Teacher 1. This teacher is also culturally eclectic and has 17 years of experience teaching in both urban and rural middle schools. CPT2 described his experiences in the classroom with multiracial students with raw and distinct language that reflected his genuine hope is for kids to learn in a safe environment.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 3 (CPT3) is a current high school principal who has 11 years in the classroom serving in a rural district. This experience qualified him to participate in this study from a variety of lenses.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 4 (CPT4) is a current technology director with 8 years in the classroom as a middle school teacher. He was teacher of the year and has great experience with teaching social and racial injustices within the rural area.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 5 (CPT5) is a student service coordinator with 18 years in education, and he served as a middle school teacher for 9 years and a middle school principal for 3 years. This teacher served in a rural school district as well as an affluent school district. This teacher and his wife have three Black adopted children as White parents. They are very sensitive to cultural inclusiveness and expressed a great interest in their personal students' needs, but also other multiracial children.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 6 (CPT6) is a current middle school teacher with 7 years' experience. This teacher met minimal requirements but has fresh experience in the classroom for

a variance in perception. This teacher was born and raised in the rural community in which she teaches.

Culturally Proficient Teacher 7 (CPT7) is high school assistant principal but taught Physical Education in a rural community for 15 years at the same campus. This teacher has been named district teacher of the year and is a black male.

Qualitative Data Collection

Primary data were collected by conducting interviews with seven teacher participants who serve as middle school educators in southeast Texas. I asked recorded open-ended questions to the teacher participants to gauge how they implement classroom culturally responsive pedagogy within their classroom. Interviews were conducted using a guided protocol that gauged narrative inquiry to make deep meaning of the feedback (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interview protocol questions (attached as Appendix A) were developed based on the research questions that guided this study as well as the literature review and experiences related to this topic.

I was fully engaged and intentionally focused on what the participants had to say to ensure high-quality feedback (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted through videoconferencing, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. Other sources of data included inviting participants to contribute artifacts, lesson plans, meeting agendas, and data collections to support the narratives.

According to Stake (2013), interviewing someone of value requires them to have “pertinent experience and the ability and ensuring they have their interview questions before hand” (p. 17). Ensuring that the participants have their interview questions beforehand allows for them to gauge the question and come up with an answer that has more substance and value (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, professional knowledge also enhances the quality of the

interview (Stake, 2013). Professional knowledge is direct knowledge lived by first-hand experiences and examined to create data based upon those individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis

The goal of extracting information for a systematic investigation was done to discover the theme behind the interpretation of the data as recommended by Leavy (2020). The systemic approach used for this study included several steps. First, the interviews were transcribed and stored in a computer database. Next, field notes were made in the margins of the typewritten transcripts to identify significant statements or quotes the participants made in relation to the central phenomenon being studied. Next, clusters of meaning have been identified from the field notes and descriptions of what the participants said. I used descriptive coding to focus on the nouns specific to the theme of thoughts and ideas (Saldana, 2014). Finally, the descriptions were analyzed to identify common practices used to implement cultural responsiveness towards multicultural students. Moustakas (1994) explained that the textural descriptions (what happened) and the structural descriptions (how it happened) of the participants' experiences form the essence of the data collected. Names and locations in the interview transcripts and observation notes have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Ethics

The selected participants were treated in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA) ethical guidelines and the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C). I gave each participant their bill of rights, ensured that

participants felt comfortable and understood the agenda, and maintained transparency. No data were collected until ACU IRB approval was obtained.

Provisions of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to “the quality of being deserving of trust or confidence” (Merriam-Webster, 2020, n.p.). A pilot study was not conducted based on the limited number of culturally responsive candidates to whom I had access. According to Chenail (2011), “Sometimes piloting is not practical because researchers do not want to lose limited research participants...” (p. 258). Instead, I enlisted the help of a colleague to conduct the interview to test the reliability of the research questions in a process called expert review of the protocol. The interview was recorded, and I transcribed the interview, using the same back-up recording device that was used for the research. This practice ensured the reliability of the recording device and tested the clarity of the recording. In addition, the interview was conducted via Zoom, and the recorder was activated. This provided me with a field test of the same technology that was used for the participants to this study (Chenail, 2011).

I adhered to the guided interview protocol questions, observations, and transcriptions to establish trustworthiness. Prior to conducting the interviews, the guided protocol questions were sent to the teachers who participated in this study. Next, the participants’ shared their perspectives for the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). After conducting the guided-protocol interviews, the participants were invited to review the transcript of their own interview to validate the accuracy of their feedback in a process called member checking. According to Stake (2013), a validation process was used through triangulation of multiple data sources such as interviews, field notes, and artifacts from teachers. Artifacts

included lesson plans, meeting agenda, website information, and other documentation that supports the interviews.

Epoché

I am an administrator in a school in southeast Texas. It is important to note that all the teachers who met the criteria of this study had the option to participate. I fully understand that my experiences as a multiracial woman are not to project biases into my study. As a student who never felt Black enough for the Black students nor White enough for the White students, I know how the lack of cultural relevance can cause the lack of inclusiveness in multiracial students. However, I have bracketed my personal biases, experiences, and beliefs while conducting this study because gathering data to support the challenges at hand remained the focus and importance of this study.

Assumptions

According to Creswell (2013, p. 17), *assumptions* refer to a researcher's own "theories, paradigms, and perspectives" that are used to formulate a problem and to develop research questions. The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. The participants met the criteria established for the study; therefore, they are culturally responsive veteran teachers who have taught at least 7 years and have experience in teaching multiracial students.
2. The participants have consciously experienced the phenomenon central to this study, and they have openly and honestly responded to the research questions.
3. The research questions were adequately developed to explore the culturally responsive practices implemented by the participants and made the basis of this study.

Limitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined *limitations* as factors that are not within the researcher's control yet may affect the findings of a research study. The limitations of this study included the following:

1. This qualitative study is not designed to generalize the entire population of teachers, but to purposefully collect specific information from a sample of teachers in southeast Texas who have experience teaching classroom community to multiracial students that adequately facilitates classroom acceptance and cultural awareness.
2. In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) referred to as the "Heisenberg effect" or the "observer effect" (p. 34), which explained that the presence of a researcher has the potential to affect the participants' responses during qualitative questioning.

Delimitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined *delimitations* as "self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (p. 134). Delimitations of this study included the following: the participants are (a) limited to middle school teachers (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades) from rural southeast Texas schools, (b) self-identified as culturally responsive teachers, (c) veteran teachers with at least 7 years of experience, (d) experienced in teaching diverse, multicultural learners within the classroom, and (e) able to adequately provide a definition of culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, the results were generalized only to those teachers who share these characteristics.

Summary

Chapter 3 begins with the purpose of the study and a brief reminder of the problem as well as the research questions that guided this research and an overview of the chapter. Also

included are an explanation of the theoretical framework, research design and methodology, qualitative data collection and analysis procedures, researcher role, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. An expert review was conducted with two participants who have knowledge within the field and the topic. Chapter 4 of this dissertation details the results of the case study. Chapter 4 restates the purpose of the study and discusses the findings, which emerged from the data analysis process. Chapter 5 includes a review and summation of the study, discussion of the conclusions, and implications of the study as it relates to future research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. This study is framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000) and SEL (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This chapter is organized in terms of the five research questions initially posed in Chapter 1. This chapter reports the findings based upon the data analysis that was conducted. A purposeful sample of seven participants was limited to (a) middle school teachers (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades) from rural southeast Texas schools who (b) self-identified as culturally responsive teachers, (c) had at least 7 years of experience, (d) taught diverse, multicultural learners within the classroom, and (e) were able to adequately provide a definition of *culturally responsive teaching*. Few studies examined the classroom community among mixed-race students; therefore, this research is vital to understanding how these students desire to be looked at as their own identity as *biracial* and how to do more as an effective classroom teacher.

A qualitative instrumental case study was used to identify the strategies and gather more information regarding how teachers reach multiracial students socially and emotionally and how to ensure teachers are giving students proper classroom community. The data were collected from the seven rural middle school teachers and analyzed. The primary source of data within this study was one-on-one, internet-based interviews. The data sources contained demographic information, including the number of years taught, whether the employing district met requirements for being defined as *rural* by Texas Education Agency (Alvarado, 2020), and being able to define *culturally responsive teaching*. The interview questions were guided by an established protocol. The secondary sources of data within this study were student artifacts (e.g.,

social emotional lesson-plans, academic data, cards and thank you notes, or other personal documents).

The assigned participant pseudonyms begin with the word CPT and are followed by a sequential number (e.g., CPT1, CPT2, CPT3, etc.). The transcripts from each interview along with all personal artifacts were reviewed several times and coded for data analysis.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 explored what strategies teachers were implementing to examine their own biases. Participants responded to this research question by describing strategies they implement to intentionally reflect on their own biases in an effort to obtain cultural proficiency in the classroom. The emerging themes were the following: intentionally plan social emotional lessons, remain open-minded and nonjudgmental, and engage in authentic professional development. These themes were identified as the most common words used within the transcriptions of the study.

Intentionally Plan Social Emotional Lessons

The participants individually described their own strategies for intentionally planning social emotional lessons. In fact, the participants indicated that intentional social emotional lesson planning inevitably leads to two or three lessons that prompt the teachers to examine their own biases and reflect on the cultural community. Furthermore, the CPT1, CPT3, and CPT4 stressed that examining one's own biases is essential to helping them to be more effective in the classroom because self-reflection leads to a full examination of planning social emotional lessons.

These teachers also reflected on the importance of intentionally planning social emotional lessons because this supported communicating effectively with their multiracial students by

intentionally practicing, planning, and implementing communication. Across the board, intentionality was essential to establishing cultural proficiency because fully examining and planning social emotional lessons and communicating effectively with multiracial students were identified as practices that lead to intentionally checking one's own biases. CPT5 explained:

Looking outside of my own biases comes naturally because I am constantly trying to expose myself to what is going on outside of my rural town so that I can be culturally aware and relatable to any circumstance that comes to me.

Four out of the seven participants all used intentional when speaking on the importance of the social emotional lessons. The participants shared the following examples of social emotional learning plans that help them reflect on their own biases and communicate more effectively.

Figures 2, 3, and 4:

Figure 2

CPT 1 Example of Daily Social and Emotional Lesson Plan

Question of the Day

“The perfect day is going to bed with a dream
and waking up with a purpose.” -AJ McLean

If you could plan the perfect day, what would you do?

“On the perfect day, I would...”

“If I could _____, it would be a perfect day.”

Note. Figure 2 provided with permission for publication by CPT1 as an example of a Daily Social and Emotional Lesson Plan.

Figure 3*CPT5 Example of Daily Social and Emotional Lesson Plan*

- Week of January 31st
- Caring for Others (Eng) Cuidar de los Demás (Sp)
- Students discuss how doing kind acts and showing caring and understanding can positively impact another person's day and mood.
- Key Concepts & Vocabulary
- Being kind and caring makes both you and others feel good.
 - You can show caring toward others by:
 - Being helpful, being generous with your time, talent, or treasures, or giving compliments, affection, and encouragement.
 - Gratitude means appreciation or thankfulness.
 - Showing gratitude when others are kind to us makes them feel appreciated.
 - A compliment is something kind or affectionate that you say about someone.

Note. Figure 3 provided with permission for publication by CPT5 as an example of a Daily Social and Emotional Lesson Plan.

Figure 4

CPT 2 Example of Weekly Social and Emotional Lesson Plan

- Monday, January 31
- Thank You For Being A Friend: The students reflect on a relationship that they have with a friend and thank them.
- Tuesday, February 01
- You Are Heard: Invite students to participate in this activity that calls for them to be a good listener; a resource has been provided.
- Wednesday, February 02
- Anti-Gossip Shield: The students will view the video about the negative effects that gossiping causes on relationships and then complete the Anti-Gossip shield.
- Thursday, February 03
- Optimist or Pessimist?: The students will have an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their views on various situations.
- Friday, February 04
- Introvert or Extrovert?: The students will answer questions to learn more about how they relate to and understand others.
 - *Student Feedback*

Note. Figure 4 provided with permission for publication by CPT2 as an example of a Daily Social and Emotional Lesson Plan.

When the participants referenced the social and emotional lessons, they reported that the students said things like, “I don’t know. What is that?” After thorough discussion and defining the topics, the kids would speak up and talk about how they did not like being around others or that they did like being around others. One student suggested that they liked both, depending on where they were and if they were comfortable. The teacher suggested that these conversations sparked other questions from the beginning topic, depending on the mood of the classroom.

Remain Open-Minded and Nonjudgmental

Being intentionally open-minded and nonjudgmental was another strategy to reflect on one’s own biases. When prompting our culturally proficient participants, one of the commonly used phrases that was coded was “to describe.” Therefore, many of these scenarios are

descriptions of their personal experiences. For example, CPT5 explained that checking his own biases required him to reflect on how he relates to students. For example, it is important to communicate with students about what is relevant to them, like showing up to their games, expanding upon their interests, and showing interest in what they are passionate about. CPT5 shared that he became more self-aware and able to take Gundling et al.'s (2011) "helicopter view" of himself by working at an Indian reservation in college. He quickly realized that culture is vast and is not what one immediately interprets it to be. CPT5 also firmly asserted that self-reflection came from this point in life knowing that whatever situation he walked into, he had to be open-minded and intentional about those around them.

Being open-minded and nonjudgmental helped the CPT teachers build relationships effectively with others who are from different cultures and backgrounds. All the participants agreed that a teacher must walk into the classroom without judgment from the beginning of the school year. CPT6 empathetically stated the following:

They know their students come from all walks of life and that parents send their very best to school each day. Believing that it truly is their very best helps the participants to emotionally and intentionally relate to these different backgrounds and different cultures. However, if biases and predetermination have been established prior to meeting and greeting the students, then the expectation within the performance of that student has already been established.

Engage in Authentic Professional Development

Several teachers noted the importance of engaging in authentic professional development helped them reflect on their own biases. CPT3 stated, "More culturally proficient targeted professional development should be given or disbursed to teachers; however, professional

development would not touch the basic practice of having to discover cultural proficiency on one's own." To be more specific, CPT3 described the professional development experience as having to happen naturally for it to be authentic:

If someone is forced to go to a professional development, then what they are going to take away from the professional development is minimal. However, if they must learn this in a natural setting, or it happens to them, or they sign up for it on their own is when the true learning will take place.

CPT7 also noted that professional development comes from the intrinsic desire to want to professionally develop for the betterment of the way they teach and the way they can relate to those around them. CPT7 shared:

Some people are uncomfortable in the way they are and can't see the need to look outside of themselves, and those are the same teachers they observe struggling with classroom management and classroom community. These students do not really want to perform because of the lack of relationships that are built within the classroom.

CPT7 also suggested that some teachers do not reflect, but they often project what they think should be happening onto other people:

This projection causes students to rebel and not perform because they do not feel heard or understood within the classroom and the lack of being willing is detrimental to a learning environment because the growth is limited because they currently see this at the district and campus they are on. Teachers talk to them at the level in which they want them to understand rather than the level the students can understand. This incongruency causes imbalance not just for multiracial students, but for all students and best practices.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding equity for all students but ensuring the intentional practices of these are essential for the growth of mixed-race students to remain culturally aware and present within the classroom. This allows space for the students who are not monoracial (Causton & MacLeod, 2020). The participants discussed the following strategies they use to create social equity in the classroom, which is critical to multiracial students feeling understood and being related to. These strategies included the following emergent themes: use equitable language, learn cultural norms, be transparent, and build trust.

Use Equitable Language

Conclusively, the participants' responses indicated that an important strategy for building social equity in the classroom is having a conscious awareness of language used when communicating with students and teachers. Teachers specifically must not use terms that could offend and must use language that promotes social acceptance for multiracial students. This intentional communication is great for all students, but necessary when dealing with multiracial students to ensure culture sensitivity. CPT1, CPT2, CPT5, CPT7 all stated that communication is key, and that language must be inclusive. Five of the seven participants also pointed out that language is inclusive and does not always include words, but language could be interpreted as body language or physical language when grouping children. The participants elaborated on this by suggesting that if you have a child whose body language refutes the idea of group work, they will not place that child with someone who is flamboyant about the idea of group work. Instead, the one with body language refuting a group would be grouped with someone a little less emphatic. However, they also mentioned while considering groups, they try and tier academic

levels, social groups for diversity, and input so the groups are also diverse. Furthermore, CPT6 added input to this use by explaining:

I try to know the most current lingo of my kids. It makes them trust me. I need to know what they are saying, what they are listening to, what they are watching. I try to stay current on TikTok and what trends are happening so that they are not trying to pull something on me.

Learn Cultural Norms

All participants noted the importance of learning their students' cultural norms to build social equity in the classroom by understanding their social media platforms, the way the students dress, gender equity and music selections. Participants indicated that in a rural environment, it is easier to see so many teachers who do not practice this strategy of being current on cultural norms within middle school students, but teachers must be responsible for the students who have various demographic and cultural backgrounds.

The participants' responses indicated that culturally proficient teachers who create socially equitable classrooms must do the research and educate themselves on various cultural norms within the population and the community. Teachers need to first know their own culture and be able to identify their own cultural norms, so they know what not to project onto other students. To understand the norms of other cultures, CPT1, CPT3, CPT4, and CPT6 all indicated that they intentionally surround themselves in multiple cultural groups, so they understand what is going on in other cultures. By doing this, they better understand what other cultural norms are, what deficits they have themselves, and what contributions they give to society.

An example of cultural norms that was presented was regarding the Hispanic population and how they often do not look the teacher in the eye. In other cultural groups, eye contact is

expected; however, in the Hispanic culture it is not. CPT1 spoke about the Indian Reserve and how it is culturally acceptable to speak on certain topics, but other topics must be avoided. In fact, certain animals must not be spoken of. Also, CPT4 discussed how Black households communicate differently. They express themselves louder and are more verbose than some White rural families. Therefore, knowing these cultural differences can help when relating to students.

All seven participants shared the idea that being current with pop-culture, student relevance, and understanding why kids say the things they say creates an environment of community with their multiracial students in the classroom. This strategy is relative when teachers must reflect on the equity for all students and what their culture is so that teachers do not inadvertently transfer their own personal beliefs into the student's world. CPT 2 discussed the following:

Teachers must step completely outside of themselves and look at surrounding areas they are immersed in. Then they must reflect upon what they taught, especially at a middle school level, to truly decipher if they were using best strategies dependent upon the students, their races, needs, and relevance. For example, ESL population will need a lot of picture support and strategies for decoding; whereas multiracial or biracial students need collective conversation and intentional conversation to ensure they stay included in conversation and community within the classroom to avoid cultural discrepancies.

Be Transparent and Build Trust

Another strategy to building equity in the classroom is to be transparent and build trust. For example, CPT2 discussed his experiences with being a White teacher in a rural, predominantly Black population and how his experience there completely changed the way he

viewed the African American race. CPT2 discussed how social interaction is key within different communities. He explained as follows:

Everyone needs to feel safe in their social interactions with you and know that you are not judging them, condemning them, or bestowing your beliefs upon them. Social differences are real; the students automatically judged me because I did not look like them. They did not know that I had a wife who looked like them and that I had kids who also looked like them. When I came into the district, I realized that I knew my wife for culturally who she was, but I didn't realize the social stigma from me just being a White guy and them not knowing anything about me. At that moment, I realized they had to get to know me, so they know I am not judging them. They had to know who I am and what I love so they know they can love me. It sounds crazy, but people must know they can trust you, and when you have students who are multiracial, they don't know what side you belong to, if you have a side, or what you connect with. So, giving them the opportunity to know is key for that relationship piece to be established.

CPT1 also elaborated upon the notion of being transparent to build trust stating, "Often you must open-up so the students know they can trust you." This participant has tattoos, piercings, and dresses very eclectic. Her perception was interesting as she moved from a big city and now works in a rural school. She perceived that she relates better to multiracial students than most teachers at the rural middle school, but teachers sometimes gave her negative vibes because of the way she dresses with her gauges, tattoos, and the fun vibrant colors she chooses to wear.

CPT7 explained as follows:

I feel like the people I work with do not understand that we must literally not be biased in anything that we do. I so often see my colleagues automatically sign the biracial kid up

for the summer meal train because the assumption is that they do not have anything. I see other colleagues lower the rigor or wonder why they are not “at risk” when one of the multiracial students I am speaking of was very well-off and cultured with vacations and great parents. The stigma people place on students that do not look like them do not benefit the kid. It hurts them. It creates boundaries when the students who look different than them do not deserve those boundaries. We are ready to get them checked for response to intervention (RTI) when they fail on something instead of reflecting to see if the problem could be the way we taught it.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging. The participants indicated that students must have opportunities to relate to others who look like them and to have community in the classroom for students to develop a sense of belonging. The following were the emergent themes: support student organizations and identify with students’ abilities to adapt.

Support Student Organizations

One strategy participants’ implemented to help mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging was to encourage students to find social groups that allow them to network with other peers who look like them. However, in rural areas this is often difficult because multiracial students are fewer than in suburban areas. Therefore, intentionally creating a community group is very important because it allows students to have engagement with others who have similar perspectives. CPT2 noted that she is aware that one district requires a minimum of 10 students to create a student organization. However, often there are not 10 students that see things the same way. Therefore, CPT2 discussed how she just opens her classroom for a group of students after

school to discuss sci-fi novels because that is what this group of multiracial students is interested in.

CPT3 indicated that organizing student organizations is an effective strategy for creating a sense of belonging:

I incorporate the culture of respecting the kid that passed away during the season about the races, community, and with a kid that I never met because I was hired the week the student got killed, and we wanted to hold a memorial to allow as many players as we could to properly honor him culturally, so we allowed for those students to pray for the game. Students who were Christian met in their social group. Students who were not met in their social group, and students who were Catholic ended up praying together. It was a neat thing to see because I got to observe how the natural community happened, and it told me a lot about my kids and their social groups through the death of this student.

CPT7 also commented on student organizations and the purpose of them by adding the following:

I think that student organizations are great experiences for students to have an opportunity to associate with students who are on the same wavelength as them. I think that the discussions within these groups are more meaningful and that their own perceptions are authentic within their setting.

Several of the participants discussed how not ignoring these students' needs and desires to feel pushed to belong is important. They do not really classify with social groups on their own, so some coaching has been needed in their career. They stated that encouraging the students to get involved is sometimes all they need. CPT1 shared an example of an announcement used to organize community activities, which is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Example of Student Organization Classroom Community

Mrs. XXXXXXXX's Community Classroom RM# 1XX
 Sci-Fi, Anime, and Comic Club
 Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:45-4:30
 Bring your best relationship building skills
 and books of interest!

Note. Figure provided with permission for publication by CPT1 as an example of an announcement used to organize community activities.

Identify With Students' Abilities to Adapt to Different Ethnic Groups

Another strategy to help mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging is to identify with students' abilities to adapt. CPT7 stated, "Watching students who are normally outgoing by nature but then shut down because they are unsure of their surroundings is one of the most challenging things to witness as a teacher." CPT3 asserted, "I teach predominantly White students, and they fit in fine; but then when I see how multiracial students struggle to fit in collectively. It makes me wonder why." CPT5 described students' phenomenal strengths as follows:

It is a catch 22; sometimes you know that they are adapting to ensure they are not alone; and then other times, they are adapting because it seems that is what they know how to do and what they are comfortable doing. It is not a negative thing that they float between social circles. To me, it is a positive thing that they can get along and socialize with so many different populations. I see some of our lighter skin biracial students adapt with those Hispanic students and that to me is so cool. These students take the time to blend and offer so much diversity to their peers. The only thing that does frustrate me is the

limited amount of ignorance from some students because race is still an issue in their family. So, the White child is losing out on an opportunity to have an incredible friend from their own personal ignorance instilled by their families. This is unfortunate but does not reflect poorly on the biracial student because character-wise, they are the ones winning.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 explored what challenges teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed-race students. Overall, the consensus of CPT1, CPT2, CPT3, CPT5 was that biracial students have more strengths than weaknesses in their social settings. However, the two primary challenges which participants mentioned included the following: teaching programs lack intentionality in addressing cultural diversity and the difficulty of fostering relationships in the classroom.

Teaching Programs Lack Intentionality in Addressing Cultural Diversity

Participants agreed that one of the challenges is that in college or in the alternative teaching certification programs, they are not taught how to deal with social and emotional challenges, racial challenges, or how to genuinely teach culturally diverse students. Thus, overall, colleges are not teaching teachers how to reach students of different backgrounds.

According to CPT2:

The state gives us social and emotional requirements to teach but often do not give us the details on how to teach it, so the kids are not getting intentionality behind the lessons. We also have so much pressure on us to perform that the social emotional requirements just feel like one more thing.

Three participants shared the challenges of their alternative certification programs giving them minimal tools to be prepared in the classroom. They also expressed the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities test (PPR) required to become a teacher during the alternative certification process is based upon the “perfect case scenario” without any challenges and with the best student in the room. Therefore, it is not applicable to a diverse school setting. Consequently, teachers do not feel prepared upon entering the profession.

Difficulty of Fostering Relationships in the Classroom

Another common challenge the participants shared is the difficulty of fostering positive relationships within their classrooms. This results in fewer opportunities for friendships and relationships to happen. CPT2 stated:

If teachers build relationships before, they begin teaching, then the classroom runs much smoother regardless of race. Good pedagogy is designed for students to be successful when they feel understood and safe. Therefore, it does not matter the race of the student; it matters about the practice in the classroom that creates social acceptance for every child. But many teachers feel like that they are rushed to perform and teach the TEKES that they forget the fundamentals of relationships.

For example, CPT6 stated:

One of the challenges I have faced is that we do make social contracts in my room, but we do not revisit it often due to time, due to the rushed feeling, so I must intentionally make sure we are all remembering what we adhered to.

CPT5 added to this common theme by stating:

Students are resilient. Race, gender, SES doesn't matter unless we tell them it matters. We must let them know that we respect all people regardless of their parents' skin colors.

They need to know that they are a human-being. Once students understand that within the classroom that they are equal and they are all human beings, then they will perform; however, the educator must do their part and facilitate that for them, so they know the social and community expectation. One of the challenges to this is we teach content over connection, but we must connect before we teach the content.

CPT7 added to the difficulty by describing the pacing of the curriculum does not allow for a much relationship building. CPT7 complained that the lessons leave minimal room for proper engagement. She emphasized the social and emotional lessons that are created to help them foster relationships in the classroom often get looked over because it feels like it is just one more thing for them to have to do. Therefore, the teachers get overwhelmed and do not do it.

Summary

Chapter 4 of this dissertation presented the results of the case study. Chapter 4 restated the purpose of the study and discussed the findings which emerged from the data analysis process. Chapter 4 found that by intentionally planning social emotional lessons, engaging in authentic professional develop, remaining open minded and nonjudgmental, supporting student organizations, being able to identify with students' abilities to adapt to different ethnic groups and addressing teaching programs lack intentionality in addressing cultural diversity we can assist all students, but specifically multiracial students by facilitating intentionally in the classroom.

Chapter 5 includes a review of the study, discussion of the conclusions, makes implications for practitioners and recommends future research studies on this topic.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. This study is framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000) and SEL (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, interpretation of the study conclusions, make recommendations for the implementation of these strategies for all teachers to support multiracial students, and suggest future studies on this topic. The chapter closes with reflections and concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

According to Vespa et al. (2018), the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 Projections identified multiracial individuals as the fastest growing population. In fact, demographics for multiracial individuals are expected to increase by more than 200% between 2016 and 2060. This projection included an expected increase of multiracial children under the age of 18 to reach "11.3% of the population by 2060" (p. 4). As a result, the population of multiracial students in the public school system will increase. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to know how to successfully service this fast-growing population.

Background of the Study

Albuja et al. (2019) argued multiracial individuals frequently struggle with self-identification because they fall between monoracial groups. As a result, these students struggle to find their belonging within their social groups. Echols et al. (2018) asserted that self-identity is fluid, especially for multiracial youth, and it is influenced by social contextual factors. These social contextual factors have suggested there are a variety of strengths and weaknesses

multiracial students possess that educators need to be able to relate to. Therefore, the need for teachers to have the tools, support, and process in place to promote social and emotional success for their students is essential to their cognitive and physiological acceptance. It is essential to understand the variables that contribute to culturally proficiency and how to relate to multiracial students in the classroom.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. This study was framed conceptually utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000) and SEL (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What strategies are teachers implementing to examine their own biases?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding equity for mixed-race students?

RQ3: What strategies are teachers implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging?

RQ4: What challenges do teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed-race students?

Review of the Design and Research Methodology

A qualitative instrumental case study design was implemented to identify data collected from seven culturally proficient teachers. In an instrumental case study, the researcher's role is to gather an understanding through a variety of data sources to provide greater insight into a particular issue, trend, or theme (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The

primary source of data within this study was one-on-one, internet-based interviews. The participant criteria included number of years taught, grade levels taught, their understanding of cultural proficiency, their understanding of cultural relevance, and if they were or had worked in a rural area. There were three women and four men who participated in this study, and all participants were White. All but one teacher were from middle-class families. The one teacher is from a very wealthy family. All seven participants spoke casually and were matter of fact.

The interview questions were guided by an established protocol. The secondary sources of data within this study were artifacts from teachers from their social and emotional lessons. Participants were asked to voluntarily submit artifacts, and the only artifacts submitted were their social and emotional lesson plans.

The transcripts from each interview along with all personal artifacts, were carefully reviewed and participants were designated with the pseudonym “CPT” to replace their name. This was code for culturally proficient teacher. The interviews were kept on a file that had to be accessed with a password to login to the computer. The coded data were then organized to determine recurring patterns and themes after transcribing the interviews. The emergent themes were then analyzed and scripted.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings which are represented by the emergent themes of this study are summarized by each research question.

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 identified strategies teachers are implementing to examine their own biases. The findings were the following:

- Intentionally Plan Social Emotional Lessons
- Remain open-minded and nonjudgmental

- Engage in Authentic Professional Development

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding equity for mixed-race students. The following were the findings:

- Use Equitable Language
- Learn Cultural Norms
- Be Transparent and Build Trust

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging. The following were the findings:

- Support Student Organizations
- Identify with Students' Abilities to Adapt to Different Ethnic Groups

Research Question 4. Research Question 4 explored what challenges teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed race students. The following were the themes:

- Teaching Programs Lack Intentionality in Addressing Cultural Diversity
- Difficulty of Fostering Relationships in the Classroom

Discussion and Conclusions of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to describe strategies middle-school teachers implement that support mixed-race students in schools in rural southeast Texas. The findings of this study suggest an overall conclusion in concurrence with Potgieter-Groot et al. (2012) who emphasized the notion of proper collaboration for academic and social success is possible through building relationships by gathering intentional and personal information about all students within the classroom. This allows the whole child to be addressed and by

implementing this tactic, a community is allowed to form and classroom community to evolve (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Livers et al. (2021) noted that multi-racial children often experience mono-racism and there is a complex history of multi-racial issues due to White supremacy, colonization, cultural imperialism, and interracial relationships. Therefore, a racial identity or multiracial identity can be complex for students because of the social constructions of race. By establishing norms in the classroom and allowing for students to express oral language and connecting with their peers, the seven teachers in this study emphasized and clarified the conclusion that these practices promote the social and emotional success of students. Clayton (2020) expressed, “The literature we found commonly analyzed biracial students’ experiences who identified as having both Black and White racial backgrounds” (p. 3). Clayton argued that these students in their adolescent years often struggle with being included. Therefore, it is essential that the facilitator of education offers support in this area.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 identified strategies teachers are implementing to examine their own biases to ensure their prejudices were not enabling them from fully reaching their students and ensuring that teachers are looking at the possible barriers students face that might impede them from learning. Study findings that indicated intentionally planning social-emotional lessons, remaining open-minded and nonjudgmental, and engaging in authentic professional development suggest the conclusion that examining one’s biases are a necessary personal and intentional action to provide support to mixed race children.

Chew and Cerbin (2021) created a framework for understanding what might be getting in the way of being able to teach a student effectively. These barriers do not only block one’s own effectiveness, but potentially keep students from learning. Chew and Cerbin (2021) pointed out

that learning only happens if both the facilitator and the learner are willing to hear the information given and the efforts by both must be aligned. Therefore, planning and taking social emotional lessons and relevantly implementing them into the lesson cycle promotes the ability for the student to be receptive to what the educator is saying because they have taken the time to foster the relationship prior to teaching the curriculum.

Clayton (2020) recommended communication over content in the classroom is crucial when relating with kids. The teacher needs to take the time to communicate and built rapport prior to jumping into the content. This contributes to the student's ability to understand and provides opportunities for trust to be established. Taylor (2017) provided support to the findings in this study and asserted that being open-minded to others outside of oneself is essential, not only in the classroom but in life. In fact, if one is not careful, one could push false narratives onto students and blind their personal beliefs due to their desire to belong. Furthermore, Taylor (2017) mentioned that educating for autonomy should be the goal of teachers due to the intellectual development of others. This was supported in this study by emphasizing that teachers must not be judgmental but consider autonomy when educating students so they may self-actualize for themselves. Autonomy requires time for critical reflection to eliminate the possibility of coercion in the classroom. They could be done through think-and-share moments where students have an opportunity to reflect on the lesson, then are given the opportunity to share the information, quick checks throughout the lesson that give the students voice and intentionally creates an opportunity for students to be able to engage. Oral language must be increased for students to have input; therefore, engagement in education must happen for the teacher and the student.

Teachers are often given opportunities to be developed professionally in a variety of fields and in education. Farrow et al. (2022) gave additional support for the finding in this study

that suggests teachers must have a voice in their professional development because initiation of learning is the first step to truly obtaining the information. If teachers are encouraged to take a student-centered learning approach so the students can obtain the information, this method does not change because the students are now teachers. Teachers must take a student-centered approach to their own learning and school districts need to also provide autonomy for teachers to pick areas in which they are weak so they can develop those weaknesses.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding equity for mixed-race students and found that using equitable language, learning cultural norms, and being transparent to build trust with students were essential to building classroom community. Based on the findings, there were multiple ideas, methods, and strategies teachers used to reach students through various best practices. Some of these best practices included:

- Establishing social contracts
- Meeting students at the door
- Understanding the language that is relevant to the community
- Giving students opportunities to express themselves in the classroom
- Understanding the ways students learn in the classroom
- Ensuring that each student has a voice in the classroom
- Intentionally creating culturally relevant lessons that engage and promote a variety of diverse topics and conversations.

The findings of this study suggest the importance of positive social experiences in the classroom and how these experiences have helped culturally proficient teachers reach their multiracial students due to the cultural sensitivity that must be present in the classroom to ensure

productivity of diverse learners. These experiences were emphasized by each of the participants as key factors in their persistence and overall success. Wood (2020) supported this by describing how students learn through their multiple intelligence chart, or their intellectual ability, but teachers in public education need to also consider the community in which they serve and their campuses to adequately reach students where they are in their emotional state. Furthermore, Wood suggested authentic engagement is better than forced engagement. Therefore, genuinely reaching the students within their own learning style must occur, but to do so teachers must know their students' learning styles.

Kibler and Chapman (2019) added to this by expressing the importance and relevance of understanding the community in which teachers serve because there is power in knowing this information in the classroom that can help teachers relate to their students faster. They also stressed how important it was to be transparent in the classroom in regard to what the content is, but also what the intent of the conversation is. Teachers must be able to be raw and authentic with students because students will be able to point out if a teacher is not being their authentic self (De Silva et al., 2018).

Equity in education is one of the most studied due to the issues of fairness and justice among students in education in regard to race, gender, and roles (Education Law Center, 2018). Gaddis and Lauen (2014) contributed to this by adding academic injustices are related to the Black-White achievement gaps, which can be closed in affluent areas due to the resources. In fact, the equity is not the same in poorer communities due to the lack of resources provided to close the gaps (Gaddis & Lauen, 2014). Additionally, when these students are two or more races, the inequality is higher due to the commonality that diverse populations have fewer resources (Education Law Center, 2018). Therefore, the findings of this research question suggest the

conclusion that equity provided by teachers must be focused and intentional to implement strategies that emphasize equitable language, learn the cultural norms, and be transparent.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 explored what strategies teachers were implementing regarding helping mixed-race students feel a sense of belonging. Multiracial students successfully belong when they feel trust and feel a part of an organization (De Silva et al., 2018). The findings of this study support student belonging through student organizations and multiracial students' abilities to adapt to different ethnic groups. These findings suggest the conclusion that support, engagement, and interactions are essential pieces of inclusiveness that result in students feeling a sense of belonging amongst multiracial students.

Causton and MacLeod (2020) noted that understanding students who challenge teachers through their actions, behaviors, socioemotional, academic, environmental, and disabilities allow teachers to determine how best to support these students. These findings suggest the conclusion that to establish a belonging culture and atmosphere of family and community, teachers must understand students and help them find ways in which they identify. Looking at one's students beyond a deficit-based approach and instead looking at their strengths and what they can do will contribute to where the students' strengths will be best facilitated within student programs.

Causton and MacLeod (2020) emphasized that students want to have positive interactions with their teachers and peers. All students have a natural desire to fit in; therefore, multiracial students have a natural desire to adapt among a variety of social groups. Gaddis and Lauen (2014) supported this by stating, "Normalcy is a myth" (p. 7). All students are diverse, unique, and demonstrate a variety of differences that educators should value instead of giving knee-jerk reactions on how to communicate with them. If educators reflected and expected all students to

be unique and did not stick to the textbook version of a White, quiet student, then educators would be able to adapt quicker to the needs of all students beyond race.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 explored what challenges teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed-race students. The findings of this study suggest that teaching programs lack intentionality in addressing cultural diversity issues for teachers and that teachers often have a difficult time fostering relationships with diverse learners in a classroom. These findings support the conclusion that supporting mixed-race students must be focused and intentional. Broughton (2016) identified the perceptions from the critical race theory education to help support the children academically. To accurately understand how classroom community happened in the classroom, the data were collected through dissecting culturally relevant practices upon these individuals based on their interests and implementing them within the classroom. Additionally, Chiteji (2008) supported this by asserting that relationships are the antidotes in the classrooms. However, teachers are forgetting basic principles of relationship building because of the stress induced by the state to perform. Therefore, they do not feel there is adequate time to build relationships and teach the curriculum. However, Chiteji reminded educators that neglecting to do this affects the community in the classroom and does not promote a positive learning environment.

Smith-Barrow (2019) discussed how federal budget cuts and mandates have brought much tension into the educational system. Yet, Ladson-Billings (1995) described culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) 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 (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469).

However, the challenge is that teachers are not given the opportunity to learn how to do this or reminded that they are teaching to diverse learners. This is supported through the participants' responses in this study regarding the alternative certification programs and how the PPR gives them minimal tools to be prepared in the classroom. In fact, Edmonson et al. (2003) asserted that the best way to practice is to act as though there are ample resources, systems, and organization in place. However, without specific, focused attention to diversity, the lack of proper training and the knowledge to be able to build positive relationships with students, teachers do not feel prepared upon entering the profession.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study can be utilized by the administrators, department leads, teachers, rural community leaders, and school leaders of diverse learners to identify and implement strategies that better support multiracial students. The implications of this study may aid in facilitating discussions, reflections and systems that could be implemented to close the achievement gaps, build culturally proficient classrooms, develop professional development, and offer student support services that would benefit this fast-growing population. In regard to the issues surrounding multiracial students and cultural proficiency, the following recommendations are based on the findings:

- Ensure cultural proficiency conversations are intentional and happening on campus (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
- Campus leaders should encourage and provide time for teachers to reflect on their biases (Albuja et al., 2019).
- Diversify hiring and recruitment practices (Tannebaum, 2020).

- Provide focused professional development to teachers and staff (Causton & MacLeod, 2020).
- Create clubs, systems, and opportunities for discussion for multiracial students to draw upon their strengths and personal experiences (Clayton, 2020).
- TEA needs to implement culturally proficient implications and cultural relevance on the PPR and within the alternative certification route (Alvarado, 2020).

The job of educators is to cultivate, support, encourage, inspire, and promote their identify of their dual culture and not limit them to a monoracial group. The Texas Education System and the preservice training for educators needs to fully embody the diverse needs of our students and not teach to a perfect case scenario. Educators must integrate supportive practices, stay culturally sensitive, and use inclusive dialogue for multiracial students.

This study leaves much to be desired on how teachers can educate these students in a greater capacity, but also suggests that research is needed to maximize multi-racial children's strengths and facilitate their ability to overcome adversity, overcome social barriers, and understand their educational experiences. Based on the findings of this study, suggestions for future research are presented.

Future Research

In a qualitative, phenomenological narrative study explore the experiences of mixed-race students who have graduated within the last 10 years and how it has developed.

- Qualitative study using focus groups to explore the impact of culturally proficient teachers and how that shaped their experiences.
- In a qualitative ethnographic study, explore the variety of strengths teachers saw within their multiracial population of students.

- Using mixed-method and survey research, identify the educational gaps that must be addressed to create a stronger system of support for multiracial students.
- Conduct a longitudinal study examining elementary, middle school, and high school experiences.
- Using survey methodology, examine potential strategies which could be implemented for teachers to best support multiracial students.
- Conduct a comparative study which examines the difference between culturally proficient teachers in a rural population versus a suburban population.

Reflections and Final Remarks

This study explored the strategies and challenges implemented by culturally proficient teachers during their experience of teaching multiracial students within a rural South Texas school. Over the course of the research study, I was inspired by the efforts and relationships built by these participants. Their desire to truly get to know their students, become culturally diverse, and understand their multiracial students as individuals is admirable. Admittedly, as a multiracial high school principal, I was aware of the challenges multiracial students faced, but never considered the challenges an educator faced within the educational system. As a researcher, I was made aware of the real challenges we face within our broken educational system, and I reflect on my own prejudices regarding my negative experiences within the educational system in a rural area.

I also realized that a little more training for teachers would have been so beneficial to a person like me during my educational experience. In addition, I reflected on my own experiences being a secondary principal and how I can implement best practices and strategies for my teachers to promote their overall success within their classrooms. I walk away from this

experience with inspiration and determination to make our educational system more culturally aware and intentional about the way we address all students, but specifically diverse students. I also want to ensure we are reframing our minds on these students' strengths and how we can tap into them to make them successful during their educational experience. This experience has been the most rewarding and will contribute to my leadership aspirations to touch all children. I feel compelled to teach others how to create classroom community, build relationships, and promote success for all learners.

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies and challenges culturally proficient teachers face in rural South Texas. This study reveals there is much more to be determined, explored, and expanded upon due to the vastly growing population of mixed-race students in public education. This study has contributed to the field of diversity, mixed-race students, and how to be a culturally proficient teacher to all students, but specifically to mixed-race students.

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Appendix A: Guided Protocol Questionnaire

1. What strategies are teachers implementing to examine their own biases?
 - a. Please describe personal experiences and strategies you use to ensure you are reflecting upon your own biases?
 - b. What practices have helped you become more self-aware and able to take what Gundling et al. (2011) refer to as “a helicopter view” of yourself while working in a multicultural environment?
 - c. What practices have enabled you to build relationships with people who are from different cultures and from different backgrounds than yours?

2. What strategies are teachers implementing regarding equity for mixed race students?
 - a. Please describe the teaching practices you use to empower students when you are working with mixed-race students.
 - b. What practices do you implement when intentionally scaffolding lessons for diverse learners that include a fun component?
 - c. What service practices do you implement when differentiating for mixed race students to give them a sense of belonging? survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun.
 - d. What practices do you include that acknowledge positive experiences of being a mixed-race student?

3. What strategies are teachers implementing regarding helping mixed race students feel a sense of belonging?
 - a. Describe strategies you use to incorporate empowering students through complex cultural issues that existed between your students in the classroom?
 - b. Tell me about a time that you helped students adapt to another culture’s values and remaining loyal to your own core values. How did you balance your response to ensure you balanced the student’s freedom and your expectation?
 - c. Describe strategies you use to incorporate collaboration or working in groups to support and build a sense of belonging?

4. What challenges do teachers need to overcome to support classroom community for mixed race students?
 - a. Describe unproductive practices you have seen implemented that you feel are counterproductive when teaching mixed race students?
 - b. What challenges do you encounter to support growth and development of mixed-race students?
 - c. Describe challenges you have encountered that do not balance the needs of mixed-race students?
 - d. Describe some of the most challenging experiences you have seen mixed race students encounter in public education?

Appendix B: Email Requesting Definition of Cultural Proficiency

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for your possible interest in participating in my doctoral research. I am honored to have your interest and can ensure that if you choose to participate in this study your privacy will be upheld, and you will remain anonymous. I understand that you all are so busy, and I want you to know that I appreciate your time.

I want you to know that you can opt out of this process at any time, and you are not mandated to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study your willingness is greatly appreciated.

Before we continue to the next phase of the study, I need to ensure you understand the term, “cultural proficiency.”

Please explain what cultural proficiency means to you in a paragraph or so that I may deem if you are a proper candidate for this study.

Please also add where you teach, how long you have been teaching and if you have ever worked in a middle school, or in a rural community.

Please allow 2-3 days for review before getting back with you. If you need anything you may reach me at, xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Tara Marshall

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



May 18, 2022

Tara Marshall
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Tara,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"Strategies Teachers Implement that Support Mixed-Race Students in Schools in Rural Southeast Texas",

(IRB# 22-056) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs