

**Critical Race Theory in Urban Classrooms: A Qualitative Exploration into
Pedagogical Strategies**

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Abstract

This qualitative study analyzed how five middle-school Language Arts teachers from an elementary school in the Northeastern United States implemented Critical Race practices to meet the curricular, social, emotions, cultural and educational needs of urban students. This research examines how critical race theory practices were used to meet the curricular, social, etc. needs of K-6 students. The pathway which led the researcher to this study began with a question, as in the case of all research: How are teachers using small group instruction to target Critical Race Theory practices (CRT) within the theoretical framework? Participants in this study include five middle-school English Language Arts teachers in an urban school. This research is developed from data acquired through five interviews. Interview transcriptions were analyzed, organized, coded by the NVivo software, and the researcher also cross-checked for accuracy. The emerging themes were building relationships, social and emotional learning, district policy, small group instruction, and student engagement.

More research is needed to focus on how teachers are currently implementing the Critical Race Theory practices into the curriculum and how it can inform and drive student teaching and learning. The recordings were then transcribed using WebEx transcription software. Transcriptions from interviews were analyzed, organized, and validated by the NVivo software. Five themes emerged from this study.

Building relationships surfaced early as a theme, supported by teachers knowing their students, by establishing well-balanced relationships before teaching the content and placing an inference on students' interest and motivation.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) surfaced as the second theme providing planning time for the students to work collaboratively to address students' individual needs. The other themes focused on district policy, student engagement, and small group instruction.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Urban Education, Qualitative Study, Small group instruction, Student engagement, Implementing Critical Race Theory, pedagogy Teacher support.

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Chapter 1: The Problem and Procedures

Teachers play an essential role and have tremendous power to inspire students to learn. The choice to transform students into critical thinkers instead of doers, who are on autopilot, is more than a choice; it is an educational revolution. Innovative practices must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical. These practices cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders' decisions—a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites. Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possession (Freire, 1970 apud Katz-Fishman, 2017).

Introduction

Human beings all process, solve, and interpret information differently. It is critical that in education, we begin to realize that education does not take place just in schools, as anthropologists well know. With that said, to address the misconceptions and trends of any curriculum development, educators must first understand the student's ability to think outside the marginalized box and problem solve. Given that learning is ingrained in one's culture and daily lives, learning achievement should be understood in relation to the way in which curriculum is relevant to one's culture. In this regard, urban student underachievement is not an isolated phenomenon (Bell, 2001; Ripley, 2013; Wiggan, 2008, 2014). A great deal of research has been conducted in urban education that shows how hegemonized, standardized, normalized approaches to urban students harms them. Considering the educational disparities in the United States, the school curriculum is one area that has undergone very little change. Today's schools overwhelmingly utilize a "hegemonized" approach to education, promoting a "one-size-fits-all" perspective (Dei,

2012 apud Greg & Watson, 2016). The author defines hegemony as stakeholders exerting influence of ideologies by a dominant group.

Teachers play an essential role in testing because they have the tremendous power to inspire students to learn, teach them language skills, and model how to work with tests and test results (Bailey, 2005; Spratt, 2005). We live in a world that continually measures a student's demonstration of knowledge and comprehension based on annual test scores. The policies that govern many of our districts stipulate that the teachers are held accountable for students' learning and academic performance, which is in concert with a yearly assessment. It can be argued that although assessment can serve multiple purposes, school systems in the United States are increasingly emphasizing the summative function of assessment. Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers are pressured to focus on using traditional instructional and assessment practices that have been effective in improving students' achievement scores on statewide-standardized tests (Brickhouse, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010).

Educational Research's field has identified that many preservice and in-service teachers resist social justice curriculum, critical pedagogy (CP) and are resistant to teaching in schools with a preponderance of minority students (Han, 2012, 2013; Hatch & Groenke, 2009; Marx, 2006 apud Tao, Margo, & Reed, 2015). Thus, many are not prepared to meet the challenge of working in an urban school setting. One point of view is that urban schools often have a reputation of challenging environments for teachers, particularly in light of accountability, language, and media attention that has labeled many urban schools as failing (Haberman, 2000).

It is pivotal that teachers strive to build a strong foundation with students and understand their community and culture because, without a firm foundation for establishing safe and culturally responsive learning environments, our future educators may be at a disadvantage in developing and delivering classroom instruction that meets the needs of urban students. Egbo (2011) suggested that how teachers construct and interpret race and diversity issues *significantly influences* their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. This, in turn, impacts student success (Brown & White, 2014).

We cannot speak about diversity and social justice without addressing the topic of racism. Racism in America is unveiled in the fabric of our school system. The alignment of White supremacy across the spectrum creates accumulated cognitive dissonance for students of color, ultimately leading to fewer teachers of color in US classrooms (Kohli, 2014). Scholar-practitioners have pushed to reframe the problem of African American teacher shortages to confront the idea that recruiting and retaining teachers who hold the pedagogical and cultural expertise is required to deliver the best education to students in high-need areas (Gist, 2017; Rogers-Ard et al., 2012, 2019; Skinner, Garretton, & Schultz, 2011).

For instance, Jordan (2020) argued that race and culture have impacted Black students in the United States educational experience. She then suggested that racial battles and social perspectives within education can be contributed to the mismatch of racial context and culture context that occur in schools that serve predominantly Black students. Those students often receive poor-quality instructional materials, limited resources, and limited, if not inadequate, pedagogical and curricular methods incongruent with their culture (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Ostrander, 2015).

Research also shows that there are gaps in knowledge, skills, and dispositions White teachers may possess relative to teaching African American students. Handfield, Woo, and Washington (2013) determined that White teachers who taught in multicultural schools entered with dispositional and pedagogical roadblocks, such as deficit thinking, decreased academic expectations, and the lack of knowledge about the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum.

Neville and Awad (2014) found that White teachers tended to operate with whiteness's hegemonic and meritocratic views. They also found that White teachers often performed with the belief of color-blindness and failed to see that they held a dominant culture lens that had little consideration of others' worldviews (Logans et al., 2018). Further research in this area is needed to uncover the gap between school districts and their ability to recruit qualified educators who have a vested interest in students of color and the urban communities in which they live. As a result, it is essential that schools implement critical race practices to ensure equity and inclusion within the curriculum.

The critical race theory framework for education attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. Further, it focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of communities of color and offers a liberatory and transformative method for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2020).

According to the Association of American Educators, a survey on Critical Race Theory and Culturally Responsive teaching was released on July 2, 2021, and the results were as follows:

Less than half of respondents (44.7%) are in favor of Critical Race Theory being an option for educators. Only 11% believe CRT should be required or mandated.

- A high percentage of respondents (81%) think that curriculum should include the stories, experiences, and narratives of a diverse group of cultures.
- Slightly more than half of respondents (53%) expressed apprehension about saying the wrong thing regarding race and negative repercussions, while 39.4% of respondents report experiencing discrimination based on their race or perceived race.
- Survey respondents by an almost three to one margin (60.4% vs 21.2%) believe the media is paying too much attention to CRT, with an even higher percentage of survey participants (78 %) agreeing outside factors, including sensationalized headlines, are interfering with a productive and necessary discussion regarding race in America.
- Survey respondents overwhelmingly (85%) feel that society should be just and inclusive but only (44.3%) feel it is currently just and inclusive.
- On average, the respondents report that 42.8% of the students with whom they interact daily are students of color.

- The survey respondents were nearly unanimous (99.5%) wanting their classroom to be a healthy learning environment for all children. (Sharkey, 2021)

Problem Statement

Some teachers in urban school districts struggle with teaching students of color. In order to effectively and efficiently educate students in urban communities, teachers must relate to the struggles of students of color, societal biases and injustices, cultural adversities, diversity, and unique learning abilities. In an attempt to race to the top of the academic ladder of knowledge, school districts must implement an effective and efficient curriculum. A social justice curriculum would support culturally relevant pedagogy to support the communities in which the students of color migrate daily. America is hemorrhaging resources at an alarming rate when it comes to effective teaching and connecting to a certain population of students.

Many teachers in urban schools are ill-prepared to help students navigate through everyday challenges and outdated school practices. The ill-preparedness of teachers is not necessarily from lack of trying rather a result of not being provided the necessary tools to thrive in an urban classroom. The focus should be to promote student engagement and participation in all lessons, with the intent of eliminating boredom by connecting to genuine student interest. It is critical that we begin to educate our students effectively so that they become productive citizens of society. The educational system has an essential role in ensuring the effectiveness of high-quality culturally responsive pedagogy, and high-quality education to “all” students regardless of race and demographics.

The Purpose Statement and Research Questions

For the sake of this dissertation, a pseudonym was created for this school. The purpose of this research is to examine how five middle-school Language Arts teachers from an elementary school located in Northern, NJ which are implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. The path which led the researcher to this study began with a question, as in the case of all research. As a country that represents itself as a melting pot of diversity, how can we promote educational equality and create essential pathways to ending demographic disparities for all students? The research was based on the following questions:

Research Question 1. How are Critical Race practices being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs at New Hope Elementary School?

Research Question 2. How can teachers inspire culturally competent students to become critical thinkers and social justice advocates?

Research Question 3. How are teachers creating a culture of high expectations for multiracial and multicultural experiences for students learning trajectories?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be used for this research is Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to Zamudo et al. (2010), CRT takes us beyond the traditional approaches and understanding of educational inequality. It foregrounds race as the central construct for analyzing inequality. Critical Race Theory is related to the study because

race matters and is the essence of inequality that plagues the fabric of societal biases and racism.

Haynes (2017) asserted that the Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from critical legal studies as a means to problematize and theorize the role that race and racism plays in education, politics, the economy, legal matters, and everyday life (Crenshaw et al., 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

To understand, examine, and address the enduring racism in educational policy and practice that protects white supremacy, Critical Race theorists employ six central tenets (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000):

- (a) racism is endemic to American culture;
- (b) rejection of dominant narratives, processes, or systems that claim race neutrality, color blindness, and meritocracy;
- (c) racism has deeply rooted origins that attribute White people with dominant status and non-White people with subordinate status;
- (d) the voices and lived experiences of people of color are legitimate and used to generate oppositional discourses;
- (e) recognition of interest convergence, which describes the conditions by which racial justice will be accommodated in a white power structure; and
- (f) racism's eradication is tied to eliminating all forms of oppression.

In Haynes's (2017) study she implemented the CRT to examine racial biases, consciousness, behaviors, and influences of White college faculty members. The finding

of the research rests on the notion that the higher the participants' level of racial awareness and consciousness through self-reflection the more open they are to identify racial inequalities and barriers that exist within the higher education system.

It is essential that the researcher examine and analyze this conceptualization framework. Throughout world history, human beings have always taken an active stand against racism, oppression, and injustice. Race has always been in the fabric of the United States hierarchical system. Race matters, and racism has been rooted in educational institutions since its inception. The Critical Race Theory approach is not a new phenomenon, yet it is underrepresented in many schools and lacks the implementation and proficiency needed within the walls and borders of many urban school districts. In fact, Teitelbaum (2020) suggested that Americans are divided as to how we should think about racial history and the way it should be taught in the school system.

With that said, America has a history of neglecting its responsibility and obligation to provide students of color, especially in urban districts, with a high-quality and equitable education, as compared to their White counterparts residing in affluent communities. Such inequalities and disparities can be traced as far back as slavery, racism, and the Jim Crow era, as stated by Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and Derrick Bell (2001). Critical Race Theory is relevant to this study and research because it provided the researcher the opportunity to analyze and examine how students of color become active agents of change to break down barriers to eliminate and fight against world oppression and racism.

The theory is essential and serves as the trajectory that race matters in educational institutions. Also, the contributing theory provides a possible framework for the study's data because it allows students to examine their local municipalities and world views as they begin to utilize their power and voices to fight against an inhumane system, which is the mother of inequality, racism, oppression, and unfairness. The only way this can be successful is if the teachers know how to effectively handle these issues by developing and creating impactful relationships with students of color.

It is critical that we begin to educate our students effectively and in a well-rounded fashion so that they become productive citizens of society. The educational system has an essential role in ensuring the effectiveness of high-quality curriculums and providing high-quality education to "all" students regardless of race and demographics.

Significance of the Study

This research helps school leaders and districts develop CRT practices that will be beneficial to the growth mindset of urban youth. The findings would contribute to the understanding of CRT practices which displays a body of knowledge necessary for full participation in an urban academic community. This study focuses on the examination of CRT instructional practices and how Critical Race practices are being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers, in order to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. This study brings light to the necessary training which teachers further need to ensure CRT is implemented with fidelity and purposeful intent. This information is pertinent in developing and delivering the proper instructional strategies which are needed to deliver CRT lessons in an urban district.

Definition of Terms

In order to promote clarity and comprehension of this study, the following terms and concepts are defined:

Color Blindness: Color-blindness provides white Americans with an ideological tool kit (cognitive frameworks, discursive devices) that can be used to defend White supremacy and advantages by denying the existence of racism and presenting “nonracist” counterarguments to policy proposals and other claims to redress racial inequalities and promote racial justice (Doane, 2017).

Critical Race Theory: Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theory birthed from protest, insists scholars take account of the ways race and racism are endemic to society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Race Practices/Praxis: Praxis involves action and reflection rooted in critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Engaging in praxis while working toward racial justice requires operating within the tensions that arise during the push and pull between liberation and oppression. According to Freire (1970), praxis is a strategic and an intentional practice “directed at the structures to be transformed” (p. 32).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: an analytic resource to describe and make sense of pedagogical practices of teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2017).

Racism: has deeply rooted origins that attribute White people with dominant status and non-White people with subordinate status (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The overview of the chapter is to highlight societal biases and injustices as they relate to cultural adversities and diversities. In an attempt to race to the top of the academic ladder of knowledge, school districts must acknowledge that race matters. The literature review covers the historical overview of the Critical Race Theory, racism, stereotypical behavior, color blindness, social justice, and critical race practices.

Critical Race Theory

According to Tate (1997), there are five principles for Critical Race Theory: recognizes racism as being part of the American system; crosses epistemological barriers; reinterprets the right to civil rights despite its limitations; portrays the dominant legal statements of neutrality, objectivity, "blind color" of not seeing color; and recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color (Tate, 1997).

According to Milner and Howard (2013), there is a version of the five fundamental principles of Critical Racial Theory that was adapted by Milner and Howard (2013), quoting Solorzano (1997): Race and racism are embedded in U.S. society (Bell, 1992) and that racism intersects forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, and immigrant status (Crenshaw, 1991; Espinoza, 1998); not seeing color, (Solórzano, 1997); the commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000); work to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty (Freire, 1970; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); extends beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism and is indispensable for understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in all its facets (Carrasco, 1996).

Critical Racial Theory explicitly requests and listens to the experiences of people of color through "counter-narrative" methods, such as family stories, parables, testimonies, and chronicles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Chaiison (2004) recognized Critical Race Theory as knowledge, as an instrument that constructs and reinforces ideas and understandings of race. Crenshaw (1995) described it as work that "challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture, and more generally in American society as a whole" (p. xiii).

Critical Pedagogy in Education

Garcia (2014) argued that the term "racism" has come to be applied to a variety of attitudes, some of which are mutually incompatible, and has been devalued to mean little more than a tendency to dislike some people for the color of their skin. Moreover, anti-racism admits the natural existence of "races" even while opposing social distinctions among them.

In the same way, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010) suggested that White privilege is a large part of the hidden infrastructure of American society, directing, driving, and often invisibly and subtly determining outcomes such as employment, housing, education, and even interpersonal relationships. In order for White privilege, a system that allows Whites to prevail, to exist, there must be a counterbalance, a system that disadvantages others, namely, racism. Privilege is a social imbalance that allows one group of people to gain a noticeable advantage over other groups. Race is a product of social forces, and racism is a system embedded in the fabric of American soil. "White privilege" as it exists in American society or in the American educational system is

defined as any phenomena, whether individual (e.g., biased teacher attitudes/perceptions), structural (e.g., curricular and pedagogical practices geared toward White, middle-class students), political (e.g., biased educational policies), economic (school funding formulas that contribute to inequality), or social (social constructions of race and disability), that serve to privilege Whites while oppressing people of color and promoting White supremacy (McIntosh, 1990). “Racism” is defined here as individual, structural, political, economic, and social forces that serve to discriminate against and disadvantage people of color on the basis of their race for the purpose of maintaining White dominance and power (Bell, 1992; Blanchett, 2006).

Van Lac (2017) described the level of racial awareness that educators must have when teaching people of color. She explained racial consciousness as three core principles:

1. acknowledge that race matters and that it continues to shape outcomes.
2. prepare students to become agents of change by providing opportunities to address racial and social issues.
3. provide pipeline opportunities for students of color to become future teachers.

A segment of educational research has focused on how to prepare educators to work in diverse school settings to close the opportunity gap often shaped by race (Brooks, Arnold, & Brooks, 2013; Okun, 2010; Pollock, 2008; Singleton, 2014). A body of studies also highlights the ways reluctant White educators resist learning about the form and function of institutionalized racism and how it operates in schools (Bates & Pardo, 2010; Carr & Klassen, 1997; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006;

Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). There are multiple schools of thought regarding the root causes for teacher resistance to learning.

The forefather of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian adult literacy worker and educator, delineated a pedagogy that sought to liberate oppressed populations. Freire believed that the purpose of education included raising the critical consciousness of oppressed groups. He claimed that members of oppressed groups should understand the broader structures and systems present in society that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Only when pupils grow conscious of the inequitable historical, social, political, and economic policies, norms, and values that have shaped and determined their place in society can they truly be in an empowered position to be agents of change in their community (Freire, 1970).

It has been over 60 years since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the United States Supreme Court decision that declared that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal and unconstitutional in the United States. As such, many schools across the country have become increasingly diverse, and yet, in many of them, racial inequality remains. Even within schools that are resource-rich, in affluent and diverse neighborhoods, an achievement gap continues to plague Black and Latina/o students. According to the Civil Rights Project at the University of California in Los Angeles, Estevez (2018) stated that “the fight to integrate New Jersey's schools is the great unfinished civil rights struggle of our time” (p.2). In conjunction, “New Jersey is America's sixth most segregated state for black students and the seventh most segregated for Latino students” (Estevez, 2018, p. #). Dyches and Thomas (2020) found that ELA teachers believed their lack of antiracist teaching stemmed from their teacher education

programs failing to explain the disposition or how to implement antiracist pedagogies. Research also shows that even if they do have access to antiracist-oriented teacher education programs, ELA preparing preservice teachers may not implement antiracist practices with fidelity once they transition to in-service teaching (Boyd, 2017).

Stereotypes and its Impact in Education

As a result, many of the youths of color might choose behavioral change over stereotypical negative urban statistics. Youth are encouraged to have their voices heard, and many are eager to take stands for what is right by making their voices heard against injustices and biases. The young people are stepping up to the plate and becoming social activists at alarming rates because it empowers young people to become agents of change in their local and global communities.

Individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, races, and cultures, who reside in urban communities, remain hopeful while experiencing life adversities and disparities (Fine et al., 2000). A community-based educational site might help youth hold on to the concept of hopefulness. Individuals do not have to be educated within the walls of a traditional classroom setting in order to learn. Learning is not limited, regardless of one's socio-economic status. Being exposed to new learning can be filtered as a way of cultivating new knowledge and endless possibilities.

Historically speaking, society tends to label and stereotype youth in urban communities. These youth are labeled as delinquents and criminals, as opposed to being viewed as law-abiding productive citizens. The American Justice system marinates on the souls of the urban youth to fill correction facilities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Social factors tend to have a negative impact on the lives of Blacks and immigrant youth

that they experience daily in America. School programs and community programs can assist youth with fundamental values to help them grow developmentally and socially to become successful and productive citizens in society. The two troubling factors targeted the lives of inner-city youth's rest on the possibilities of incarceration and racism. Youth of color have the opportunity to alter traditional negative labels by becoming problem solvers and change agents in the community (Kitwana, 2005; Rose, 2008).

Nevertheless, urban youth who are actively involved in community-based organizations are more likely to be involved in the social justice process of changing the unjust conditions of their communities. When youth are involved in social justice activities, it opens the doors for endless possibilities, which decrease school dropout rates, drug abuse, violence, and incarceration in impoverished urban communities. When schools and communities collaborate effectively, students are likely to become efficient participants of civic engagement and development (Camarota, 2007).

It is essential for inner-city urban youth to become involved in civic organizations to promote social justice in their communities and throughout the world. Black inner-city youth should capitalize on the essential roots and foundation of their family origin, including the utilization of resources they have within their communities, such as local faith-based organizations and partner with local businesses. Basically, the conclusion rests on the foundation that as a society, we must work collectively to ensure the success of our inner-city youth by promoting and advocating for programs which would lead to activism and organizing grass roots programs to change their mindset and eliminate the stereotypical behaviors of inner-city youth.

Ortiz, Capraro, and Capraro (2018) stated that equality, as understood from a historical perspective in the fight for civil rights, was assumed to be exercised in part by implementing a color-blind approach to litigation (Tate, 1997). Similarly, there are some teachers who choose to teach from a color-blind mentality (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tate, 1997), assuming it to be most equitable, but in trying not to acknowledge color, teachers contradict their practices or notions of not seeing color at all.

Color-blindness was operationalized by Aleinikoff (1991) when he stated that perhaps what is meant by Whites who claim to be color-blind is that they “do not notice or act on the basis of race” (p. 1079), a claim he deemed outlandish. In dismantling color-blindness, what Tate referred to as traditional civil rights language, opportunity-to-learn standards are explicated and made conspicuous within mathematics education (Tate, 1995, 1997). The authors contend that race and culture play substantial roles in the way mathematical literacy and classroom norms are developed, and that students of color have not enjoyed the same opportunities-to-learn in ways consistent with their culture. To this end, negligence in determining strategies that work well, specifically with students of color, is under researched, especially with African American students in mathematics (Jackson & Wilson, 2012).

Social Justice in Curriculum/ Hip Hop

Teachers must be willing participants with learning the critical pedagogy in relation to social justice education. Social justice strategies and practices should be effectively implemented in classrooms for diverse students. Such practices should supersede the traditional teaching and learning praxis because they often interfere with marginalized student’s academic growth. Social justice praxis is essential because it

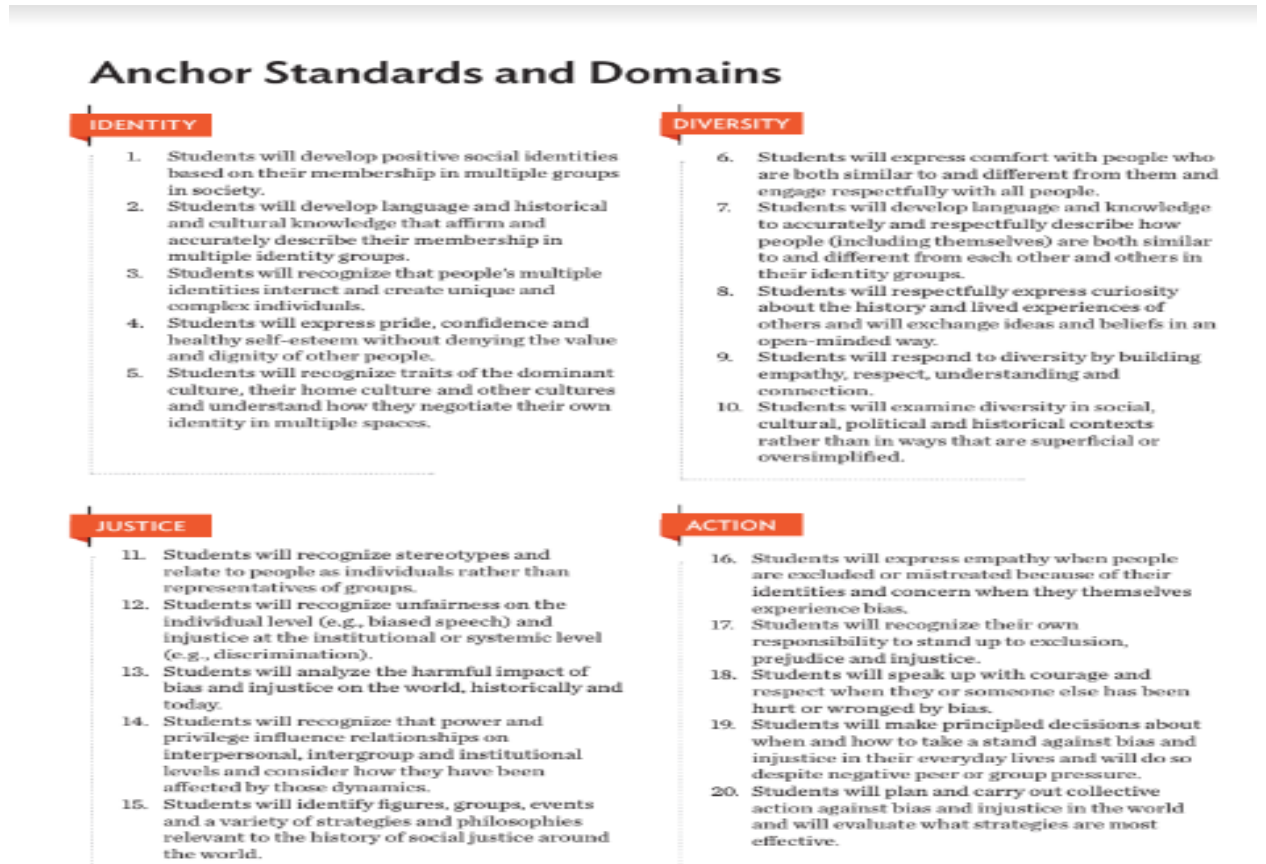
provides students in urban settings with opportunities and experiences to identify and solve inequalities worldwide. Without the resources of social justice education and the efficient pedagogy, students might lack the proper academic and social development needed to be critical thinkers and effective change agents (Meister, Zimmer, & Wright, 2017).

In essence, teachers cannot adequately teach a curriculum if they fail to understand the pedagogy or student diversity. Addressing inequality through the implementation of social justice praxis makes a difference in the lives of students who live in urban communities. The teachers play an important role in supporting and implementing a social justice education. It is critical that in today's society, teachers are not resistant to empowering students.

For teachers to properly educate students on the social justice curriculum, teachers have to alter and reflect on their personal biases and change their mindset; if not, it would be an injustice to students' academic and social growth. It is critical that teachers remain knowledgeable about what is occurring in the world in which they live. If teachers lack the knowledge of critical pedagogies, classroom best practices, and social justice education, how can they properly educate students in urban communities and address inequalities?

The social justice approach is the latest education trend. To effectively teach the social justice curriculum, school leaders and educators must understand the "justification" behind teaching the curriculum. There are essential factors behind the justification praxis prior to labeling a concern/dispute as a social justice matter (Johnson & Borrego, 2009). The teachers of the curriculum must have knowledge and

understanding that human rights are inalienable and necessary. In fact, any curriculum should advocate for social justice. A social justice education cannot effectively exist until it begins to manifest in oneself. Individuals must understand how social justice and human rights are intertwined with the school system. According to Social Justice Standards, The Learning For Justice Anti-Bias Framework is broken down into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action (Social Justice Standards - Learning for Justice, 2023).

Figure 1*Anchor Standards and Domains*

Social justice standards: The learning for justice anti-bias framework (p. 2).

Learning for justice. www.learningforjustice.orgIn order to be successful according to the Social Justice Framework (2022), “Teaching about IDJA allows educators to engage with a range of anti-bias, multicultural and social justice issues” (p. #). It is critical to provide an effective administration preparation program for future leaders to implement a sustainable social justice curriculum. Such a program must be designed and foster an opportunity for leadership to be open to new ideas. The program must be geared at preparing candidates to create an equitable learning environment (Woods & Hauser, 2013). The candidates must be willing to understand cultural differences and diversities.

Candidates take a proactive role to close the achievement gap, future leaders possessing a critical consciousness to make a difference and removing or eliminating barriers that will prevent equitable access. Educational preparation programs should implement and deliver a program that is conducive to the candidates gaining knowledge of a guaranteed curriculum to address inequality and injustice. Programs are needed that will offer excellence and properly prepare candidates to become effective social justice leaders.

African American linguistic traditions, like toasting and signifying, and African literary traditions whereby griots (or poets) maintained the history of communities through memorization and storytelling are central to the Afro-Diasporic roots of hip-hop and have been well-established in the literature (Alim, 2002; Smitherman, 1997). Additionally, scholars (Alim, 2007; Hill, 2009; Stovall, 2006) have argued that educators in schools and in out-of-school contexts can take a critical pedagogical approach to hip-hop language and literacy practices and engage youth in thinking about their own language, communities, and the media in increasingly critical/social justice-oriented ways (Turner, Hayes, & Way, 2013). A hip-hop curriculum will bridge the gap between culture relevant and student achievement. The hip-hop pedagogy helps students become critical thinkers and problem solvers using topics they can relate to or that are of interest.

The hip-hop pedagogy serves as a vehicle for social justice awareness and student learning. (Thomas & Tonuzi, 2015). The substance is founded on the notion that educators can reach all diverse learners using a hip-hop pedagogy throughout the classrooms daily. Students' academic knowledge should be extended beyond the traditional academic contexts offered in school districts and classroom settings. The foundation's research is based on the premise that the guide offers students and educators

a two-fold approach to close the literacy achievement gap. The first fold provides students with reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The second pathway provides learners with critical thinking skills to promote art and music through the context of hip-hop pedagogy. Hip-hop is viewed as a creative form of self-expression (Fels Foundation). The hip-hop guide is viewed as a cultural “centerpiece” to unpack rigorous lessons while providing learners with the critical thinking skills warranted to become active agents of change addresses inequalities in social justice.

Critical Race Praxis/Practices

Many teachers in urban schools are ill-prepared to help students navigate through everyday challenges and outdated school practices. The ill-preparedness of teachers is not necessarily for lack of trying but rather a result of not being provided the necessary practices to thrive in an urban classroom.

Praxis involves action and reflection rooted in critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Engaging in praxis while working toward racial justice requires operating within the tensions that arise during the push and pull between liberation and oppression. According to Freire (1970), praxis is strategic and intentional practice. The Critical Race praxis is an example which aims to build solidarity capacities, and positionalities with a shared commitment toward racial justice because “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (Freire, 1970, p. 34).

According to Garcia (2017), scholars of Critical Race Theory in education argue that students of color have lived experiences that are often silenced by schools and the pressure to “perform in keeping with the curriculum” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.

48). In addition, students of color have a unique understanding of race and racism that is important to understand and make part of what is learned in a classroom.

Summary

The literature suggests that ELA middle-school teachers can benefit from Critical Race Theory practices. This chapter covered the historical overview of Critical Race Theory, racism, stereotypical behavior, color blindness, social justice, and Critical Race practices. Relationships are a crucial factor in students' engagement and participation. Teachers face structural barriers in implementing Critical Race Theory practices in their daily instruction because they are not built into many teacher education programs (Thomas, 2020). Chapter Three explores research methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective. This research aimed to identify how New Hope Elementary School teachers were implementing the Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. This research used virtual interviews to collect data.

Although Critical Race Theory was used primarily in the field of legal research, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are known for introducing Critical Race Theory into the educational field. Since the introduction of the approach of Critical Race Theory in the educational field by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998, 1999) and Tate (1997, 2012), many researchers have used this field of educational research as a theoretical and analytical framework in the context of the United States (Bell, 2003; Chapman, 2007; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Lopéz, 2003; Lynn, 1999; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Milner & Milner, 2010; Howard, 2013; Parker, 1998; Parker & Stovall, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villenas, Villenas, & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2005), and in the context of England (Gillborn, 2006; Rollock, 2012). This approach analyzed how cultural background, race, and ethnicity, contribute to students' academic achievement, especially in urban schools (Bañales et al., 2020; Hill, 2021; Noguera & Alicea, 2020).

Research Questions

The research questions focused on the content of the study, the questions can be examined in the interpretation of the qualitative data (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The research questions are important as they help to narrow the focus and serve as a guide to the reader (Creswell, 2009). A well-developed research question needs

to be relevant and meaningful (Stone, 2002). The pathway of the research was based on the following questions:

RQ 1. How are Critical Race practices being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs at New Hope Elementary School?

RQ 2. How can teachers inspire culturally competent students to become critical thinkers and social justice advocates?

RQ 3. How are teachers creating a culture of high expectations for multiracial and multicultural experiences for students learning trajectories?

Research Design

This study was designed on the grounded theory (GT) principles. According to Bryant (2017), GT tenets are built on the notion of an existing problem and the hypothesis is not necessary. Bryman and Bell (2007) supported this view by suggesting that grounded theory rests on the premises of coding, comparison, and sampling. This study examined how five middle-school English Language Arts teachers from New Hope Elementary School in Northern, New Jersey are implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs.

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective and followed the theoretical process of grounded theory designed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). This research was developed from data acquired through five interviews. The interview setting was virtual, using the WebEx and Zoom platforms.

This study opted for a qualitative approach, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1994), where they consider the five characteristics of grounded theory to build the path of this investigation.

The first characteristic concerns the initial phase of the research, considered an open phase, with multiple views of the object of study. At this initial moment of the research, all the information collected is relevant, thus requiring the researcher to define and narrow the axis of the study.

After the initial moment of the research and the progressive process of focusing the researcher, the second characteristic of the research procedure studied by Bogdan and Biklen (1994), focused on the formulation of analytical questions. This phase was extremely important because through the questions formulated, the collection techniques became systematized, thus enabling a better juncture between the methodology and the theory listed. At a first glance, it seemed easy to dialogue with the sources.

Although presenting characteristics apparently in a linear way, the process did not happen that way. The study opted for this method, as the researcher saw it as a more didactic way of what it is found and decided on in the journey as a novice researcher. These characteristics are mixed throughout the process, as happened with the third characteristic, pointed out by Bogdan and Biklen (1994), that is, the literature review.

The literature review movement aids the fourth feature outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1994), to test theoretical-methodological choices. The last characteristic of the series of five strategies highlighted by Bogdan and Biklen (1994) consists of valuing the empirical process of the researcher in the activity of collecting and analyzing research data. The procedure of this step emphasizes not only recording the structural data of the

study, but also the observations, senses and perceptions of the researcher that emerged during the excavation of the research development. Such records can offer substantial antiquity to the investigated questions and contribute to the construction process and the research result. In order to better organize the study and to record the reading construction process, the researcher created a research diary and analyzed the findings regarding the theoretical-methodological contribution. This instrument recorded the research perceptions about the object studied.

Setting/Site

Based on New Hope Elementary school's website, this elementary school located in Northern NJ was built in 1929 adjacent to a stadium. The school enrolled approximately 1,100 pre-kindergarteners through eighth-grade students. "A recipient of the Fordham University National School Change Award, New Hope School is recognized as an excellent and competitive educational institution. New Hope School's goal was to empower students to create, reshape, and fully participate in personal and community environments, which will enhance the quality of life for everyone."

The interview setting was held virtually using the WebEx and Zoom platforms. To minimize distractions and to assure privacy, interviews were performed following the guidelines proposed by Easwaramoorthy and Zarinpoush (2006) in their literature entitled *Interviewing for Research*. Interviews were conducted in a friendly but professional manner; participants had the option to terminate the interview at any time; to the extent possible, other individuals were precluded from interrupting an interview that was in process, and always recalled that this was a structured interview, not a debate.

Before starting the session, the interviewing protocol was clearly explained, and the participant was asked to sign the consent form if they agreed to participate. Each interview was conducted individually and did not have a time limit. Also, the purpose of the study and its relevance was explained verbally and via the informed consent form (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006). Respondents were made aware that the interview was being recorded via an iPhone XR in real-time for academic purposes. Participants were informed concerning the processes employed to protect their responses, including data collection and storage, and the recording was used for research application (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006).

Recruitment

Participants for this research project were recruited via personal and professional connections. This researcher was a former teacher at New Hope School and does not have a supervisory role over the teachers or have policy influence in the school and only collaborates with the academic sector of the Board of Education. Five participants were invited to participate in the study through email and telephone calls. The participating teachers were not knowledgeable or formally trained in CRT.

Participants

For this study, five middle-school English Language Arts teachers were invited to participate. The participants were general education teachers from a school ranked as one of the “best K-8” schools in America. The participants were invited to participate in this study according to their mandatory weekly Professional Learning Community (PLCs) meetings. The fifth and sixth grade teachers attended the weekly meetings together, and the seventh and eighth grade teachers attended weekly meetings together.

The demographics of the participants consist of tenured and non-tenured teachers. The participants for the study included five middle-school teachers varying from grades five to eight. There was one fifth grade English Language Arts teacher, one sixth grade teacher, one seventh grade teacher, one eighth grade teacher, and one ELA/Social Studies teacher, one sixth grade teacher, one seventh grade teacher, and one eighth grade ELA/social studies. The participants were all employed as urban public-school teachers. This particular school district is one of the largest urban public-school districts in New Jersey. The district educates over 40,000 students. The five teachers had a diverse classroom setting consisting of Hispanic and African American girls and boys. The sample was gathered based on the school's diverse staff known by the researcher. The study includes (5) female teachers: (2) African Americans, (1) Puerto Rican/Brazilian, (1) Irish-Italian descent, and (1) Portuguese American. Two of the five participants live in suburban areas, and the other three live in suburban areas. The demographics of the teachers are as follows: one African American veteran female teacher has over 24 years of teaching in the same district and is less than 10 months shy of retirement. The other African American veteran female teacher has more than 22 years of experience in education. The Puerto Rican/Brazilian tenured teacher has over nine years of experience but was a student-teacher at this location and transitioned to serve as an ELA teacher. The Portuguese tenured teacher has over 14 years of teaching experience. The Italian-Irish female non-tenured teacher has four years of experience. She is also the eighth-grade social studies teacher. The participants have deliberately been selected and consist of tenured and non-tenured teachers. Table 1 provides a synopsis of

each participant who participated in this research. It provides a snapshot of the participants.

Table 1

Participants Profile

Participant	D1	P2	A3	PZ4	T5
Nationality	Puerto Rican/ Brazilian	Irish, Italian, Polish, German	Portuguese American	African American	African American
Status	Tenured	Non-Tenured	Tenured	Tenured	Tenured
Year of Experience	9	4	14	24	22
Subject	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA
Grade	8	7/8	5	6	7
Metropolitan Statistical Area	Suburban	Urban	Urban	Suburban	Suburban

Interview Guide

The interview protocol focused on the literature review's limitations, specifically the lack of programming and support that drew upon teacher effectiveness to implement the Critical Race Theory practices into the curriculum. The researcher designed the questions to highlight the effectiveness of teachers using Critical Race Theory practices in the urban area to address students' social, cultural, and educational needs. The allowance of an organically evolving interview protocol was used, allowing for suggested questions from research participants. The researcher's inclusion of participant questions in this study led to a recommendation for future research around the impacts of teachers using effective Critical Race Theory practices to implement district curricula. Additional research, which includes the participants in the interview protocol, is highly

recommended. A sampling of interview questions and the complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. The protocol questions posed to each participant after introductions were as follows:

1. How are the teachers implementing the curriculum to meet urban students' needs?
2. How is the district implementing effective teaching practices for the Critical Race Theory to drive instruction and increase student performance?
3. Identify any teacher practices of Critical Race Theory.
4. What do you know about the Critical Race practices?
5. Doing your weekly planning, how much time do you invest in ensuring you address your students' social, emotional, and educational needs?
6. How often do your district/school offer professional development training on Critical Race Theory? Was the training effective and did you implement the learned strategies to address students' learning/needs?
7. Describe how your weekly planning consists of meeting the needs of your students?
8. How often do you teach Critical Race Theory? And are you comfortable teaching Critical Race Theory?
9. How does the leadership team at your school provide teachers with planning time to address and unpack the district's curriculum to ensure the students' social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs are met?

The interviewer asked follow-up questions to probe for additional information on the current questions to better understand the participant's experience and/or perspective.

Data Collection

According to Alshenqeeti (2014), a qualitative interview has two key factors: it flows and is rich in detail. Qualitative interviews have a tendency to generate copious amounts of data (Neuman, 2007). Data analysis can be aided through coding by generating meaningful data units and classifying and ordering these units (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

This research study used the virtual interview method. It is important to clearly state that participation in the conducted interviews was voluntary and signed informed consents for participants were obtained prior to interviews. The duration of the interview took between 35-45 minutes. The open-ended questions allowed the interview to be an informal, organic conversation unique to each participant's experiences and allowed for an environment where the participant felt comfortable and confident.

The interviews were recorded using an audio recording program. The interviews began with questions about the participants' culture and professional experiences with the social justice curriculum and educational equality. There were nine questions that were aligned with the researcher's ethical procedures and guidelines. The participants were informed and instructed to sign the consent form for being recorded. The participants completed a Google Form to provide consent to be documented in this study. The researcher emailed a consent form to each participant.

Data Source(s)

The data for this research was acquired using participants' interviews. The researcher implemented the transcript as a data source. The interview took less than one hour using Zoom/WebEx platforms. Each interview session was recorded, and participants were given breaks when needed. Participants determined the day and time for the interview. Each participant was asked to answer nine questions based on Critical Race Theory implementation, teacher best practices, the curriculum, and meeting the needs of students in urban areas (Appendix A).

Data Analysis

Data were collected through transcript and the WebEx recording during 35-45 minute interviews with five participants who work in an urban school as ELA middle-school teachers. The recordings were then transcribed using WebEx transcription software. Transcriptions from interviews were analyzed, organized, validated by the NVivo software, and also cross-checked for accuracy. The data was analyzed using codes around connection, self-discovery, belief, encouragement, and support, which were then grouped and turned into themes. This study was designed as a grounded theory. According to Bryant (2017), GT tenets are built on the notion of an existing problem and the hypothesis is not necessary. In this sense, Bryman and Bell (2007) support this view by suggesting that grounded theory rests on the premises of coding, comparison, and sampling. The researcher wanted to capture the true essence of the participant voices and for the themes to authentically surface through taking a deep dive into the data. According to Sheppard (2020), the analysis of the gathered qualitative data can be observed as a circular or spiraling process, rather than a linear progression. This

qualitative research study adopted a systematic approach and followed the three strategic phases proposed by Sheppard (2020):

1. cautiously read and listen to interviews;
2. identify persisting words or phrases;
3. select and organize themes into sections.

A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher received a certificate for completing the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program (CITI). IRB approval was granted from Saint Peter's University prior to beginning the research. All data was stored on a personal computer with a password to protect the privacy of all participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of all interview participants. All participants were teachers. Lastly, all recorded materials will be erased after five years, after the conclusion of the defense date minimizing any future risks related to confidentiality. Researchers must give substantial consideration to the impact their research might have on individual participants and to minimize negative impacts. In this sense, this research study was guided by the following ethical principles proposed by Sheppard (2020):

1. Respect for human dignity
2. Respect for free and informed consent
3. Respect for privacy and confidentiality
4. Balance harms and benefits
5. Maximizing benefit

Summary

A goal of this chapter was to outline the research methods used to answer the research questions. This chapter also outlined the processes and procedures used to understand how teachers are implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis of the data collected. In this sense, the chapter sections explained how the research design, participants, instrumentations, research procedures, and data analysis were selected to accommodate the literature research and methods.

Chapter 4: Findings

This research examines how five middle-school Language Arts teachers from New Hope Elementary School in Newark, New Jersey, are implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. The path which led the researcher to this study began with a question, as in the case of all research. As a country representing itself as a melting pot of diversity, how can we promote educational equality and create essential pathways to ending demographic disparities for all students? The path of the research was based on the following questions:

RQ 1. How are Critical Race practices being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs at New Hope Elementary School?

RQ 2. How can teachers inspire culturally competent students to become critical thinkers and social justice advocates?

RQ 3. How are teachers creating a culture of high expectations for multiracial and multicultural experiences for students learning trajectories?

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective and followed the theoretical process of grounded theory designed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). This research is developed from data acquired through five interviews. The interview setting was held virtually using the WebEx and Zoom platforms.

The data set consists of the responses from the interview. The interviews were recorded using Webex video conferencing, which offers the transcript of the conducted

interview as the primary data source. The interview took up to one hour using the WebEx platform. Each participant was asked to answer nine questions based on Critical Race Theory practices, teacher best practices, the curriculum, and meeting the needs of students in urban areas.

Five middle-school English Language Arts teachers were invited to participate in this study. Participants for this research were recruited via personal and professional connections, and were invited to participate in the study via email and telephone. The participants were general education teachers from a school ranked as one of the "best K-8" schools in America. The participants who volunteered attended weekly PLC meetings to utilize data, review best practices, and to ensure small group implementation for addressing individual learning needs. Critical Race Theory practices were not on the agenda or on the forefront in these weekly meetings, leaving teachers to unpack the curriculum independently and leaving uncertainty when deciding which strategies would assist them in delivering intentional CRT instruction.

For this study, the five participants were asked nine questions based on Critical Race Theory practices, teacher best practices, the curriculum, and meeting the needs of students in urban areas. Before the interview process, the participants had limited knowledge of the term CRT. However, their perspective changed during the interview. The participants acknowledged that there is consistent room for growth as they reflected upon the interview questions. They realized they needed to adapt and pivot to meet their students' needs by addressing the misconceptions presented in history books. All participants echoed the same message regarding having difficult conversations about race, culture, and injustices if students were to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.

One participant reflected that she would focus on finding teachable moments to help students realize how some things they say, do, and learn could be racist or stem from an old mindset. Another participant reflected and stated that based on the information they learned about CRT, they will no longer shy away from acknowledging that history books are whitewashed and acknowledge current events. Interview transcriptions were analyzed, organized, and coded by the NVivo software. This chapter presents the results of the study. The information presented here was extracted from the interview responses.

The narratives described throughout this chapter identify five themes contributing to the Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students' social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. First, teachers' commitment to knowing students' interests and investment is involved at varying levels for each participant. They are crucial in providing relationships and expectations that nurture student learning. Planning time for SEL is the second theme that contributes to meeting students' individual needs. When teaching students the social and emotional aspects of Critical Race Theory practices, teachers were allotted time to plan collaboratively. Policies, the third theme, are essential in helping a school create quality standards for learning expectations and accountability. District policies also establish how students are taught and what they are taught. The fourth theme to play an essential role in identifying the Critical Race practices to meet urban students' social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs is the need for knowledge about the controversy surrounding Critical Race Practices. The teachers shared the need for more personal knowledge surrounding the controversial practice. Lastly, small group instruction provides support and scaffolding often needed as students transition from one activity to the next. Small group instruction can lead to

honing in on strengths and weaknesses and individualized learning by helping teachers to match education to meet students' needs. In the next few paragraphs, the researcher gives a snapshot of each participant.

Portrait of Participants

Participant #1 - Ms. D1

The first volunteer participant, Ms. D1, has taught Language Arts for 19 consecutive years. D1 has been in the same school for nine years; she worked in four different grade levels. Furthermore, she has taught English and math. Her area of focus is getting students to write logically to express their critical thinking. Additionally, she always incorporates movement and allows students to take ownership of their and their peers' work.

Participant #2 - P2

The second participant, Ms. P2, has been a teacher at New Hope Elementary School for four years and has been teaching for seven years. She is an ELA teacher and, for the last four, has been conducting Social Studies. Ms. P2 is the district's turnkey person for presenting Cornell Notes. She trains educators and district leaders how the students take rigorous notes using their notebooks. This participant is interested in attending more culturally relevant professional developments (PD) and PDs that help her get better at her craft and to assist her with her writing skills. Ms. P2 always seeks professional development to assist Language Arts teachers while working with students with different cultural diversities.

Participant #3 - A3

In 2017, Ms. A3 was named the "Teacher of the Year." She has been a middle-school ELA teacher for 14 years. She enjoys working with students with special needs and believes that small group instruction is the catalyst to support all learners' educational needs.

Participant #4 - PZ4

Ms. PZ4 has worked with middle-school students teaching ELA for over 24 years. She attends out-of-district workshops on culturally relevant topics and enjoys reading about race.

Participant #5 - T5

Participant T5 has been a middle-school ELA teacher for 22 years. She taught fourth-grade math for 14 years and science at one school before coming to New Hope Elementary School. She has been at New Hope for eight years. T5 likes to tap into world events to broaden student perspectives. She is an avid sports fan who loves to incorporate multifaceted sports topics into students' learning, such as sports writing, statistics, and broadcasting; she also enjoys March Madness because she has a competitive spirit.

Establishing Critical Race Theory Practices in New Hope Elementary School

After gathering the data and analyzing the interviews, the researcher was able to pinpoint the most concerning topics/themes that were critical in having skilled teachers implement CRT in their classrooms. The data suggests that 1) building teacher to student relationships, 2) providing social emotional learning components to the curricular, 3) understanding district policy, 4) effectively using small groups to deliver content, and 5) student engagement, were pertinent in delivering CRT instruction efficiently. The next

section delves further into each theme to examine the barriers that restrict teachers from delivering CRT practices.

Theme 1: Building Relationships/Making Connections

A skillful teacher provides students with a nurturing learning environment. They are nation builders who strive to define the characteristics of students' needs, wants, interests, and specific learning styles. It is essential for them to create an environment that is conducive to learning and accountability. Their support is critical for the students to become productive citizens, critical thinkers, and change agents. Rita Pierson (2013) stated, "Kids don't learn from people they don't know" (1:41). The value and importance of human connection rest on the foundation of building relationships. It's relationships before content. Many participants reflected on the belief in knowing their students' interests and investing in multi-faceted opportunities to increase pathways to learning. This often causes teachers to feel that student engagement rests on the notion of them implementing the curriculum to meet the students' need to go beyond the pages of the district's textbooks. They are straddling between the tales of the two beliefs: their personal and professional.

P2 expressed that finding connections between what students learn in the classroom and how they apply the link to their everyday lives is critical. She tries to implement practices in which she does her best not to censor or stifle their voices. The participant then shared that students must understand the standard curriculum influencing European-centric beliefs and philosophy trends. She discussed how the students would benefit from content material that is more to the students' experience than the standards, which would be considered a classic book, instead relating the content to their own

experiences. P2 ended the conversation by stating “We need to be able to validate our feelings and recognize that our experiences are essential in learning.”

Similarly, D1 discussed that the significant factor is getting to know your kids and connecting the learning to real-life experiences. She continues to explain that you need to know your students’ likes and dislikes before incorporating any curriculum to build relationships with them. The participant also expressed that you should know where students stand and use those tools so that the information you get can align with whatever curriculum is already in place. She provided an example of the class reading articles and watching videos to help fill in the gaps; the students were in awe because they questioned why they did not learn this information in history class. Nevertheless, this topic opened their eyes and made the students want to research further.

In comparison, A3 makes real life connections by elaborating on the history of Black Wall Street and how the government bombed and tried to stop the economic growth of African Americans in the United States. The participant stated, "Their souls are into it; it's a different approach. You see the excitement on the kids' faces." As a 5th-grade ELA teacher, she provides opportunities to incorporate many hands-on activities. She also utilizes articles and videos and added that the district has limited online activities. Therefore, she builds on students' interests to promote student engagement.

Theme 2: Planning Time for SEL

The term “social emotional learning” (SEL) is designed to reflect the fact that the acquisition of the skills and attitudes within the five competency domains is a process and that schools are one of the primary places where this learning takes place (New York

State Education, 2018). SEL is a component of CRT practice. The SEL framework known as the CASEL is for individuals to focus on the five competencies:

1. Self-awareness
2. Decision making
3. Self-management
4. Social awareness
5. Relationship skills

SEL helps students develop their ability to deal with everyday problems. Teachers can build rapport with students to understand their family and social background to promote positive lifestyles (2023, March 3).

P2 explained how planning is one of her strong suits; she aims at being "naturally and capable" of incorporating effective practices to address students' social, emotional, and academic needs. P2 believed in assessing and meeting students' needs. Similarly, PZ4 assumed that the CRT would allow the students to see from a different perspective from the inside out. "As an African American woman in this country, I believe that we have not put social, emotional learning in our curriculum planning time even if the content may not necessarily be related to race. However, the platform is open for discussion if a student brings it up." In addition, Ms. P2 encouraged students to think through the process and make connections. Her experience has led her to believe that implementing this strategy has a more meaningful impact.

Nevertheless, T5 profoundly supported "the idea of embedding or supplementing various supplemental materials as a medium to either build a background, provide different perspectives, or establish a point of view." She also believed that speaking and

listening exercises might be an extension to the supplemental materials. This way teachers could collaborate with whomever, not just those available during the regular schedule. She continued, "I know the leadership team also required people to join clubs in the building this year. I believe that it is to get people together to collaborate." Moreover, D1 stated that planning time is essential; she explained it's ongoing throughout the day from simple check-in with SEL. She uses platforms like Rethink, which gives them videos and opportunities to speak about their emotions and target different areas of SEL.

Similarly, P2 expressed that the supervisors in her building are supportive and provide opportunities for the staff to come together for conversations and planning time. The staff is also offered planning time during weekly PLCs, in which they get the chance to unpack the curriculum as they work on the social and emotional needs of the students. The staff gets to see what one teacher is doing, if it's working for them, and how it could be implemented in other classrooms. "I strongly favor classroom visits to help educators grow professionally." In addition, A3 mentioned that two hours of planning time is used because educators spend an hour before and after school starts. Her accountability partner always plans, and A3 acknowledged that she has planning time with the resource teachers.

Theme 3: District Policy

Teachers are required to follow distinct policy in regards to their duties and performance. District policy lays down the framework that the Board of Education is expecting from its staff members and holds all accountable to their performance and

duties. It allows the schools to create a school culture and climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful for student learning and teacher development.

P2 expressed one of the biggest challenges she came across was district limitation. "It took a lot of work to help teachers relate to the content personally instead of how to relate it to our students." She continued to state that a challenge that hinders the district's limitation is that they still treat the critical race practices to increase student performance as a one size fits all approach. As a fourth-year teacher, the participant had been invited to one professional development training with a high concentration on Critical Race Theory. She expressed that the PD offered was helpful, but it was less about implementing the theory and more about changing the individual mindset. The participant stated she gingerly implemented the theory practices and took some of PD's ideas to reflect on what she needed to improve.

The participant also felt like the one PD offered was more like a lecture or discussion. It reminded her of a book signing event instead of what you could do in your classroom. P2 noted that she believes she is always trying to be mindful of Critical Race Theory. The participant is not so concerned about having to teach it, but more about how students would feel having a white woman teaching the content. On the other hand, she expressed that the students are comfortable with her, and it's much easier for her. Still, her biggest struggle is always helping them feel comfortable with her leading those discussions in an urban area. D1, on the other hand, expressed the love of attending professional development training. The participant explained that she doesn't know how often the district offers a Critical Race Theory professional development training, or if it was a "training that I wasn't aware of." She stated,

From what I know when the district offers training, they show us different methods to communicate the information. So that way, students have a plethora of different strategies. Based on that, our district, especially with this new training this year, has given us various methods and tools to succeed in the school year. We have a couple of training sessions geared toward small groups.

Ms. A3 expressed that for Critical Race Theory, the district's curriculum provided almost five units on the topic. She explained that she loves the units because the students can discuss things they usually don't discuss. She continued, "Sometimes we need to go back and revisit the practices that were not told the right way, and sometimes we need to go back and learn what happened." Furthermore, the participant stated that she used the restorative circle approach to address the student's social and emotional needs.

Additionally, the staff is provided with weekly PLCs, in which the school leadership team addresses and unpacks the curriculum, and then the rest of the time is used as planning time with all the other teachers of the grade-level team. With 14 years of teaching experience, Ms. A3 explained that she has attended only two professional development sessions on Critical Race Theory. The two training sessions she attended were synonymous with implementing instructional strategies and ensuring students talked to each other. She later stated, "That was all we got, and nothing too deep on the color or race. It was more about the units." The participant explained,

I am comfortable with teaching Critical Race Theory. However, I wish I had been given more information to give the students... I also wish the district would have better PD sessions to train the staff in more in-depth information so that we could reach the students.

On the other hand, she explained that she does not like or favor the district's writing pieces. PZ4 agreed, believing that "the district's curriculum is not focused on the materials that reflect urban city students' needs and it should connect, and be relatable to them." She stated that the books have been "minimal," and how they are implemented is not as thorough as it should be. PZ4 thought, "The district needs to implement effective teaching practices for Critical Race Theory....I haven't seen anything indicating they are using it." She then proceeded to explain that "I enjoy reading and will teach the students the practices that I should receive at staff development for teaching practices. These practices will also allow me to implement or find research on implementing best practices for Critical Race Theory." She explained, "The school/district doesn't have any materials that speak to the Critical Race Theory, and I have not seen anyone trying to implement it." The participant credited "the components of balanced literacy as being practice for Critical Race Theory."

Additionally, she implemented the Rethink curriculum that the school board provided. The participant was adamant about expressing that she did not have the materials. She mentioned this twice during the interview. She did not hesitate to state, "There's no books, no workbooks, and no videos." She only saw something if she visited YouTube. Ms. PZ4 explained that the district had not provided the teachers with books focusing on children learning about race. She suggested that the district still needs to provide materials focusing on Critical Race Theory. "Still, if I have the books, I teach quite often because that's who I am, and kids must understand race in this country from both perspectives, but we don't have materials, and we have yet to receive the materials."

Nevertheless, she expressed that "they need to get materials, allowing us to research and plan, based on the materials for social-emotional learning for their students."

T5 stated that "a couple of years back, the educators in the building/district pushed for a new Social Studies unit, which is now the Amistad unit." They wanted a different Social Studies curriculum to teach viewing from different lenses. She believed the voices of the people drove the district to provide this curriculum because they endorsed the idea. She later stated that "I believe the Amistad curriculum brought a different view or lens to a part of history, and it was okay to teach it and the practices of critical race theory."

Theme 4: Small Group Instruction

Small groups are pertinent to individualized student performance and allows the teachers to deliver explicit instruction to their students. Teachers are equipped with the knowledge of deciphering data to be able to customize tailored lessons that are precise in reaching each child's specific learning needs. Small groups allow the teacher to focus on maintaining individualized learning goals and in creating flexible groups, which allow the teacher to provide individualized feedback and support, which will in turn foster student engagement and participation.

P2 elaborated that teachers would always have students who are on various levels of need. Teachers tailor instruction, especially for small groups, to ensure that they are meeting everybody where they are instead of taking a one-size-fits-all approach. The participant further elaborated that the data used is to tailor her instruction and small groups. She provided station activities at least once a week where she can work in small groups and have a teacher-led session. Also, allow students to have additional practice on

things they were not successful at the beginning or require additional support. Having those moments to do stations with those small groups helps her with the students without holding the rest of the class back yet continuously challenging the class.

D1's teaching practices rest on scaffolding, high expectations, and tailored instruction. She explained that tailored instructions are essential when meeting students in small groups and making sure that teachers like herself meet each student where they are academically. She then clarified that teachers should not hinder students by saying "they're at this level." She further explained that she pushes them to meet standards requirements in a small group setting where they can adapt quickly. She took a deep dive into how to launch the curriculum, but this school year, there have been more different teaching styles and learning tools she uses and implements in small groups. She does small group instruction every day. The small groups are just literary circles, so students can get used to just talking to each other on a much higher level. Once the data shows that the students have mastered a specific skill, she moves the students to the next skill/concept.

A3 stated, "I favor reviewing data such as the students' reading records, guided reading, and spelling inventories to group students differently. I believe that different groups are essential to meet individual needs." She noted that the school has an interventionist who comes in, and she will identify which students need extra help. In accord, PZ4 stated that "I focused on implementing practices that will allow different levels for the students in my classroom." In support of small group instruction, T5 stated, "I believe this demographic needs to address different mediums like written work, including videos, documentaries, magazines, and art. I provide other things to bring to the

classroom, more of a supplement to the curriculum." Lastly, T5 believed that the planning happens at the end of the day or end of class while it's fresh and then reflected at the end of the day again. She decides what to adjust and re-teach with the resource teacher or aide in the class. She also collaborated or conferenced about what they saw, what notes were taken, or what they noticed. After that, she monitors and adjusts constantly to ensure her small groups are moving the trajectory needle in the right direction.

Theme 5: Student Engagement/ Making an Impact

Student engagement is the epicenter of a teacher's daily instruction. If the students are not participating, they are not learning. Engaging students in the learning process increases their focus and engagements them to participate in high level thinking and questioning. Implementing a variety of resources where students can choose how they will respond to their instruction, allows the students and teachers to be equitable in their various learning styles, therefore, increasing student engagement. The goal is to find the methods that will motivate your students to participate, and the more you know your students, the more you are able to include their interests within each lesson.

P2 provided opportunities for her students to open up in a way in which they can share their social and emotional experiences. She believed that "the content that is being taught is somehow related to what they have dealt with, something they've experienced in the world, or something they've seen on the news." Allowing this process to happen reminds the participant of being "organic" instead of forcing the practices. Nevertheless, the participant expressed that Critical Race practices are cross-disciplinary techniques for exploring various political or historical movements. She also mentioned that teachers should not take a Eurocentric approach in the classroom to keep students engaged.

Instead, teachers should think outside the box and provide an environment where students are engaged in high interest and culturally diverse activities like Critical Race practices. She said, “You have multiple viewpoints and must allow students the opportunity to explore those various viewpoints.”

Similarly, D1 expressed that the school leaders provide yearly planning for fun Fridays and things students can earn throughout the year. They can earn different prizes and incentives. Seeing them do something they have never done—bringing those bonding experiences to their children, so they know the teachers are there for them. The students can lean on them for support from the beginning of the school year and then monthly or bi-monthly to plan out the events they will plan for this year. Similarly, Ms. A3 said she implemented all Critical Race Theory teaching practices. The teachers’ only knowledge of CRT practices was through the district’s curriculum, which was very limited. The teachers researched the practices on Google and attempted to apply some without being formally trained. They identified and defined the practices through small group instruction to address individual needs.

The teaching practices A3 identified are accountable talk, which she explained she does in her class consistently. The students must answer questions with evidence and reasoning, and they research topics. She explained that the second unit of the curriculum is about what happened in history and why they excluded certain people from our past. The students take ownership of their learning. Ms. A3 explained, “PLCs are used as planning time, and the rest is the teacher’s time.” She then explained that the staff also get Professional Development days, in which they get half a day to plan. The staff also gets

the weekly time to plan. She said, "Certain committees also get planning time to address the school's cultural, social, and emotional aspects."

The participant PZ4 stressed, "I used my planning time to focus on the materials needed for the curriculum." She later elaborated, "The schools provide 120 minutes of advisory time where the students work on social emotional learning." The participant later expressed, "I plan with a team of teachers on the topics that we will teach; my planning would be to look at differentiated teaching groups." She then expressed that she plans with a group of teachers to prepare lesson plans. All these planning efforts positively impact student engagement because the participants are investing time in creating engaging lessons and activities that make learning enjoyable. This enables students to take ownership of their learning.

In addition, Ms. T5 stated that she "believes in teaching it or implementing it in the classroom to keep discussions open." She suggested that "it is a topic which is not to fear, or steer away from if it comes up."

Summary

Chapter Four examined the results of the research study. The five participants were asked nine questions based on Critical Race Theory practices, and teacher best practices, the curriculum and meeting the needs of students in urban areas. The transcripts from interviews were analyzed, organized, and validated by the NVivo software. The information was extracted from the responses of the interview; the interviews were organized into nine sections. These findings are examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to examine how five middle-school Language Arts teachers from New Hope Elementary School in Northern, New Jersey are implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. This research was developed from data acquired through five interviews. The interview setting was held virtually using the WebEx platform, presenting a narrative of each interviewee's experiences. Each participant's interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through open coding.

Research Questions

The pathway of the research was based on the following questions:

1. How are Critical Race practices being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs at New Hope Elementary School?
2. How can teachers inspire culturally competent students to become critical thinkers and social justice advocates?
3. How are teachers creating a culture of high expectations for multiracial and multicultural experiences for students learning trajectories?

Summary of Findings

Four themes emerged from this study. Building relationships surfaced early as a theme, supported by teachers knowing their students, by establishing well-balanced relationships before teaching the content and placing an inference on students' interest

and motivation. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) surfaced as the second theme providing planning time for the students to work collaboratively to address students' individual needs. District policy surfaced as the third theme providing connection recognizing the controversy on Critical Race Theory practices. The fourth theme that emerged was small group instruction, supported by student ownership and staff collaboration. Collectively the participants' experiences provided a narrative revolving around the building of a sense of best practices and offer, in their voices, recommendations for expanded opportunities to foster connection as well as to help their school/district better understand teacher effectiveness to implement Critical Race Theory practices into the curricular.

There were three guiding research questions in this study. The first question was as follows: How are Critical Race practices being implemented by middle-school English Language Arts teachers to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs at New Hope Elementary School?

This study suggested that there was a hyper-focus on teachers building relationships and making connections to pedagogy by building a solid foundation on student interest. All five participants believed in relationships before content. They collected various data sources and collaborated as a team to analyze the data collected to solve academic challenges. New Hope Elementary School engages in weekly Professional Learning Communities and Grade Level Meetings to analyze and review data and problem-solve around challenges encountered. During these weekly meetings, they use a data-driven approach to create an action plan to support students' social and

emotional learning needs, which was another theme that emerged. Student group instruction was a theme that emerged as a pattern in all interviews conducted.

In addition, throughout the interviews, a common theme of student engagement arose from the interviews. They recounted stories in which they complimented themselves on the importance of getting to know their students and how they took praise for staying connected. This experience was referenced as an earmark for playing a significant role in building relationships. The participants suggested that the students' curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs were also addressed through their daily planning, which was reflected through their bi-weekly lesson plans.

The second question asked was the following: How can teachers inspire culturally competent students to become critical thinkers and social justice advocates? Regarding Research Question Two, there was a significant focus on tailored instruction, providing small groups, offering professional development, hands-on activities, student engagement, and teacher practices. Participants shared that they review and analyze the data to determine the academic needs of their students. The participants noted that as adult learners, they were comfortable being uncomfortable when it came to teaching culturally inspired materials. They were comfortable sharing that their personal beliefs and philosophies allow them the creativity and the options of thinking outside the box-referring to the district's curriculum. They were all in favor of researching additional information regarding teaching students culturally relevant content. Some participants attend out-of-district professional development training and surf the Internet for other resources.

The third question asked was the following: How are teachers creating a culture of high expectations for multiracial and multicultural experiences for students learning trajectories? The participants had the students tune into their learning by having them take ownership of their educational learning trajectory. The units within the district's curriculum exposed various cultural experiences. Not only were they exposed to those multicultural tests, but they also engaged in critical thinking activities. The critical analysis activities explored the nature of the interconnectedness of various cultures. Additionally, the students were placed in small-tailored groups daily, and the teachers collected and analyzed data in which the staff work collaboratively to ensure student performance of the New Jersey standards.

Implications For Future Research

This study specifically informs the Critical Race practices and how they impact students' engagement and achievement to meet the needs of urban students. In addition, it serves to inform how the district's curriculum meets social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. Future research should examine the impact of Critical Race Theory practices and the district's curriculum to ensure it meets urban students' needs as it helps increase student social, emotional, and academic needs, and promotes student engagement. Even though the district provides professional development training to all educators, a focus on culturally relevant pedagogy/Critical Race practices for students is imperative.

Furthermore, providing educators with effective, efficient, and consistent professional development training on Critical Race Theory will help meet all students' academic, emotional, and cultural needs. Further research could involve the perception of

teachers in the elementary school on transitioning students to the middle schools with Critical Race practices. Expanding the five participants' research study to other school districts, such as suburban and rural districts, could contribute valuable insight into this research area. Expanding this research study outside of the urban school setting and involving secondary education could benefit educators in the future. Additionally, future research is for school districts to provide comprehensive training on Critical Race Theory practices because the five participants had limited to no knowledge of the specific tenets of CRT. Based on their response, it was apparent that the teachers' knowledge of CRT did not match what the researcher had in mind when she asked them about CRT practices.

Implications for Practice

Educational leaders should attend ongoing professional developments to enhance their craft and then turn-key best practices to ensure student mastery of skills. In turn, this will help educators understand the needs of diverse learners and develop effective Critical Race theory strategies for meeting those needs. These training and professional development policies should be centered around district-wide curriculum and policy as well. Leaders should also create a culture of respect and inclusivity in which all students and teachers feel valued and supported as life-long learners. Additionally, they should develop a diverse curriculum that reflects the experiences and cultures of all learners within their district and community. Lastly, school leaders should provide resources and materials to support diverse learners including technology, readings, and exposure in different avenues. Leaders should also set time aside for teachers to be reflective as they teach and expand their own knowledge of Critical Race Theory practices.

Limitations

Although this study focused on one urban school district in New Jersey, it is a challenge to generalize these findings to all urban schools, provided the unique adversities encountered by urban schools. A limitation of the study was that all participants were from New Hope Elementary School. The sample size of the population could be described as a limitation. While the study has good variability across the different types of themes represented, it might be helpful to have a sampling with a higher concentration of participants in each setting. A requirement for participation is that the participants are middle-school English Language Arts teachers. The varying grades and the academic contents of the participants could be another limitation. The outcomes of this study significantly relied on participants' responses, expecting that each participant truthfully answered the interview questions. In addition, all interviews were conducted via WebEx; the participant responses may be impacted or limited.

Discussion of Findings

The emerged theme demonstrates that participants believed that by providing the proper training, educators could be more effective when combining curriculum with improved instructional practices for students in urban areas. In effective schools, teachers are provided with the autonomy to implement diverse practices through small group instruction that allows students to explore their own diverse interests, thus, promoting student voice and agency in exploring Critical Race Theory components. Warren (2013) has similar beliefs:

as a White woman, she did not always have such success reaching Black students. They were more closed off until she started utilizing family business. The class trusts her as evidenced by the sensitive topics that come up during family business

related to death, dating, and future goals. (p. 2)

The purpose of this section is to interpret that with proper district training, educators can implement diverse practices where all learners can benefit.

Conclusion

This qualitative research investigated five middle-school Language Arts teachers implementing Critical Race practices to meet the needs of urban students, according to their curriculum, social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. In this research study, various patterns/themes emerged on implementing Critical Race practices utilized by the educators at Hope Elementary School. This engrained practice weekly GLM/PLC time allowed grade-level teams to plan, assess, and support small-group instruction, student engagement, and student achievement. The responses for the research questions were presented in themes one, two, and three. The essential themes are used to identify individual attention/culturally relevant teaching, fostering critical thinking, and controversy surrounding CRT. Furthermore, Critical Race practices are a challenge for some educators, and the district expects that the teachers implement district-approved resources, follow the curriculum with fidelity, and provide instructional strategies based on students' individual needs so the data demonstrates growth in student outcomes. Lastly, the educators work closely with the grade-level bands/teams to create, manage, and implement a social justice curriculum as they are used as a road map to address Critical Race practices to move towards acquiring this new change. Essentially, the grade-level planning/collaborating time used by the educators promotes small-group instruction, student engagement, and student achievement. The participants were not comfortable teaching the practices because they were not formally trained by their

district. Based on the participants' responses, they were curious and wanted to know about the CRT practices and how they could be implemented effectively. Teachers are not going to independently teach CRT unless it's a district mandate. According to Pendharkar (2022), certain school districts are not providing the opportunities for Critical Race Theory practices to be implemented in a safe manner by threatening students' freedom to learn.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

10. How are the teachers implementing the curriculum to meet urban students' needs?
11. How is the district implementing effective teaching practices for Critical Race Theory to drive instruction and increase student performance?
12. Identify any teacher practices of Critical Race Theory.
13. What do you know about Critical Race practices?
14. Doing your weekly planning, how much time do you invest in ensuring you address your students' social, emotional, and educational needs?
15. How often does your district/school offer professional development training on Critical Race Theory? Was the training effective, and did you implement the learned strategies to address students' learning/needs?
16. Describe how your weekly planning consists of meeting the needs of your students.
17. How often do you teach Critical Race Theory? And are you comfortable teaching Critical Race Theory?
18. How does the leadership team at your school provide teachers with planning time to address and unpack the district's curriculum to ensure the students' social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs are met?