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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, FINDING THEIR WAY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF FIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EDUCATORS' EARLY EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP INTO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEGAGOGUES, by RACHEL BEATRICE DUNBAR, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

_____
Lou Edward Matthews, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Julie Dangel, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Joya Carter Hicks, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Joyce King, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
Barbara Meyers, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Early Childhood Education

_____
R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Rachel Beatrice Dunbar

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Rachel Beatrice Dunbar
3743 North Goddard Road
Lithonia, GA, 30038

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Lou Edward Matthews
Department of Middle/Secondary Education
and Instructional Technology
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083

VITA

Rachel Beatrice Dunbar

ADDRESS: 3743 North Goddard Road
Lithonia, GA 30038

EDUCATION:

Ph. D.	2008	Georgia State University Early Childhood Education
M.A.	2001	Teachers College, Columbia University Curriculum & Teaching
B.S.	1999	Georgia Southern University Early Childhood Education
A.A.	1997	Oxford College, Emory University Liberal Arts

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2006-Present	Graduate Research Assistant Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
2005-2006	Instructor Augusta State University, Augusta, GA
2002-2005	Grade 4 Teacher Hugo Newman College Preparatory School, New York, NY
2001-2002	Grade 3 Teacher Henry Highland Garnett School for Success, New York, NY

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

2007-Present	National Association for Multicultural Education
2007-Present	American Educational Research Association
2001-Present	Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated

PUBLICATIONS:

2009	Review of Diverse: Issues in Higher Education. *African American Encyclopedia*
2009	Benson, G., & Dunbar, R. (2009). The referral and placement process. In R. Colarusso & C. O'Rourke (Eds.).

	Special Education for All Teachers (5th ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
2008	Matthews, L., Nall, R. &, Barron M. (in review). Wading through the waters: Clarifying culturally relevant pedagogy for educational practice and development.
2006	Early Childhood Education study guide for Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE)

PRESENTATIONS:

Nov. 2008	*National Association for Multicultural Education,* New Orleans, LA (Declined).
May 2007	*Sources of Urban Excellence Conference*, Georgia State University
Mar. 2006	*Impacting Student Learning Conference*, Augusta State University
Feb. 2006	*Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc*., Savannah State University
Jan. 2006	*Hawaii International Conference on Education*, Honolulu, Hawaii
Oct. 2005	*SINO-American Education Consortium Conference*, Kennesaw State University

ABSTRACT

FINDING THEIR WAY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF FIVE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EDUCATORS' EARLY EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP INTO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEGAGOGUES

by

Rachel Beatrice Dunbar

Teacher education programs have been charged with the responsibility to equip all teachers to work successfully in increasingly diverse elementary classrooms around the nation (NCES, 1996). However, the composition of the nation's teaching force has not kept pace with these changes. Additionally, there is concern that many Pre-service teachers are ill prepared to work with culturally diverse students, partly because teacher education programs (TEPs) often adopt a monocultural, one-size-fits-all approach to preparation, ignoring race, class, and gender considerations (King & Castnell, 2001). African American women who seek preparation are greatly impacted by this singular approach to teacher education, which influences the way in which they experience their training. Consequently, they are often underserved in TEPs (Cozart & Price, 2005). It has been argued that TEPs will have to broaden their approaches to preparation by using a culturally relevant approach to teaching (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Given the necessity for teachers to be equipped to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners in the classroom, it is imperative that TEPs are designed to cultivate culturally appropriate practices within Pre-service teachers.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the nature of the diversity preparation of five African American women and their teaching experiences following the completion of their teacher education training. The critical ethnographic case studies that developed were theoretically framed in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995),

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990), and Womanism (Phillips, 2006). Data were collected from classroom observations, individual, and group interviews. Using a system of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), data analysis resulted in the emergence of three overarching themes: a) the formal diversity preparation offered by the university, b) the women's individual perspectives of cultural relevance, and c) the ways in which the women incorporated their perspectives into their classroom practices. The experiences the young women encountered significantly influenced their understandings of culture and its impact on learning for diverse student populations. The results of this study suggest the need for teacher educators to reconsider how TEPs are structured to better prepare minority Pre-service teachers in the future to teach culturally diverse students.

FINDING THEIR WAY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF FIVE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EDUCATORS' EARLY EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP INTO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEGAGOGUES

by
Rachel B. Dunbar

A Dissertation

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in
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in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
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It has taken a considerable amount of time and effort to produce this piece of work that is near and dear to my heart. I believe in the message it conveys and I believe in what that message means for the field of education. Most of all, I believe in my participants. So finally, I would like to give a special thanks to the young women who shared their experiences with me and in turn, allowed me share with others the story of five exceptional educators.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	American Council on Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
NCATE	National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
NCES	National Center for Educational Statistics
PST	Pre-Service Teacher
S.C.A.A.S.I	Southern Conference on African American Studies, Incorporated
SFE	Social Foundations of Education
TEP	Teacher Education Program

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Finding Their Way

In my experience as a teacher educator in a Teacher Education Program (TEP) several years ago at a four year public institution in Southern Georgia, I interacted as a supervisor and instructor with five African American women actively pursuing their teaching certification. As the only African American women in their cohort, they felt isolated daily in class, concerned that their identity as minorities marginalized them within their TEP. Moreover, these young women expressed that they were disgruntled by the curriculum in their TEP: they expected to learn ways in which to teach students from diverse backgrounds, but in their opinion, were only taught to how to work with a homogenous group of students. Consequently, this instructional approach prevented the young women from their desired deep understanding of how to implement diversity education. A series of conversations between me and the young women throughout the year led to them sharing their perceived lack of multicultural preparation in the current program, as well as the ways in which they believed they were treated as minorities. As a result, I questioned the issues within this respective TEPs related to the preparation of Pre-service teachers, especially African American women, to become educators. Of additional concern was to what extent did African American women in TEPs at other institutions of higher education have similar feelings regarding their formal preparation programs. These thoughts influenced my search for a way not only to address teacher

concerns about TEPs, but also establish how the five young women I met would be able to find their own way on a journey to meet their personal expectations of academic success for their students of color.

Problem Statement and Background

Each year the nation's school system quietly transforms as it reflects an array of students from diverse backgrounds. With a student population quickly approaching almost 70% ethnic minority (NCES, 1996), there follows that each student has cultural and linguistic needs differing from those of their non-minority peers. Arguably, in order to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of these students, the nation's teaching force must be equipped with training to address the unique characteristics of an increasingly diverse population. These needs are characterized by things such as language differences, perspectives of knowledge shaped by environmental factors, health related concerns, study skills, and feeling of belonging, and the ability to negotiate dealing with academic versus home settings (NAEYC, 1995). Although student demographics have changed in classrooms, teacher demographics have not been consistent with these changes, comprised of mostly White, middle class women and only 7.8% African Americans in general (NCES, 2003). Coupled with these statistics, Pre-service teachers are often trained within programs that adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to learning which gives rise to concern that teachers are ill-prepared to teach in diverse classrooms. Research suggests TEPs whose curriculum content ignores the influence of race, class, language, gender, and culture are inadequately preparing Pre-service teachers to be sensitive to the cultural knowledge and tools students bring with them into the classroom, which are a result of their cultural group interactions (Sleeter, 2001a). In these instances, African

American women find that their experiences within monocultural TEPs are subpar, and they are often left underserved in their training. This is a critical issue for minority Pre-service teachers whose ways of knowing are influenced by their personal and group experiences. Preparation from a singular perspective that reflects ideology of a dominant culture neglects to account for how the cultural capital of minorities may impact future student learning. Theoretically, cultural capital explains those things in society that distinctly define the power held by individuals within a culture and include language, customs, traditions, behaviors, and any knowledge developed as a result of shared experiences (Olneck, 2000). In the elementary classroom, cultural capital has the potential to serve as an integral part of teaching and learning.

Given the need to equip all teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of all student learners, it is imperative that TEPs adopt program models that cultivate within Pre-service teachers practices that reflect a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Culture broadly encompasses people's ethnic heritage, their beliefs and traditionally practiced customs, as well as the environment in which they occupy the majority of their time and thereby most closely relate. Culturally relevant pedagogy, therefore, is an approach that takes into consideration these aspects.

Preparing Pre-service teachers for Diversity

Pre-service Teacher Dispositions

Examination of Pre-service teacher preparation prompts a discussion of what issues may prevent future teachers from a more fully developed ability to work in diverse classroom settings. Of initial consideration are attitudes and beliefs toward multicultural education that Pre-service teachers bring with them into their TEPs. Dispositions that

reflect a tendency to view students of color from a deficit perspective immediately hinder Pre-service teachers' ability to teach towards equity and social justice (Xu, 2000). According to Sleeter (2001b), naiveté about multiculturalism and ethnic diversity leads teachers to mistakenly believe that children from urban backgrounds are lazy and uninterested in learning, attitudes that may in turn cause teachers to have low expectations for educational excellence. As the attitudes of future teachers are a reflection of their ways of knowing, teacher beliefs may impact their conceptions of diversity, generally leading to ambivalent acceptance of norms and privileges unfairly afforded to Whites (King, 1991). King found that most teacher education students had a skewed frame of reference for the meaning of cultural diversity, content to accept mainstream norms offered by society. Through careful analysis of the notion that people fail to use their consciousness critically, King developed the term "dysconsciousness," explained as an uncritical "habit of mind" that validate existing inequities in society by accepting injustices as they are without question. Acceptance without understanding underlying implications threatens to move Pre-service teachers further into spaces where they can comfortably avoid confronting the danger of their narrow-minded dispositions.

Narrowing the gap between biased thinking and a realistic view of education by using a multicultural lens begins with critical self-reflection of how existing ideas form. Causey, Thomas, & Armento (2000) posited the difficulty in influencing Pre-service teachers' thoughts about diversity was due to the negative connotations associated with their prior knowledge. In a longitudinal qualitative case study of two Pre-service teachers, Causey et al. examined the impact of field placements, teacher autobiographies, personal action plans, and cultural immersion experiences in urban schools. Although these

exercises were instrumental during the teacher education program to guide Pre-service teachers in becoming more reflective, Causey et al. argued that a singular course was insufficient. To prevent digression into stereotypical thoughts about students of color, they recommended the use of follow up programs in order for in-service teachers to receive continuous professional development. The tendency to revert to prior beliefs that negatively categorize students of color speaks to Pre-service teachers' readiness for working with diverse learners and suggests the need for additional sensitivity training.

In a study of multicultural and diversity awareness, Miller et al. (2003) found that most Pre-service teachers agreed with statements that recommended cultural integration in the curriculum. Unfortunately, the majority of these same teachers were neutral when asked how they felt about integrating culture into their classrooms. These findings revealed that despite discourse of changed views and acceptance of cultural diversity, most Pre-service teachers remain unprepared to face diversity in their own classrooms represented by students' ethnicities and learning styles. Although theoretical courses alone are not enough to change Pre-service teachers' dispositions, Milner (2006) offered that a series of courses whose central components specifically focus on multiculturalism and social justice have the potential to positively influence on Pre-service teachers' level of preparedness. Within his course designed to improve Pre-service teachers attitudes and thoughts about diversity, Milner discussed three interactions during the class: cultural and racial awareness and insight through readings, discussions, and assignments; critical reflection to encourage Pre-service teachers to examine their own personal biases and stereotypes; and bridging theory to practice for Pre-service teachers to connect classroom learning through authentic teaching experiences. In the midst of attempts by teacher

educators to alter Pre-service teachers' views and make them more receptive to differences through heightened awareness, Milner explained that all attempts are futile if TEPs are poorly organized.

Diversity Preparation through Systematic Change

A second issue in pre-service preparation has been the current structure of most TEPs to prepare new teachers for diversity. Inconsistent program models and lack of agreement of the best model in which to train teachers can lead to poor preparation and system-wide failure. As more teachers are trained within programs that fail to provide appropriate diversity preparation, more teachers subsequently begin to teach their own students with a narrow and biased worldview or without the use of creative approaches to learning or attention to social justice. Strong teachers guided by their commitment to social and political change are cognizant of what it means to teach the whole child as they demonstrate active participation in pedagogy that uplifts students academically, and encourage students to actively participate in social change (Cochran-Smith, 1997). This ability results from concentrated preparation in programs whose curriculum reflects a commitment to critical reflection and cultural awareness.

Strategic planning that demonstrates an organized system of training is required in order to properly prepare Pre-service teachers for diversity. Teacher education studies (Ambe, 2006; Tellez, 2004; Xu, 2000; Scott & Mumford, 2007; Chou, 2007) have indicated a change in TEP curriculum is a possible solution. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) required that all teacher certification programs include multicultural education as part of their curricula to ensure that diversity is infused throughout the course content as well as reflected in the faculty and staff

demographics (Ambe, 2006). The integration of multicultural education in all aspects of teacher education demonstrated a transformative multicultural pedagogy that is not limited by teaching students about other cultural groups, but insists on fostering within students an appreciation of diversity as an area of strength as opposed to a subtractive attribute (Morey & Kitano, 1997 in Ambe, 2006). According to Scott & Mumford (2007), one option was to integrate social foundations of education (SFE) courses in teacher education curriculum as a strategy that may increase cultural competence and encourage critical thinking. Through SFE courses, Pre-service teachers become equipped to focus more precisely on student success through the integration of home into the daily functions of school to empower students by their own experiences (Ambe, 2006). This type of diversity preparation can benefit non-minority Pre-service teachers who have limited experiences with culturally diverse groups as well as African American Pre-service teachers whose backgrounds do not exempt them from proper preparation.

African Americans and Their Position in Teacher Education

The Presence of African American Teachers

As discussed earlier, student demographics are increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse, evidence of the different cultures represented in classrooms nationwide. Teacher demographics, on the other hand, do not reflect the same diversity. Results from a 1999-2000 national survey on school staffing revealed over 74% of classroom teachers were female, 84% of whom were White and from middle to upper middle class socioeconomic backgrounds (NCES, 2003, in Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). The minority teacher population, consisting of 7.8% African American, 5.7% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian American, and .8% Native American, was alarmingly low (NCES, 2003). Sleeter

(2001b) indicated that small numbers of Pre-service teachers of color, as compared to non-minority Pre-service teachers, can potentially have an adverse effect on diverse students who see very few examples of minority teachers as role models in classrooms. In a review of literature on diversity in teacher education, Guyton, Saxton, & Wesche (1996) reported that minority teachers had more sensitivity to minority students and their lived circumstances. Moreover, Guyton et al. specifically reported that African American teachers from this study possessed an ethic of caring for their students, evidence of the need to recruit more African Americans into the teaching profession.

Increased African American recruits into TEPs will begin to decrease the homogeneity in teacher demographics. However, King (1993) explained the presence of African American in teacher education is more than just to provide a balance in the numbers of teachers of color versus non-minority teachers. She argued that research on African American teachers shows them to be change agents whose high expectations for their students are often based upon the teachers' personal cultural experiences. If the presence of African American teachers is tantamount to education, one must question why the literature on their contributions is growing so slowly. What has been reported includes findings as offered by Fuller (1992) who stated teacher education experiences for Pre-service teachers of color are quite different from those who are White. Additionally, Hulsebosch & Koerner (1994) reported minority Pre-service teachers felt like outsiders in their programs and later in the schools where they attempted to maintain their racial identities.

According to Bainer (1990), minority students in TEPs struggle daily, "…faced with an overwhelming task during the pre-service training program: they are expected to

be bicultural, bidialectic, and bicognitive" (p. 56, as cited in Guyton, Saxton, and Wesche, 1996). Therefore, African American Pre-service teachers cannot help but to feel the pressures of being minorities in their programs. Coupled with preparation that has little focus on issues of diversity and uses a monolingual curriculum, African American Pre-service teachers often regard their TEPs unfavorably. The situation becomes more complex when African American *women* are added to the scenario of teacher preparation for minorities. Research on African American women Pre-service teachers provides evidence that fewer education degrees have been conferred in the last twenty years. King (1993) reported that statistics relative to the number of bachelor degrees African American women have received from 1976 to 1987 had declined. Those numbers increased in the late 1980s and the number of masters degrees only rose slightly as well, 3,084 and 4,167, respectively (ACE, 1991). Given this data, teacher educators must actively seek ways to attract, prepare, and retain teachers of color in the education profession, specifically African American women. The task is to discover what strategy is best suited to address the need for teacher preparation that equips teachers to work with children of color.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as an Option for Preparation

Hilliard (1997) urged teacher educators to follow the example of programs from which successful teachers of children of color have emerged to discover the training strategies that equipped those teachers to prevent children from experiencing failure. Examples of can be found in research on teachers who have successfully worked with African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994); teachers who advocate for their students both in and out of the classroom (Lynn, 2006); and teachers who are in various

stages of their careers as teachers of minority students (Howard, 2001). In the African tradition, it is the teacher's responsibility to stimulate a child's mind and appeal to the intellectual, physical, and spiritual aspects of the child in a holistic manner (Hilliard, 1997). Similarly, Howard (2001) posited that teachers who attempt to close the learning gap for their minority students are those who are concerned with the whole child. There must be areas of teaching that step outside of the academic content in order to consider the social, emotional, and mental aspects of a child as well. Moreover, teachers must develop appropriate social skills, intellect, integrity, and morality within their students. As Howard argued, teachers must make an effort to go beyond offering basic academic skill; they must teach students how to exist in society. These elements of holistic learning, presented in conjunction with other principles of teaching that utilize students' culture in the learning process, may influence the curriculum of TEPs when Pre-service teachers are prepared for diverse classroom settings.

Programs that give attention to cultural diversity require teacher educators to assist Pre-service teachers' evolution into pedagogues who, through their instructional practices and their teacher/student interactions, demonstrate a personal belief in the potential for all students of color to be successful. As evidenced by the work of successful educators, teacher education must move in a new direction for an increased rate of student achievement. A suggested direction in which to travel is one that leads to the use of a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995) in order to provide teachers with a frame of reference that encourages critical thinking, careful self-reflection, and commitment to reconstructing their thoughts and identities. Culturally relevant pedagogy is based on the premise that all students can be successful without

regard to their background or personal circumstances. Teachers who utilize a culturally relevant approach to learning not only maintain the belief in their students' abilities to attain success, they capitalize upon the presence of diversity within their classrooms and use it as an essential part of teaching and learning.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is not a solution to teacher training. It is, however, one way to successfully prepare African American Pre-service teachers who seek to educate culturally diverse students. As the research on minority teacher preparation grows, it is imperative to add to that literature the findings on how to better prepare African American Pre-service teachers for culturally diverse classrooms by devoting special attention to their experiences during their TEP.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of the diversity preparation experiences of five African American women during their teacher education training, and their 1st year as teachers. More specifically, the research questions were:

1. How do five African American women educators perceive their experiences of diversity preparation during their Teacher Education Program (TEP)?
2. How is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) manifested in the pedagogical perspectives and practices of five African American women educators during their 1st year of teaching?

These questions will guide the exploration of the experiences of the young women who were my mentees and influenced the implementation of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

A common mistake made during discussions of diversity is to imply that CRP is solely centered upon instructional practices (L. Matthews, personal communication, January 2007). To the contrary, CRP encompasses beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, and strategies utilized by educators who have seen effective results through their classroom practices and thereby do not minimize these attributes into mere methods of delivering content curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1994) explained that teachers who demonstrate culturally relevant approaches to education embody three key conditions: an adamant belief in the academic success of all students, acknowledgement of students' culture as central to the curriculum, and a view of teaching as a means through which educators can bring about social justice. Effective pedagogy, therefore, results from an investment in all facets of students' lives where their cultural capital serves as an additive to the learning process.

Culturally relevant pedagogues seek to be culturally affirming and empower their students to be successful (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This conceptualization of teaching and learning has recently become more prominent in educational circles due to the increasing number of culturally diverse students in K-12 classrooms across the county (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Teacher education programs must provide a foundation for Pre-service teachers to have a more global perspective of their role in and out of the classroom (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). These programs are responsible for unpacking the myths associated with the uneven distribution of power in society, unearned privilege, and the misconception that students of color are incompetent. A study, such as the one

implemented and described in this work, designed using CRP as a conceptual framework allows for the examination of elements vital to preparation that equips Pre-service teachers for diversity education, especially Pre-service teachers from historically marginalized groups. These include characteristics such as positive dispositions for all cultural groups, behaviors grounded in the belief that all students will be successful, and instructional strategies that celebrate student diversity.

Black Feminist Thought

Before the 1900's African American (used interchangeably with Black) women had limited opportunities in academia (Evans, 2005/2006), typically given courses less rigorous than those offered to men. Yet, despite low expectations and discouraging statements, African American women such as Anna Cooper and Mary Terrell "pushed the envelope" to pursue higher education degrees and became the first African American women to earn their Master of Arts degrees in 1888, the former later earning a doctorate of philosophy degree (p. 3). Part of a historically oppressed group, these women and others, (Zora Neal Hurston, Septima Clark, Mary Fair Burks), defied obstacles to validate their scholarly contributions and political commitments as women of color. Feminism, which would generally provide an arena for women from this era to have a voice, has often been criticized for excluding women of color (Hartsock, 1990). By adding women of color to feminist theory, Hartsock explained the necessity to account for their experiences, and how those experiences influence theories and concepts. This considered, the perspectives of African American women will differ greatly from those of White women, making African American women "outsiders-within" (Collins, 2000a, p. 11), able to witness the advantages afforded to the dominant culture, but never able to

experience these luxuries firsthand. Black feminist thought seeks to empower African American women based upon a historic system of oppression they have come to know.

Black feminist thought, as explained by Collins (2000a), is the "U.S. Black woman's critical social theory" (p. 9). Through Black feminist thought, African American women are able to realize the benefits of an epistemology committed to social justice for African American women and other marginalized groups. Six distinguishing features characterize Black feminist thought, setting it apart from its European counterpart.

1. African American women are part of an oppressed group at the intersection of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality;
2. While not all African American women respond to struggles in the same way, the common factor is the understanding that all African American women have experienced challenges;
3. African American women's experiences bear resemblances to other oppressed groups;
4. African American women make strong intellectual contributions. It is the responsibility of other African American women to a) recognize and appreciate the content and b) realize the power of these contributions to bring about change;
5. Black feminist thought and Black feminist practice must constantly change as social structures change;
6. Black feminist thought aims at collaborating with other efforts to fight for social justice. (Collins, 2000a)

These features provided a foundation for this research inquiry that sought to examine the contributions of African American women educators to academia. These features informed the research questions, the data collection, the data analysis, and provided specific factors of the theoretical framework to serve as an underlying set of guidelines during the study.

Findings from ongoing research in education continue to add to the repertoire of literature regarding minority teacher populations. Collins (2000b) argued that the

significance of African American women's experiences is that they have the potential to foster new inquiry and interpretation for the experiences of women of color in general. A core theme of Black feminist thought is for African American women to find their voice to express a "collective, self-defined…standpoint" within a hegemonic society that has traditionally silenced them (p. 99). As explained by Sealey-Ruiz (2007), African American women bring with them into academic settings prior knowledge of several personal roles: daughters, mothers, sisters, wives, and workers in a society that intersects with race, gender, and class, all factors that contribute to the quality of their learning. These roles, from a perspective of color, often influence future experiences at the university level.

African American students at predominantly White institutions often struggle with how others perceive them. This perception may lead to negative effects on their academic success (Steele, 2003, cited in Williams et al., 2005). Williams et al. (2005) explained it is through support of each other that African American women survive in mainstream academia. Studies on African American women in academia (Cozart & Price, 2005; Williams et al.; Shujaa, 1994; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007; Henry, 1996; Evans, 2005/2006) emphasize the role of African American women as germane to the learning community, especially when working with culturally diverse students. Black feminist thought provides a platform upon which African American women can speak with authority on what they have come to know.

Significance of the Study

A study of this nature that examines cultural relevance through the pedagogical journey of five African American women educators has the potential to impact the field

of education in several different ways. First, by specifically focusing on the experiences African American women had in their TEP and then during their first year as educators, this study will provide insight on how African American educators are formally prepared for diverse pedagogy and then how they demonstrate this knowledge in their classrooms. Second, it serves as a resource for young educators who previously may not have been afforded the opportunity to reveal their struggles as minorities in a TEP. Young African American women attempting to mature into educators who celebrate their students using culturally relevant approaches to learning will be informed by the experiences of others who have begun to grow in their profession. Lastly, this study may encourage teacher educators to review the current organization of TEPs to consider how they may begin the process of adjusting the curriculum to be more inclusive of diversity education and consider the needs of their minority Pre-service teachers.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the issues related to teacher education, particularly with respect to African American women seeking to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. It mentioned their apprehensions to enter their own classrooms for the first time knowing that although certified, the believed they were unprepared for the classroom. Also discussed were the theoretical frameworks that shape this study: culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000a). A third component, womanism, will be discussed in the chapter that follows. Additionally, the research questions and significance of the study were included.

Chapter 2 reviews literature focused on cultural approaches to teaching with a discussion of the lexicon of terms used most commonly in education. Next, there is a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that provide the lens through this study is viewed. Literature is then presented on the experiences of African American women in education, which is followed by a discussion of characteristics of exemplary teachers who teach children of color and how after school programs play a role in the education process. This chapter concludes with a discussion of rejecting a deficit view associated with culture, poverty, and education. Chapter 3 gives a detailed outline of the design for the research study including the role of the researcher, the process of data collection, and plans for data analysis. The limitations of the study are also discussed. In Chapter 4, there is a detailed discussion of the journey the participants partook as they attempted to develop into culturally relevant pedagogues. Lastly, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and offers recommendations for future research for teacher education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter investigates the literature relative to preparation in diversity pedagogy for Pre-service teachers. To begin the discussion, this chapter briefly points to the powerful a role culture plays in the process of learning as described by Delpit (1995) and goes on to describe a number of approaches to learning categorized as cultural in nature. The sections that follow explain culturally relevant pedagogy, Black feminist thought, and womanism as springboards for conceptualizing the significance of African American women in the field of education, later giving particular attention to their challenges in teacher preparation.

The Power of Culture in Learning

In a review of studies on the basic structure of TEPs, Cochran-Smith (2005) reported that a number of programs have been scrutinized for their ability to prepare teachers in developing dispositions and strategies that align with the needs of diverse learners. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the changing demographics of the student population in the public school system indicates an increasing number of cultural and linguistic minorities sitting in today's classrooms (Sleeter, 2001a). It is the culture of students that lays the foundation for meaningful learning to occur. Students from culturally diverse populations whose history speaks of classroom marginalization typically find knowledge disseminated by mostly White middle class women (Sleeter, 2001b). Delpit (1995) explained that African American,

Native American, Hispanic, and Asian American students are essentially “other people’s children”, subjected to experiencing what she calls a “culture of power” (p. 24). The five premises she proposed associated with this theme directly relate to the experiences of students of color. The first premise suggested that classrooms are central locations to witness issues of power come alive via teacher/student relationships, mandated assessments, and academic versus vocational training.

Second, certain guidelines are attached to the power seen in academic and social circles, of which Delpit (1995) stated include ways of talking and dressing, as well as ways of interacting with people. Third, within the culture of power are rules that reflect those who are in power and are established to cater to their needs. Standardized tests, for example, are not designed for children from working class and poor backgrounds who have not been afforded the same opportunities for exposure as students from upper and middle class backgrounds. The assumption made by test developers is that a particular question or problem has a general and specific answer. This mistake, Hilliard (1980) warned, threatens not only students of color, but the very foundation of the testing system. He explained that America English speakers typically fair well on standardized tests due to their familiarity with the language and the experiences by which the questions are situated. Under this premise, Hilliard argued the use of standardized tests is inappropriate if they are not designed with consideration of all learners.

Another notable premise Delpit (1995) offered is that those outside of the power group who desire to attain power will find it much easier to do so if they have access to the rules that apply with explicit details. Finally, as hegemony exists in so many invisible forms, those in power often either do not realize their position or choose to ignore its

presence. At the other end of this spectrum, however, are those with the least amount of power who are most cognizant their limited access to those things they feel are necessary for their survival. Marginalized groups recognize they are subjected to discrimination; hence, culturally diverse students are aware of the lack of substance in their curriculum that celebrates their home lives. By using cultural approaches to learning, teachers can alleviate many of the problems ethnically diverse students experience in their classrooms.

Knowledge has a broad span and increases as individuals accumulate new ideas, most of which are greatly influenced by what is taught through family practices, traditions, and social interactions. Collectively, this is referred to as "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Explained by Moll et al. as essential for individuals to function, funds of knowledge developed within the home accompany students into the classroom. Lee (2005) offered that cultural funds of knowledge impact the ways in which students interpret what they see and hear outside of the home and thereby influence how they respond to particular situations. She explained that learning for all students should be contextualized in real world situations, but for ethnically and linguistically diverse students this is even more important. Consider the following mathematical scenario by Silver, Smith &, Nelson (1995):

> Yvonne is trying to decide whether she should buy a weekly bus pass. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, she rides the bus to and from work. On Tuesday and Thursday, she rides the bus to work, but gets a ride home with her friends. Should Yvonne buy a weekly bus pass? Explain your answer.
>
> Busy Bus Company Fares
>
> One-Way $1.00
>
> Weekly Pass $9.00 (p. 41)

A teacher conscious of the dynamics of teaching diverse children would quickly recognize the multiplicity of solutions in the mathematics equation and anticipate that

students from working class families would justify purchasing the monthly card as a more sound financial decision. The justification would be the opportunity to share the pass with family members. Pedagogy that is liberating and transformative (King, 2005) celebrates ethnically and linguistically diverse students' ability to make a contribution to their learning in ways that reject limitations imposed by mainstream standards. The section that follows discusses several cultural approaches to learning with an explanation of how they can empower students to achieve success.

Diversity Preparation in Teacher Education

When considering the ways in which Pre-service teachers have been prepared for diversity, there is the need to examine programs that utilize strategies designed to increase cultural awareness. According to Wiedeman (2002), TEPs must have lasting effects on teacher candidates that go beyond a temporary impact during their formal training. Teacher educators can strive to accomplish this in preparation programs by providing systematic support for teachers as "life-long learners" who form partnerships with fellow colleagues and educate for social justice by infusing diversity into the TEPs and practicum experiences (p. 207).

All teachers have the opportunity, if willing, to contribute to the movement that seeks to transform inequities prevalent in society. For this reason, Cochran-Smith (2004) offered six fundamental principles of pedagogy that are necessary for teachers who desire to teach for social justice. The first principle indicates teachers must understand that students create their own meanings of the information they receive. As logical thinkers, students have the ability to grasp complex ideas. With this in mind, teachers must create environments that foster collaborative rather than individual learning. Principle two

encourages teachers to use students' cultural knowledge as a resource in the classroom. By developing curriculum that is multicultural and inclusive, teachers give students an opportunity to make a contextual connection between what they have learned to situations in their personal lives. Under the third principle, Cochran-Smith explained that when teacher give their students life long skills, students can use their prior knowledge to build a bridge that connects to new knowledge. This closes the understanding gap and makes it possible for students to conceptualize new ideas. Under the fourth principle, teachers respect family traditions and customs and attempt to use the richness of the students' heritage as learning tools in the classroom, careful not to convey negative images of home versus school. Principle five urges teachers to use a variety of methods to assess students both formatively and cumulatively. Flexibility in assessment methods conveys the message that teachers acknowledge students' varied learning styles support advanced learning for their students without relying on standardized tests. The final principle as offered by Cochran-Smith urges teachers to be explicit about areas of the curriculum that promote inequality. Students must receive guidance in order to recognize where inequities exist both in and out of the school walls. Heightened awareness in the school context empowers students to be more cognizant of those things with which they are confronted in society.

Cochran-Smith (1995) exclaimed that there is a dangerous disconnect between what TEPs offer teacher candidates and the realties of classrooms with diverse learners. Her argument lay in the notion that teachers must have a richer knowledge base grounded in diversity and must receive proper training to incorporate diversity into their daily practices. The proposed diversity preparation for teachers must not only be

comprehensive, it must also be systematic, a sentiment declared by Ladson-Billings (2000a). She offered several strategies within TEPs to assist in this process, which included autobiographic narratives that allow teachers to discus their lives and reflect on their personal experiences. Since much of the content taught in TEPs often does not match what teachers will actually confront in urban settings, Ladson-Billings suggested that TEPs restructure their field experiences to match future confrontations. Key to these experiences is appropriate explanation and guidance from teacher educators in order to negate the possibility of reinforcing negative stereotypes on the part of Pre-service teachers. By helping Pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of social inequities and using the natural rich cultural experiences that students bring with them into the classroom, teachers move one step closer to helping their students become successful.

One example of a TEP that integrates field-based learning into the curriculum is the CULTURES program developed by Jacqueline Jordan Irvine. Using training that incorporates hands-on learning in urban schools helps to facilitate what Dr. Irvine termed "cultural synchronization," during which time students in the program are immersed in cultural settings and engaged in critical reflection (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Participation in several different activities in the CULTURES program led the participating teachers to reflect upon their own classroom practices and the appropriateness of these practices for their diverse students. They devoted careful attention to their teaching practice to determine if any aspect of the habits they used daily required a change.

Valuable to a teacher's learning experience is the implementation of cultural strategies and reflection upon them to determine their success. Moll & Arnot-Hopffer (2005) stated, "Teacher education…is a matter of developing not only technical

competence and solid knowledge of subject matter but also sociocultural competence in working with the diversity of students that characterize contemporary school" (p. 244). In a meta-analysis of multicultural research, Moll & Arnot-Hopffer provided several examples of research studies that highlight theory in practice, giving teachers the opportunity to have authentic experiences interacting with their students' culture through communication with parents, immersion in the community, and reading narratives generated from student photographs. For example, in a 4-week field experience where students took photographs and wrote memoirs to accompany them, teachers gleaned pertinent information about their students and were able to design culturally appropriate lessons according to their new funds of knowledge (Allen & Labbo, 2001 as cited in Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005). This experience helped teachers reflect on their commitment to teaching and the importance of valuing other cultures.

Once Pre-service teachers have been exposed to preparation that fosters within them an appreciation for diversity, they must then learn different strategies that can be used in the classroom with their students. These strategies are come from a variety of cultural approaches that place the students at the center of learning.

Cultural Approaches to Teaching

The need for cultural approaches to teaching comes out of the changing demographics of the diverse student population juxtaposed to the homogeneous teaching force (Milner et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Dee & Henklin, 2002). As well, it results from archaic and inappropriate practice of cultivating learning for all students using the same strategies prescribed by the dominant culture. Commonly used in educational conversations, *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995)

describes an approach to teaching where each aspect of a student's culture is celebrated and integrated into the curriculum. Students consistently see themselves positively reflected in and around the school in subjects such as mathematics (Matthews, 2003) and literacy (Xu, 2000), while learning to recognize and challenge dominant ideologies that seek to undermine the intelligence and academic excellence for students of color. Ladson-Billings (1994) insisted that three conditions are essential to the foundation of CRP: academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. All students, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status, have the potential to excel academically and as such, are entitled to knowledge that helps them acquire tools that lead them to question barriers set up for them by hegemonic practices (deMarrias & LeCompte, 1999).

Similar to the term used above, *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Phuntsog, 1998; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; Martin, 1997) embraces ethnicity, religion, class, and other features of a person in order to respond to that person's culture. In her own review of literature associated with culturally responsive teaching, Martin (1997) discovered that terminology used to create meaning for culture often had negative connotations including such references as "discrimination," "cultural bias," "stereotyping," and "melting pot." Her work reflects the theory that culturally responsive educators respond to the cultural identity of students in their classroom, by going beyond traditional, simplistic approaches to instruction by taking responsibility for the quality of education for their students. For example, mathematics can be transformed into a manageable content area through culturally responsive pedagogy by contextualizing word problems in culturally meaningful ways, where students experience minimal anxiety and feel empowered as

they gain control of numerical tasks (Leonard & Guha, 2002). Attention to culture affirms students as individuals, strengthens their identities, and affirms their cultural heritiage.

Culturally centered pedagogy (Sheets, 1995) insists that students' culture is at the center of the learning process, a pedagogical approach that acknowledges the skills and abilities students bring with them into the classroom. Sheets questioned the phenomenon of student failure one year, yet academic success the following year. In a three-year study of Spanish speaking students enrolled in her advanced Spanish class, Sheets discovered that despite America's lack of appreciation for dual language speakers, her students were able to progress to "giftedness" from remediation once they were no longer taught through traditional instructional methods. By placing their culture at the center of instruction and validating their experiences, Sheets found students experienced a healthier ethnic identity and were able to take pride in their cultural heritage.

Diversity education, much broader in scope than content standards and daily instruction, requires that groups traditionally marginalized by society should experience equality just as their non-minority counterparts. Therefore, *equity pedagogy* (Banks & Banks, 1995) helps students become critical thinkers who recognize when social class structures prevent upward mobility for ethnic minorities and thereby stagnate democracy and justice in society. Banks & Banks defined equity pedagogy as

> …teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society. (p. 152)

Banks and Banks argued for schools to alter stereotypical assumptions they hold and unravel existing structures that prevent equality in classrooms. In their efforts to explain

the dynamics of the essence of multicultural education, Banks and Banks insisted that when combined with a “transformative curricula” and self-reflective teachers, equity pedagogy produces powerful results where students are always the central focus of teaching and learning (p. 155).

Much like equity pedagogy, *politically relevant teaching* (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) emphasizes equality for marginalized groups in education, with careful attention given to the limits these groups experience in society. Key to her concept of this term was Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s insistence that embedded within culturally relevant teaching is “the political, historical, social, as well as cultural understanding that teachers bring to their profession” (p. 704-705). By studying the history of teachers and teaching practices in the segregated South, Beauboeuf-Lafontant highlighted the persistent struggle for students of color to gain ownership of their learning, constantly in a battle to demonstrate positive characteristics that challenged stereotypical negative labels given to them such as “culturally different, “disadvantaged,” or “at risk” (p. 716). Beaubouf-Lafontant’s study exemplified teachers whose personal commitment to their students was not contingent upon their cultural similarities, but rather grounded in their understanding of mainstream, dominant political dynamics and their tenacity to usurp these strongholds.

In the lexicon of terms used to describe cultural approaches to teaching, of particular interest is culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which is most appropriate for comprehensively training teacher candidates by its capacity to address both teacher beliefs for overall student success and students’ need for cultural integrity.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is often used in reference to methods that demonstrate teachers' ability to provide instruction by placing culture into the curriculum. The danger in summarizing CRP as simply "good teaching" is that it grossly undermines what educators strive for when attempting to become culturally relevant pedagogues. Ladson- Billings (1994) defined CRP as "…a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using their cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 17). Inherent in this pedagogy are the conceptions that educators must posses in order to be effective with their students. The first conception, that of self and others, asserts that culturally relevant pedagogues perceive themselves as educational professionals who give back to the community and encourage their students to do likewise. In describing the dynamics of teacher-student relationships from the vantage of oppressed groups, Freire (2002) explained education as a process of banking information into students, countering a misguided message that students objectify ignorance while teachers posses ultimate knowledge. To the contrary, Freire insisted that students are able to make worthwhile contributions to the learning process, an aspect of education that culturally relevant pedagogues understand and use advantageously.

Educating children is an art form and according to Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers who use culturally relevant practices see themselves as artists who believe all students are fully capable of academic success. Rejecting assimilationist attitudes that portray students of color using a deficit model, culturally relevant pedagogues do not

subscribe to the belief that failure is inevitable for minority students. Instead, culturally relevant pedagogues encourage students to believe in themselves and do not accept failure as a viable option for their destiny.

Conceptually, culturally relevant pedagogues have a grasp on how social relations are formed and maintained in diverse classrooms. They demonstrate a connection with all students and encourage collaboration instead of competition. In the African tradition, knowing one's self implies a healthy self awareness and personal operation through collectivity instead of individualism (Akbar, 2004). European psychology encourages competition to achieve individual success in contrast to culturally relevant pedagogy that encourages students to assume responsibility for themselves and their peers, and reject learning that takes place in isolation. As Akbar went on to explain, this extends beyond the walls of the classroom, permeating the core of social communities where teachers interact with children and their families to acknowledge all cultures and foster positive relationships with parents for stronger school/community partnerships.

A third and final conception of culturally relevant pedagogy is that of knowledge, viewed by mainstream ideologists as an area in which students accept statements and situations given to them as truth. According to Ladson-Billings (1994) knowledge as understood by culturally relevant pedagogues is seen as pliable, able to be recycled and exchanged between teachers and students for fresh perspectives. Ladson-Billings argued for a critical view of knowledge, persuading educators to question practices geared toward benefiting the dominant group that leave minority groups at the margins. Positivists claim there is an existing objective reality that should be universally accepted, while post modernists, on the other hand, argue that reality is both subjective and

personally constructed and therein formulates a body of thinking into which CRP can fall (Crotty, 1998). Culturally relevant pedagogues believe knowledge exchanged between themselves and their students holds different meanings for each person, which validates the personal meanings and empowers students to value their own ways of knowing.

Theorizing African American Women's Experience

Research specifically focused on African American women encompasses a range of topics that include an examination of their role within family structures (Zinn, 1990), their triumphs as survivors (Ryan, 2004), and their sexual identification (Stephens & Phillips, 2005). For example, Ryan, (2004) used Black feminist theory as a framework to describe the resilience of African American women breast cancer survivors who faced physical and emotional challenges. Their stories shed light the tenacity of African American women to overcome personal obstacles in addition to marginalization and discrimination. Collins's (2000a) description of Black feminist thought includes four dimensions that aid in the investigation of critical issues relative to African American women. The first, lived experiences as a criterion of meaning, explains how personal encounters are instrumental in shaping ways of knowing for cultural groups such as African American women (Williams et al., 2005). These initial encounters provide a foundation for how African American women react in situations that follow, such as those related to their encounters while in the academy. Research documents that African American women attending predominantly White institutions experience academia quite differently from their White female classmates. For example, Cozart & Price (2005) reported that African American women adopt practices to alleviate stress associated with isolation with which they are confronted and then find ways to encourage those whom

they discover have had similar experiences. The coping mechanisms that form as a result of this isolation contribute to how African American women experience schooling.

The second dimension of Black feminist thought uses dialogue to assess knowledge claims wherein marginalized groups actively contribute to conversations through honest expression (Ryan, 2004). By sharing stories and engaging in dialogue, African Americans pass down traditions and folk tales to new generations so as preserve invaluable family histories. In their exploration of the relationships of Black mothers and their sons through juxtaposing African American literature to social practice, King & Mitchell (1990) shared that maternal conversations that recall "family background, secrets, and family lore" bring about improved emotions for sons (p.49). In addition to this oral tradition, Collins (2000a) explained that in the Black church, the call and response method typically exchanged between pastors and their congregations demonstrates the connection amongst those within the same cultural group, acknowledging the wisdom of one, guidance for the other, and the verbal exchange that unites the two.

The third dimension of Black feminist thought as described by Collins (2000a) emphasized how an ethic of caring allows empathy and emotions to enter dialogues. As speakers candidly share vignettes, they reveal their capacity for personal revelation. Similarly, King & Mitchell (1990) highlighted the tenants of African American oral tradition through their use of conversations as a mode for research participants to speak and listen to common experiences. Through the listening process, those within the group find they are able to connect emotion to those who have shared their stories. The final dimension of Black feminism, the ethic of personal accountability, is a key dimension

regarding how African American women exchange ideas through their dialogues is expressing accountability for their knowledge (Collins, 2000a). When making knowledge claims, those within the group must provide substantial evidence for the validity of those statements, which has a direct connection to morals, ethics, values, and character.

Black feminist thought recognizes the varied experiences of African American women both in society and academic settings, noting the inequities that factor into these experiences to mold African American women's understandings of the world around them. Shujaa (1994) stated that "cultural orientation makes a difference in the way one critiques society," most significant when considering how cultural orientations of African American women dictate their relationships to education and understanding how school plays a role in shaping their identities (Shujaa p. 28, as cited in Cozart & Price, 2005). The often covert and subtle subjugation of African American women in academia has managed to affect African American women in the academy for many years. As asserted by Cozart & Price (2005), African American women have the potential to greatly impact the social contexts in which they exist, empowered by the foundations laid by Black feminist thought.

Characteristic of marginalized groups, African American women have experienced being silenced in a society that ignores them and a system that misuses them. Black feminist thought encourages African American women to end this silence by speaking in political, social, and personal realms. Collins (1998) explained there exists two types of knowledge that give significance to the act of breaking this silence. The first is the idea that "legitimate" knowledge is typically controlled by elite groups, silencing African American women to the extent of being "mammies" or feeling subservient (p.

49). The second type of knowledge is that which is shared privately by groups on the other side of the dominant culture, free to discuss in their private spaces what they would not mention in public. Here, African American women who were once considered passive, become bold, expressive, and vocal in their opinions of injustices.

From a global perspective, Black feminist thought encompasses several areas of importance, the first being the economic status of women and issues associated with poverty (Collins, 1998) where particular concern is geared toward employment and educational opportunities for women. A second area involves women's political and basic human rights wherein women in general have historically been denied the right to vote or hold office. Third, Black feminist thought draws attention to family issues such as domestic labor, divorce laws, and policies related to child custody. Collins further raised concern of health and sexuality issues for women not only domestically, but globally as well. The goal of Black feminist thought is not to subjugate other groups by a sole focus on African American women, but rather to empower both men and women to strive for a humanist vision of community and aim for social justice (Collins, 2000a).

Women of Color at the Margins

Hegemonic practices that permeate social interactions, professional opportunities, and academic engagement often go unnoticed by those who neglect to pay careful attention to inequities. However, minorities posses what is considered a "constructed otherness" (Wynter, 1992 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2000b, p. 262) that allows them to observe the world from a broader perspective using wide-angle vision, seeing things that may go unnoticed to others. Those who witness hegemony most clearly are groups of color living their lives in the margins. King (1995, in Ladson-Billings, 2000b) explained

that those who occupy the margins in society do not intend to ease into the mainstream, aware of the debauched agency that accompanies that position. Rather they seek ways to minimize the negative effects of hegemony through heightening others' awareness. As double minorities African American women are familiar with this role, invariably confronted with being pushed to the margins in their places of employment, their associations with others, and particularly in education.

King (1995) went on to describe how the view from the edge that provides evidence of how marginalized groups are treated by society serves as a driving force for African American women in education to devote their attention to providing assistance to students of color in school. It brings about "othermothering" (Case, 1997); the maternal instinct African American women posses from a long tradition of caring for family as taught by mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and extended family members. Employing a qualitative perspective, Case examined the perceptions of two African American women working in urban elementary schools with culturally diverse students. These women displayed a clear attachment to their students, through attentive, loving dispositions and expressed sense of responsibility to meet their students' psycho-emotional and intellectual needs. Their desire to nurture and care for children who were not their own as they used a marginal perspective on society's inequities, demonstrated a womanist sense of caring that African American women cannot easily avoid.

Womanism & African American Women's Experience

Historically, feminism has not included the African American woman's experience. Sojourner Truth, arguably considered the first Black feminist, was not welcomed by other feminists into this community of activists because of her

straightforward and radical views (T. Russell, personal communication, August, 19, 2008). She was, thereafter, labeled as what was to be termed womanist. Most noticeably introduced in educational discussions by Walker (1983), womanism was derived from the notion that African American women have experienced a multitude of "-isms" in history (classism, racism, sexism) and thereby have acquired a special positionality in regards to culture and politics. Womanism as discussed by Collins (2006) is based primarily on the somewhat contradictory definitions as given by Alice Walker in In Search of Our Mothers Gardens, explaining that the term refers to behavior demonstrated by young ladies acting "womanish". These ladies were bold and expressive with an air of courage and confidence, characteristics that were the opposite of girlish, unserious, and irresponsible mannerisms. Walker (1983) often contrasted the experiences of Black women to those of White women and implied Black women were womanist while White women were simply feminist.

Although used in conjunction with Black feminist thought (Collins, 1998), womanism is a perspective rather than a theoretic framework, which often makes it difficult to articulate (Russell, 2008). As the caveats of both Black feminist thought and womanism create an important relationship, the two terms should not be used interchangeably. Whereas feminism focuses on equality for women and Black feminism specifically argues for women of color to have the same access as men, womanism focuses on all levels of oppression, inclusive of class and race (Phillips, 2006). According to Phillips, womanism places emphasis on the everyday experiences of women of color, attempting to restore balance to the interactions with humans and nature and insists that liberation will only be possible when all persons are free.

Despite the tendency to combine Black feminist thought and womanism, Phillips (2006) argued the latter has not been presented with exhaustive detail and offered five distinct characteristics that should accompany it. First, womanism is *antioppressionist*, forming the umbrella under which all other forms of oppressive labels fall such as antisexist, antihomophobic, and antiracist. The life of a womanist is lived in a manner that fights to disassemble oppression and liberate society from all manifestations of oppression. Womanists are motivated to help individuals move beyond domination in all forms.

A second characteristic, *vernacular*, indicates that womanism is part of the everyday, common woman or man. Instead of adopting an elitist attitude, womanists embrace the reality that there are common elements to connect all humanity: shelter, food, love, communication, and other elements in society. The everyday lives of people are what make them both similar and uniquely different. However, womanists embrace differences and welcome diversity with the insistence that perfection is not necessary.

There is no rigidity in womanism and subsequently, *nonideological* refers to the flexibility within this perspective. Whereas strict ideologies impose lines over which some conversationalists are not allowed to cross, womanism welcomes dialogue to promote inclusion. Key to this particular characteristic is dialogue amongst all involved where positive relationships are fostered and those who still have a need to determine their own distinctive perspectives are still encouraged to participate. Bearing in mind that everyone must be afforded an opportunity to express themselves, womanists insist that no one be excluded from conversations.

When describing the fourth characteristic of womanism, *communitarian*, the term "commonweal" is used to explain the goal of social change. Defined as "the state of collective well-being", commonweal represents the optimal state of well-being for all those in a community (Phillips, 2006). Community is viewed as a series of tiers in womanism, where women of color comprise the first level (self). This is followed by the community (kin), followed by all those who are or have been oppressed (similarity), and finally followed by all humanity (universal). These tiers demonstrate that Black women are visionaries who conceive the community as integral to collectivity and facilitating social change.

Finally, *spiritualized* makes reference to the acknowledgement that there is interconnectedness amongst human life, living kind, and the material world. Through a spiritual realm, womanists believe this realm to be real and concrete and allow the transcendent spirituality to aid in guiding their political activism. Of the five characteristics, this is often the one that brings about the most controversy because perspectives that are more theory based tend to avoid incorporating spirituality. Womanists do not shy away from this concept.

Like Black feminist thought, womanism places emphasis on dialogue and its pivotal role in the quest for human liberation (Phillips & McCaskill, 2006). This is especially critical in institutions of higher education where African Americans have been forced to find ways to exist both in and out of the academy, where their knowledge is ignored and they are marginalized. Contrary to the premise that the academy receives no benefit from the presence of African American women, the academy actually suffers from not readily soliciting input from African American women. Upon entrée into the

academy, African American women bring personal experiences shaped by their backgrounds of an oppressed group with deep African origins. These experiences create the foundation for intricate personal vignettes that "utilize dialogue and story as metaphors for knowledge construction and validation" (p. 89).

Central to womanism are three tenets: oppression gives people different degrees of privilege and consequences, the longevity of social transformation is rooted in the marriage of individual empowerment and collective action, and humanism seeks universal rather than individual liberation (Collins, 1998). Much like othermothering, exemplary African American woman educators from a womanist perspective often are let to care for their students and exhibit three specific characteristics: "the embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethnic of risk" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 72). First, African American women are guided their familiar mother-child relationships when interacting with students, purposely searching for commonalities in their experiences so as to be more empathetic and sensitive to students' needs. Rather than shunning poor children or those whose backgrounds represent a diverse culture, African American women educators who reject a deficit theory tend to embrace their students and form bonds that make the students feel loved and appreciated.

Second, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) insisted that political clarity drives the understanding African Americans have of inequities in school and society that differentiate how successes and failures will be realized for different groups of children. African American women who embrace CRP make it their responsibility to care for their students, protect them from unjust practices in society, while also helping students begin to recognize hindrances to their enhanced quality of life. A final characteristic of African

American women who seek excellence for their students of color is an ethic of risk, perseverance to work with their students, motivated by the impending outcomes of success while cognizant that serious problems exist in society that will not be easily resolved.

African American women whose goal is to educate their students both academically and socially are often driven by their connection to spiritually (Tisdell, 2002), which speaks of liberation and freedom. In a discussion of "emancipatory spirituality" Lerner (2000, as cited in Tisdell, 2002) argued for situating spirituality in a context deeper than that of religion or a reactionary spirituality (p. 128). It values pluralism and the multiplicity of spirit within different cultures and traditions where emphasis is placed on social justice. In a qualitative research study of women adult educators from multicultural backgrounds, Tisdell (2002) found that women in the study evidenced their commitment to working for social justice by focusing their class discussions on issues that would encourage equity in society. Greatly influenced by their spirituality, these women challenged power relations to dismantle unjust structures in society around race, class, and gender. Their efforts speak to the work done by African American women educators of culturally diverse students who are afforded greater opportunities to be successful because of the commitment from their educators.

Challenges for African American Pre-Service Teachers

In the early part of the 21st century nearly 500,000 full time faculties were employed in colleges and universities around the county (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Of the 35,000 in teacher education, 88% where White, 81% of whom were between the ages of 45 and 60. In stark contrast, 495,000 Pre-service teachers in colleges of education

reflected an enrollment of 86% White, 7% African American, and 3% Latino. While PST enrollment has increased in the ten years since Ladson-Billings collected data, the percentage of minority Pre-service teachers is still relatively low. As a result, African American Pre-service teachers have been forced to cope as minorities in predominantly White institutions where they must make critical decisions about their identities.

Investigating the phenomenon of "cultural denial" and "cultural limbo" among African American Pre-service teachers, Meacham (2000) discovered many teachers felt pressured during their TEPs to deny familiar connections to their cultures because the programs did not support non-standardized English (p. 571). With the prevailing assumption that the culture of minority students subtracts rather than adds to their learning, African American Pre-service teachers have been challenged to quietly affirm their personal integrity and validate their own linguistic traditions in the midst of "conforming to the norms of a profession that has been historically hostile to [their] heritage" (p. 572). In clarifying a coping mechanism used by African American Pre-service teachers, West's (1991) explanation was that of self-love, a historical behavior to which African Americans have relied upon when faced with the decision to conform to mainstream society. Survival strategies such as creating a critical space in teaching that incorporates African American cultural experiences and cultivating new values that eliminate prior assumptions help validate African American cultural perspectives and satisfy the circumstances imposed by a mainstream culture of power in teacher education (Meacham, 2000). The mere fact that African American Pre-service teachers have to "survive" in their TEP signifies a break down within the system of teacher education that

is designed to equip new teachers for their future classrooms, rather than leave them despondent and frustrated.

Once African American educators transition from pre-service to in-service positions, they will face the challenge of negotiating their identities in academic contexts primarily driven by state mandated tests, school policies, and racial biases (Agee, 2004). Through analyzing the results of a case study of a young African American English teacher for three years, Agee deducted that African Americans must float between the space that houses imagined identities as first year teachers versus identities imposed by an uncooperative school system. The teacher in this study experienced the existing gap from her TEP as a pre-service teacher and the politics that revolved around teaching in the public school system, a harsh reality that openly revealed how hegemony functions in education (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). The result often manifests itself through pressures upon African American teachers to negotiate their individuality for what is required by schools.

A welcoming environment makes it easier for Pre-service teachers to complete their program of study. However, Berry (2005) described the climate that African American college students may face when entering their TEP as “chilly”, referencing the tendency for African Americans feel invalidated for accounts of their personal experiences in teacher education (Delpit, 1995). The consequence is African American Pre-service teachers leave suspicious of the gravity of the formal curriculum as presented by their TEPs, curriculum that is often in contention with the Pre-service teachers’ ideas of school based upon personal experiences (Berry, 2005). The responsibility then becomes that of teacher educators who must discover ways to retain African American

Pre-service teachers in the teaching profession and moreover, affirm their experiences. As an African American woman and teacher educator who felt connected to her students as a minority, Berry advised that other teacher educators teach Pre-service teachers using personally engaged pedagogy, one that initiates teacher educators to be personally revealing through stories and memoirs. These candid revelations force teacher educators to become vulnerable, which eases African American Pre-service teachers' willingness to share their own stories knowing others can relate to their experiences.

The quandaries African American Pre-service teachers face in their TEPs can be resolved if only teacher educators and policy makers are more attentive to the confined spaces in which they place their future teachers. By providing opportunities for professional growth and development, and giving attention to social issues related to minority teachers in education, TEPs can better prepare teachers for diverse classroom settings.

Teaching Children of Color

Characteristics of Exemplary Teachers

Most research that addresses issues related to teacher preparation comment on changing demographics of teacher and student populations in schools around the nation. These reports often indicate that teachers are generally middle class White women while students are culturally and linguistically diverse (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This said, teacher education programs that attempt to prepare teachers for diverse classrooms must reevaluate their methods of training by carefully examining the curriculum for elements that perpetuate hegemony and deficit models of thinking so as to better equip teachers for social justice education (LaBosky, 2006; Rodgers, 2006; Applebaum, 2005). This may

require teacher candidates to talk about their lives and reflect on their personal experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000a) to uncover ways of thinking that have gone unaddressed. Irvine (1991) asserted that as long as Pre-service teachers maintain thinking that suggests a cultural history of social deprivation has led to inferior intelligence for students of color, there is no intervention or instructional method that will elevate those students academically. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers emerge from their programs prepared to teach children of color, free of biased assumptions.

Educators concerned with seeing students of color excel have continuously searched for answers to why this group of children has experienced a lack of academic success. Blame has been shifted to a number of different sources with no definite explanation for who is ultimately responsible for this trend. Goodwin & Swartz (2006) argued that the solution is not to improve current practices, but rather to adopt new ones. In response to this issue, they proposed that teaching and learning for students of color must be relevant. Thereby, cultural knowledge must inform teacher practices as should the context in which teaching and learning takes place. With this premise, Goodwin & Swartz explained that effective teachers of children of color posses seven specific constructs, used in conjunction with each other that move them to utilize a holistic approach to instruction. Construct one, *Teachers as Professionals*, indicates teachers connect their beliefs and practices, constantly seeking new knowledge that will refine their practices in order to push their students forward socially and academically.

The second construct of *Families and Communities* as recommended by Goodwin & Swartz (2006) states teachers seek out family members and those in the community to become involved in schooling. This collaborative effort enhances students'

experiences while it establishes value in connecting home lives to learning. Under the construct of *Emancipatory Pedagogy*, teachers use a variety of approaches to learning so students become the central focus bringing about a sense of affirmation for their role in the classroom. Students learn how to think critically and discover ways to prevent restrictions of race, class, and gender imposed upon them by society. The fourth construct, *Cultural Knowledge*, is the necessity to represent the knowledge and experiences of diverse groups accurately. Low representation of African American and Latino cultures disempowers these and other groups whose rich traditions can serve as resources in the classroom if regarded with appreciation. *Systemic Analysis* as a construct is a method of opening one's eyes to the hegemonic shaping of the educational system for students. Through this critical analysis is the opportunity to dissect information for evidence of racism and oppression as prevalent forces in society often hidden behind smoke clouds of rhetoric and fanciful conversations.

Students should feel safe and loved classrooms whose environments foster positive relationships and encourages student engagement in learning. Therefore, *Classroom Environment* is a sixth construct Goodwin & Swartz (2006) commented as imperative when teaching children of color. As long as teachers maintain high expectations for their students, they can expect the outcomes to mirror their optimism. Finally, *Student Experiences* refers to a construct where students interact with the school environment to form their own realities in the educational system. As students develop multiple identities in and out of school, they grapple with working through those identities in order to survive. Teachers who understand how the complexities of schooling affect students of color are able to pattern their pedagogy around a framework

that guides students through school and leads them to success. This success can be found in contexts outside of the school walls as well. One venue for facilitating student excellence is the after school program.

The After School Perspective

An educational area that deserves mention is that of after school activities where students find themselves engaged upon the completion of the academic day. The origins of after school date back to the latter portion of the 19th century when there was a decrease in the need for child labor and an increase in school attendance, fueled by mandatory education laws (Halpen, 2002). As fewer children were needed to work in factories, more of them attended school. Consequently, children remained in school longer and left school at grade eight as opposed to grade five. Typically, after school hours were occupied by boys helping with industrial work while girls helped with chores at home. Soon, tenement apartments became overcrowded in the afternoon which forced children to fill the streets as a means to find freedom from their families. Parents protested the idle nature of their children's new pastime, concerned with the rise in crime and unsafe activities that became increasingly prevalent in the metropolitan areas. There had to be a sensible way in which to fill this time.

Among the proposed ideas was to allow children to play, as it helped them make meaning of their world. This play, however, had to be structured in order to provide balance to a world that was already unstable (Kadzielski, 1977). The after school program movement was formed. Individual men and women organized the first programs in available spaces such as storefronts and churches, places where children could relax while they played board games and socialized (Halpern, 2002). It was not long before the

increased attendance of more children caused programs to expand not only their capacity, but their range of activities as well. There followed campaigns to raise funds to help supplement the cost of accommodating so many boys and girls in the afternoon. Depending on the size of the establishment, the groups of children who attended could range from 30 to 70 in number each day.

One group that was not given as much attention was African American boys and girls. Chicago was less than eager to integrate the children whom they serviced, yet New York seemed more accommodating (Haplern, 2002). According to Spear (1967), Black churches like Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago attempted to provide some services to African American children, but they were often unable to reach the poorest communities where help was most needed. It took the efforts of a handful of committed individuals to develop and maintaining programs to assist children of color.

The early models of after school programs sought to provide protection for children while giving them a space for constructive play Caretakers also attempted to teach vocational and domestic skills to boys and girls, respectively. After World War II, parents who were able to secure steady jobs found their children falling into the category of “latchkey” kids, which required after school programs to assume more responsibly for care (Halpern, 2002). Children facing post-war stress had to learn to cope psychologically and were able to participate in programs that gave them opportunities to salvage old clothing items, study airplane design, and lean first aid, all of which helped the children feel valued (Kirk, 2000). In the 1950’s there was a question of whether the after school commitment was to the neighborhood or specific populations. This was most critical for African Americans and Latinos, whose numbers were growing in cities around the nation.

It was reconciled that trust amongst communities and their members had to be established in an effort to meet the needs of children.

There was a renewed interest in after school programs in the 1970s and 1980s and by the mid-1990s there was a range of activities available for children (Halpern, 2002). For example, the Ballard Boys and Girls Club in Seattle offered classes such as clay modeling, sewing, sign language, and homework help. Posner & Vandell (1999) suggested that after school activities had the potential to help students with development of home and school competencies. In a longitudinal study of 194 African American and White students in grades 3-5, Posner & Vandell found that there were a range of activities in which children could participate, such as coached sports, inside structures, academic, and extracurricular. However, most children watched television after school. Those who participated in programs seemed to attain more structure in their lives and did not "hang out" as much as their peers who were not in after school programs.

The Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA), one of the nation's largest service organizations for youth, has a history of positive influence on children and youth. In their study of what elements contribute to positive psychological functioning for diverse youth, Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch (2001) found that club participants were able to establish strong relationship with staff member whose support helped to temper inappropriate behavior in school and at home. Youth were motivated to do well academically and those who attended the club displayed higher self esteem than those who did not attend. Overall, the youth enjoyed being in an environment where they felt safe, protected, and treated with dignity and respect.

While it may be more convenient for youth to play games or socialize with friends, Shann (2001) suggested that participating in after school programs is a more appropriate use of time. She found that middle school youth who were not affiliated with a specific program often did not use their after school time wisely and spent far less time reading than youth who attended a program immediately after school or on Saturdays. Programs such as those offered by the Manchester Youth Development Center (MYCD) served as a safe haven for children and youth to help build their self-esteem while ensuring they received academic support (Beck, 1999). After school programs that offer mentoring relationships facilitate the development of increased confidence and feelings of empowerment (Diversi & Mecham, 2005). With this mentoring, however, must come an understanding of the cultures of those whom participate. As Diversi & Mecham found in their study of Latino(a) students and their Caucasian mentors, there had to be an initial understanding of the physical closeness that was traditional in the Latino culture. Facilitators in any after school program are more likely to reach their children in positive ways if they acquire a general understanding of the cultural practices of those children who participate. In addition to increased self esteem and greater confidence, after school programs have the potential to reduce behavior problems with increased child attendance (Riggs, 2006), boost confidence (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005), and offer structure for those in whom lives it is lacking (Cosden et al., 2001). The after school arena has a critically purposeful role in the field of education.

Associating Culture and Poverty with Education

A common misconception often associated with children in urban areas who experience poverty is that they are incapable of academic excellence. Those who adopt a

mentality that attaches a deficit label to children, especially those of color, blame children's capacity to learn and achieve at the level of their non-minority counterparts on the children's culture and environmental circumstances. Moreover, there are a number of teacher who thereby adopt what Haberman (ND) referred to as the pedagogy of poverty: a way of teaching in urban classrooms. At the core of this pedagogy are practices such as disseminating information, monitoring seatwork, administering tests, punishing uncooperative behavior, and assigning homework. In isolation, these actions on the part of educators are acceptable. However, when considered for what benefits they offer students, these actions cause more harm than good. According to Haberman, students do not receive life skills or realize their ultimate levels of achievement. The ritualistic nature of this pedagogy hinders the opportunity for differentiated learning and to meet individual student needs.

In order for schools to more effectively meet student needs, Ladson-Billings (1996) argued that schools must improve students' relationships both in and out of school. Children have been forced to witness circumstances in their communities that greatly impact their lives and how they make meaning of their worlds. Factors such as crime, violence, and parents' loss of employment contribute to how students react to their in-school interactions. Additionally, once school commences, students living in urban areas often have less activities to occupy their time. Ladson-Billings offered that the greatest advantage middle and upper class children have over lower class children in the city is that the prior are overwhelmed with a plethora of activities after school that keep them occupied, which gives them consistent adult and peer interactions. The infrequency of these interactions for urban children, compounded with pre-existing circumstances,

raises concern for educators who seek to improve the lives of these students. Ladson-Billings explained that not all factors associated with urban living are negative and educators can actually use students' culture to aid in the learning process. Dancing and hip hop as forms of artistic expression are two sources by which students can craft their culture. Sports are instrumental as well in student achievement, in that they provide opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, and success. Culture and poverty are not terms that should be negatively applied to urban students. As posited by Ladson-Billings, urbanism has the potential to greatly impact students. Effective teachers who reject deficit thinking and recognize the vibrant possibilities for their students are likely to accomplish the social justice for which they strive.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on approaches to teaching that emphasized the culture of students and its critical role in education. Specific focus was devoted to CRP, which is as able to encompass the pedagogical beliefs, dispositions, and practices of teachers that place students at the center of the learning process. It described both Black feminist thought and womanism as two additional perspectives that provided the lens through which this study was conducted. Also discussed in this chapter was literature that offered the characteristics of exemplary teachers of children of color and the history of after school programs. Literature provided in this chapter highlighted the salient issues related to teacher education, especially for African American women and other minority Pre-service teachers. Scholars interested in improving the quality of preparation for Pre-service teachers must consistently engage in conversations to discover the reason for gaps in the literature regarding minorities in general. Murrell (2000) was extremely concerned

that there still lacks a strong TEP model available to prepare teachers for diverse student populations, indicating that improper training that will make Pre-service teachers' ability to educate others more difficult. Additionally, as Pre-service teachers become cognizant of the lack of quality in their TEPs, concentrated strategies should be implemented to truly mend a fallible system.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology employed for this study and introduces the study participants. There is a discussion of the methods used to analyze data and disseminate the findings.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study utilized ethnographic methodology to examine the lived academic and professional experiences of five African American women in the field of education, where each participant represented a specific case that added to the body of research collectively. To begin the chapter, critical ethnography and critical ethnographic case study are described in relation to this study. The research design employed for addressing questions is also presented within this chapter including the role of the researcher, a description of the participants chosen, the data analysis process, and the study limitations.

The guiding questions for this study were:

1. How do five African American women educators perceive their experiences of diversity preparation during their Teacher Education Program (TEP)?
2. How is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) manifested in the pedagogical perspectives and practices of five African American women educators during their 1st year of teaching?

Methodology

Critical Ethnography

Ethnography is a form of methodology where researchers take an in-depth look at a phenomenon while in the field. Practiced by early anthropologists as a form of fieldwork, ethnography stands apart from other methodologies by its emphasis on culture and the revelation of what happens in that culture. In ethnographic studies, researchers

study a cultural group or particular phenomenon in a naturalistic setting, using primarily observational data to gather information over a period of time (Madison, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999, Patillo-McCoy, 1999) and provide a more nuanced report of what is occurring. When ethnographers do not remain in the field for extended time periods, they still have the opportunity to make detailed inquiries and conduct in-depth observations for strong data collection as a consequence of choosing ethnographic methodology.

The advantage for ethnographers is that research is fairly flexible, sanctioning the lived realities of participants to evolve in their natural context (Creswell, 2003), so as to prevent contrived results. According to deMarrais & LeCompete (1999), ethnographic researchers who take a critical approach to inquiry assume that both empowered and disempowered groups of people exist simultaneously in school systems. Critical ethnographers, therefore, attempt to uncover invisible hegemonic practices that perpetuate injustices and societal inequities. According to Crotty (1998), critical inquiry goes beyond simply seeking to understand a culture; ethnography "unmasks hegemony and address[es] oppressive forces" calling for societal transformation (p. 12). Critical ethnography was chosen for this study due to the freedom it provides in the field to collect data on the participants' lived experiences. The next section explains the applicability of case study to this research.

Critical Ethnographic Case Studies

Researchers who use case study to conduct research gain valuable information on those individuals whom they have chosen to study. Case study research opens the door for researchers to examine small events in detail and then document complex characteristics that make a phenomenon unique (Yin, 2003). Considered a strategy rather

than a method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), case study helps researchers to better understand situations as they inquire what information is most useful to provide insight on who or what is being studied. Researchers focus specifically on cases in which they are interested, not the methods used (Stake, 2003). This thereby leads researchers to choose those methods that are most practical to gather pertinent details on each case. Any data that answers key questions related to the case helps to add information to previous relevant literature (Stake & Easley, 1978). The findings, however, are not readily applicable in other contexts. Case studies are difficult to generalize because each case has unique qualities that set it apart from others.

Three characteristics that define case studies are their central focus on a particular situation, a detailed description of a situation in order to facilitate new meaning, and additional understanding on the part of readers (Merriam, 2001). Unlike other formats, reports from case studies transition readers to a place where details are rich and vivid, permitting readers to feel as though they are able to experience the particular situation firsthand (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The qualitative researcher becomes known as a bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) who links data together like pieces of a puzzle until all components join to create an intricate display. Similarly, the elements of case studies join to give one clear image of the phenomena in question, providing fresh insight for readers. Specific to this study, a critical ethnographic approach was employed in order to gather detailed information of the participants using a critical lens. Critical ethnographic case study was the most appropriate methodology for this research inquiry because it offered the best means to candidly capture the personal experiences of all five participants.

Participant Selection and Setting

Participant Description

Before the study began, I obtained consent of the adult participants, clearly indicating that their participation was completely voluntary and would not affect their performance evaluations at their places of employment in any way (see Appendix A). Five consenting participants were assigned pseudonyms in the field notes, interviews, and final report. Although students were not directly involved in the study, I obtained consent from parents for their child to be present while I observed the teachers (see Appendix B). In order to guarantee that participant names remained confidential throughout the duration of the research inquiry, all identifying names of participant and locations such as schools and counties were assigned pseudonyms and were kept separate from field notes and stored in a locked file cabinet in my office. Thereby, I was the sole person with direct access to all confidential information pertaining to the participants. All work for this study was conducted with authorization of review boards from selected university and school systems.

The participants for this study were five African American women in their first full year as educators of culturally diverse elementary students (see Appendix C). Four of the young women accepted positions as elementary teachers in general education classrooms (K-5) in their hometowns. The fifth participant for this study chose not to teach in an elementary classroom and instead she accepted a position as an after school academic coordinator at a Boys and Girls Club in the area in which she lived. I invited each of the young women to participate without respect of their current occupational status, and refer to both the classrooms and Boys and Girls Club as “academic workplace

settings" in this discussion. The rationale for selecting these particular five young women stemmed from a series of conversations between me and the young women where they expressed concern with what they believed was a lack of preparation in cultural diversity while in their TEP. These five young women were the only Pre-service teachers at that time who shared their concerns. A sixth African American young woman who was originally selected for the study was unable to participate once data collection began. Two other minorities in the TEP, an African American male and a Latina female, did not express to me that they were disgruntled with the program. The ages for the selected participants ranged from 22-30 years.

Setting Description

This research inquiry took place in five different academic workplace settings in Allentown, a city located in the Southern United States. Identifying names of these specific settings were assigned pseudonyms in this study. Four of the academic settings were elementary schools and the last was a Boys and Girls Club where students completed homework assignments and engaged in extracurricular activities after school. The elementary schools in Allentown were located in Riverside and McLauren Counties (pseudonyms), the first of which was urban and the latter of which was rural. The Boys and Girls Club was located in Riverside County as well. Table 1 displays the 2007-2008 student demographics for the two school systems that were part of this study.

Table 1

Student Demographics by County

Ethnicity	Percentage of Students by County	
	Riverside County	McLauren County
African American		
White	72%	49%
Hispanic	22%	47%
Asian	2%	2%
American Indian	1%	<1%
Unspecified	<1%	<1%
Qualify for Free or Reduced	2%	N/A
Lunch	70%	68%
Expenditures per Child	$8,115	$7,379

*Note: All information above was retrieved from http//www.greatschools.net.

Role of Researcher and Subjectivity

In order to capture the experiences of the young women in this study I determined it was imperative that I "come clean at the hyphen" to write with and for the people whom I studied (Fine et al., 2000, p. 123). This meant that I had to be clear about my identity as a researcher who sought to improve efforts in teacher education and as an educator who had a vested interest in the participants. Black feminist thought insists that researchers connect themselves to their study and participate in the research in order to provide an authentic representation of those whom they choose to study (Collins, 2000a). Additionally, womanism places emphasis on the interaction and collaboration between the researcher and her subjects so that an intimate and authentic picture of the study may be captured (Phillips, 2006). My role as a researcher in this study had several caveats. First, I was a participant observer (Preissle & Grant, 2004) in the classroom, documenting the behaviors of the young women as they occurred in a natural context. Next, I represented an individual with whom the participants felt comfortable to share their experiences. Finally, I served as the instrument through which the voices of these young women could be shared with others to influence diversity preparation within TEPs.

Ultimately, researchers must ask the fundamental question of the way in which they shall be toward the people they are studying to determine what behaviors to exhibit during the research inquiry (Schwandt, 2000). The solution comes from researchers employing the type of methodology that exhibits consideration for participants, exposing them to minimal discomfort and anxiety, while accomplishing the goals of the study. I was able to accomplish this by giving careful attention to how participants reacted to my inquiries. Any questions that generated nervous emotion from the young women were rephrased for clarity or passed to possibly be revisited at a later time. The subjectivity in this research was purposeful and came as a result of my personal connection to the participants. This connection evolved over the course of two years as the roles I played in their educational careers changed the more I grew to know the young women. I began as one of their instructors in the TEP at Allentown State University. I also oversaw at least three of them during their lab placements and thus filled the second role of a supervisor. It was not long before the young women gravitated to me as a source of support while they were in their TEP, as I was the only female instructor of color in the department. Their desire to converse with a faculty member regarding their personal struggles in their program eventually led the young women to adopt me as their unofficial mentor, my third role. After my departure from the university, the young women and I remained in contact and they continued to share with me their concerns in their program. The final role I played in the relationship with these young women was that of a researcher where I chose them to be the focus of this study. The development of these roles for me is what allows me to have confidence in my data. My position was critical to data collection and analysis since I was already familiar with the participants. Participant recruitment was not a

difficult task as the young women were readily available for interviews and observations. Their familiarity with me as a mentor allowed the young women to maintain a level of comfort during their conversations, which brought about extensive revelations during their discussions.

Data Sources and Method of Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

This study employed two qualitative data sources to answer the proposed guiding questions. The first was semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998), conducted during times and in places that were most convenient for the participants. Two individual interviews for four participants occurred during the Spring 2008 school semester, which was their first year of instruction. The fifth participant, who did not have a self contained classroom, did not participate in individual interviews or observations. She was part of the group interview only, which is where she provided all relative data. In order to capture the stories of the participants with precision, I used a digital recorder to record each interview and later transcribe the conversations. The interviews were designed to allow the participants to speak openly and at length on their personal experiences during their TEPs and what they were currently experiencing as educators of culturally diverse students. Using a recursive style of questioning, I began the first individual interview with a tentative set of questions and allowed the participants' responses to guide subsequent questions (see Appendix D). These questions centered on the participants' personal definitions of cultural relevance and how they envisioned its presence in the classroom. The first individual interview also dealt with the participants' experiences as African American women in their TEP in order to begin a discussion of their training.

Each individual interview consisted of the same template of initial questions, but was tailored to the specific participant based upon her responses.

Follow up questions for the second individual interviews were determined by the initial interview responses and what was seen during observations (see Appendix E). While there was also a template for this interview, the inquiry was more in-depth. By that time, I had an opportunity to observe the participants twice and thereby modified the questions according to the field notes and prior interviews. Each interview lasted 35-45 minutes when the young women were not in the presence of their students. While most of the individual interviews took place at the respective elementary schools, one interview was conducted at a local dessert establishment. This particular setting proved to be most appropriate, as the casual environment helped the participant to feel more relaxed. A second interview with a different participant took place while the students had lunch in their classroom in preparation for field day. This was a suitable situation as well in that the participant pointed out specific students to whom she referred, adding richness to her responses.

In addition to the two individual interviews for four participants, there was one group interview for all five participants (see Appendix F). This interview lasted for approximately two hours one evening during dinner in a private dining room at a well respected hotel in the city. The purpose of the group interview was to allow the participants to dialogue and share with each other their experiences from the past year. The young women also shared culturally relevant practices they found successful in their respective academic workplace settings. They were welcomed to share their stories at length, unconfined by time limits for the interview.

Observations

The second data source was observation supplemented by field notes and memos at each educator's academic workplace setting to document the activities and behaviors that took place during the day. Unsure of what behaviors would be displayed, I developed a tentative observation guide to document incidents as they occurred (see Appendix G). I looked for incidents that would provide evidence of culturally relevant practices as demonstrated by the young women such as phrases, actions, body language, dispositions, room arrangement, and text books. Later, themes and codes that emerged from the field notes were compared to interview transcriptions. Three of the participants were observed in their classrooms and around the school three times over a four week period. The schedule was arranged so that there was one observation per week for each participant with no young woman observed twice in a row (see Appendix H). Visits were alternated between morning and afternoons to allow me to see students before and after lunch as I assumed the students may behave differently after they had eaten and had recess. I also wanted to observe a different content area each visit if possible.

Observations were conducted during formal content area activities and informal activities such as recess and free time, influencing the conversations during subsequent interviews. Each observation lasted approximately three hours. The length of the observations was governed by the amount of time it took to for the teacher and students complete a particular content area. For example, morning visits usually allowed me to observe Voyager (a scripted Reading program), independent work, and lesson review. This was often followed by a Special such as Art or Music. After the students returned to the room, I continued observations. Afternoon visits commenced after lunch and lasted

until dismissal. One participant requested that she not be part of the observations, as she still viewed me as a supervisor and was uncomfortable with me watching her teach. I anticipated I would participate in special activities and classroom celebrations if they took place during my visits. Since this study was not designed to gather the evolution of the participants' practices, the time allotted to data collection was appropriate for the purpose of answering the guiding questions. The chosen data collection methods I employed helped to represent my participants as accurately as possible.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is ongoing during the research process and allows researchers to condense an exorbitant amount of information into a more user friendly format (Merriam, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Analysis involves organizing data, breaking them into more manageable parts, developing codes, and searching for possible patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My initial guiding research questions provided guidelines for data analysis.

Yin (2003) recommended two techniques when analyzing studies involving multiple cases. The first, pattern matching, involves comparing an empirical pattern with a predicted one, which will be supported by literature. If those patterns match, it helps to strengthen the internal validity of the cases. A second technique applicable to this research is cross-case synthesis where each case is treated as a separate study, yet is compared for similarities and new emerging themes. As suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2007), I looked for patterns and themes to emerge from interviews and field notes, and used words and phrases to develop coding categories (see Appendix I). Influenced by my theoretical perspectives, I sorted these themes by the settings in which the young women

experienced them and looked for subcategories where applicable. The use of multiple data sources (interviews and observations) helped ensure that the codes developed created a rich, thick description of the results (Merriam, 1998).

For this study, I employed a system of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze the data in detail. The data was broken into manageable parts and studied in detail to discover where similarities and differences manifested themselves. It was difficult to predict specific codes that would surface from my personal identity connections (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I was careful allow room for the codes from the data to emerge on their own. The step by step analysis included the following: 1) a holistic reading of the field notes and interview transcripts, 2) terms and memos written in the margins of the field notes, 3) each conversation segment from the interviews viewed individually, and 4) codes and themes developed based upon the memos. Each hard copy interview was coded by hand using abbreviations. Often, there appeared to be multiple codes within a conversation segment. This led to creating subcategories for initial categories that were too broad. After hand coding, the codes were transferred to an electronic database to file and maintain the documents. As an additional step, all conversation segments from each interview with the same themes were grouped together for quick retrieval when it was time to discuss the findings. Through this process, the voices of the participants were free to emerge and speak to the guiding research questions rather than be influenced by an established set of codes.

Interpreting Findings and Dissemination of Results

To interpret the data, I utilized several strategies as suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2007). First, I looked at published studies for their relevance to my research and

then attempted to be evaluative of my subjects by asking, “Is what I am seeing good or bad” and how can this be beneficial to others (p. 197). I also tried to anticipate the assumptions or questions my audience of teacher educators may have and attempted to interpret for them what I came to understand during my research. Finally, I carefully considered the implications my findings may have on future practice. A clear focus for conducting interviews, data analysis, and data interpretation was achieved by creating and following a table outlining specific aspects of CRP and other approaches that apply culture in teaching and learning (see Appendix J). Careful interpretation of my data was imperative so that the discussion of findings would provide a more accurate picture of what I collected.

Based upon careful analysis of the data and critical interpretation of the results, I drew several conclusions that appeared to represent what the participants shared during interviews and from field notes taken during observations. Given my closeness to the participants, I initially struggled with how to critically interpret the results. However, I discovered that by first analyzing the data strictly as a researcher and then conducting a second analysis as an African American woman educator, I achieved less bias in the final report. First, I had to step away from the data that was before me. Since I was closely connected to the study from the onset, I was careful to examine the data objectively by behaving as though I was an outsider. This allowed me to interpret the findings as raw data, the way a non-biased observer may do. Secondly, I returned to the data and looked at them more critically, this time using the lens of someone who was similar to the participants in ethnicity and gender. This second analysis allowed me to use my identity

as an African American woman educator to attempt to empathize with the participants in order to apply a deeper meaning to the experiences they shared.

Unlike quantitative analysis that calls for results to be disseminated in a specific format, this qualitative study is presented in a narrative format in order to provide a thorough and detailed description of the findings. My investigation of the ways in which five African American women took a journey from Pre-service teachers to their first year as educators to become culturally relevant pedagogues is presented so readers find themselves closely connected to the participants. Using Black feminism as well as a womanism as part of my theoretical stance, I believed it was important to illuminate the stories of these young women. While my interpretations of their shared experiences were significant to make meaning of what I saw and heard, I felt it was essential to place the voices of the young women in the forefront. My goal was to make certain the participants' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are clearly evident in the writing, leaving little room for readers to question what the participants meant to say.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In qualitative research the report of a case is considered trustworthy when the findings are a close reflection of what the participants have described to the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When researcher and participant biases are not monitored appropriately, they can cause a threat to trustworthiness. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested five strategies to manage these threats: connect the study to the theoretical framework (credibility); transfer results to other contexts without generalizing (transferability); make sure the data and the findings are consistent (dependability); attempt to have as little bias as possible (confirmability); and have the researcher

acknowledge his/her active participation in the study (reflexitivity). My strategy to guarantee the trustworthiness of this study took place in three ways. First, I triangulated the data by interviewing participants, conducting observations while taking detailed field notes, and engaging in constant comparison of the information to be certain that it was parallel. Secondly, I employed member checking (Yin, 2003) to confirm the accuracy of the codes I developed for the themes that emerged during data collection. Lastly, I conferred with the participants for reassurance that I portrayed them factually, careful not to let my personal biases influence the data incorrectly. In order to ensure that I documented their statements accurately, I returned to my participants after the individual interviews to confer with them. I reiterated questions from the individual interviews and reminded them of the responses they shared. I then inquired if I had interpreted their statements correctly and then asked if they wanted to share anything additional. This allowed an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their prior statements and make provide clarity for me if they believed they were not accurately presented.

Validity of the Findings

This study is valid in that it measured what it was meant to measure: the lived experiences of the participants. While the data did not specifically indicate that the young women were culturally relevant pedagogues, it did reveal they were developing characteristics of the like. As a critical ethnographer, I must "live inside the cultural and discursive positionalities" that inform the claims made by my participants (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 299). Essentially, I validate their ways of knowing by availing myself to be part of their culture. Therefore, in order to guarantee the validity of this research, I was guided by three conditions outlined by Carspeken (1996) when addressing issues

within critical ethnography: I analyzed my data holistically, examined researcher bias I brought into the study, and carefully noted body language as displayed by the participants to link the meaning of the data to the validity of the findings.

Body language was a critical component of this research because the young women often used hand gestured or displayed facial expressions when answering questions. The interviews were not video recorded so I had to make memos in my notes to indicate when body language accompanied a response. When uncertain about the meaning behind a particular facial expression, I conferred with the respective young woman to clarify the implied meaning behind it. The group interview facilitated face validity for this study (King and Mitchell, 1990). Through sharing stories, each young woman could easily connect their experiences to those shared by another young woman who participated. I did not attempt to validate the effectiveness of the young women's practices by devoting time with them to look at specific student work samples. However, I was able to observe the display of artifacts around the room and the young women verbally shared how their students displayed improvements both academically and socially.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research studies are designed to provide a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon, making the results difficult to generalize (Yin, 2003), but all studies have their limits. The first limitation of this study originated from the novelty of looking at five specific cases of African American women who chose to enter the teaching profession to become educators despite the challenges they faced while in their TEP. Their experiences, though informative to the field of teacher preparation, cannot be

readily applied to all situations involving African American men and women in education. Therefore, readers must keep in mind that data that resulted from this examination add to the literature on TEPs, but are limited to those participants represented in this study.

My personal biases as a researcher contributed a second limitation to this study. My personal investment in the lives of these five young women began two years before the design of this research inquiry so their stories were of particular interest to me as it related to their development as professionals. Although I willingly volunteered to reveal my perceptions at the onset of the research, my concern for the professional well being of the young women managed to manifest itself within the final report. A third limitation was the time in which the study was conducted. I collected data over the course of one semester as opposed to a full year. This prevented me from seeing change in the dispositions and strategies of the young women over an extended period of time. However, the bounded time in which I observed and interviewed them provided me with the young women's perceptions of their experiences as Pre-service teachers and a general snapshot of how they managed their classrooms in their first year as educators.

The use of the term "culture" became a fourth limitation during the course of the study. Although the participants used this term in interviews as responses to my inquiries, I discovered during data analysis that they were actually referring to their students' environments or home experiences. It was necessary to tease out this definition more during the study conclusion since my idea of culture may not have matched that of my participants.

Lastly, this study was both gender and regionally specific, which presented a fifth limitation to the study. The participants were all African American women, which caused the data to reflect the voices of women of color. Their personal experiences do not necessarily apply to African American men or to non-minority women, who may have a different perspective on the content and curriculum of their TEP. In addition to this study investigating only African American women, it was also situated in one particular Southern state. The findings provided beginning insight into how teacher educators can improve their training for African American educators in all institutional settings. These factors in mind, I implemented this study with the understanding that my findings would not be widely applicable. However, the limitations of the study will not prevent readers from asking new questions and considering ways in which they can influence their respective TEPs.

Summary

This chapter explained the research design and methodology used to engage in inquiry of the pedagogical journey of five African American women. Key concepts related to case study, critical ethnography in general, and ethnographic case study more specifically were outlined and addressed. A rationale was given for participant selection and there was a description of the settings chosen for the study. There was an explanation of the role the researcher played in this study and how the researcher's subjectivity may have influenced the interpretation of the findings. This chapter also explained the data sources and methods of collection used with the participants. Additionally, there was a description of how data were analyzed along with an explanation of how this study exhibited trustworthiness and validity. Finally, the study limitations were discussed.

The next chapter introduces the study participants and presents the findings that resulted from exploring the journey five African American women educators took to become culturally relevant pedagogues.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES AS NEW EDUCATORS

The research questions for this inquiry sought to address the nature of the preparation for African American educators during their Teacher Education Program (TEP) that equips them to use culturally relevant approaches to learning. It also sought to address how Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is manifested in the classroom through the social interactions and instructional practices of five African American women during their first year as educators with respect to the absence of diversity preparation within their TEP. By addressing these questions, this work will inform in the ways in which TEPs are structured to develop culturally relevant pedagogues.

This chapter is divided into four sections that explore the journey of five young women who sought to become educators of culturally diverse children. The first section provides an introduction into the background of the participants through incorporating the author's prior knowledge of them along with what was learned during data collection. Section Two explores the nature of the young women's teacher preparation experience for diversity education at Allentown State University where they were enrolled in an Early Childhood Education TEP. Section Three discusses the nature of the young women's perspectives of culturally relevant teaching and how they incorporated these perspectives into their classroom practices amidst the perceived absence of diversity training in their TEP. Finally, Section Four summarizes the findings of the journey the young women took in this study.

Participant Introductions

The five young African American women who took part in this study were enrolled in a TEP at Allentown State University during their junior and senior year of college. Here, they obtained their certification in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and continued on to become elementary educators. Each in their early to late 20's, these young women took various routes to arrive in the program and had different individual experiences during their preparation. However, they all eventually came together as comrades, connected by similarities they did not know existed, but welcomed as they grew as Pre-service teachers and later as educators.

Lisette and Her Story

Lisette expressed her surprise that as a first year teacher, she was more connected to her students than she anticipated and described them as her "babies".

> I guess I talk to them more than I thought I would talk to my class about things like my dad becoming a preacher and me and my husband going on vacation and you know, things like that. I thought I never would share that with my class, but it just ended up that way. I feel really close to them. I don't know if it's because they're my first class or I don't know, I just bonded with them.

As a wife and mother of two, Lisette felt the role of caring came naturally for her. She tried to evenly distribute that care amongst all of her students as evidenced in her interactions with them. During my first observation at Greystone Elementary, I noticed that Lisette spoke to each child with a pleasant disposition while maintaining an authoritative tone, and managed to give each student a bit of her attention. She did this calmly, as though she was confident of her abilities as a first year teacher as she walked around her classroom to call out words for a Spelling test or to monitor each child during individual assignments.

Greystone Elementary, located in McLauren County, was situated in a rural area. The school system serviced approximately 4,300 students in PreK-12th grade, with Greystone as one of the primary schools that housed students through grade three. Their website listed the many achievements the school had earned as an indication of the pride possessed by the school community. Out of a staff of 101, there were only 4 African American teachers and 5 African American paraprofessionals. I asked Lisette if it bothered her to be a "minority" all over again. She laughed and stated that until she went to an all Black school she would just have to accept that fact. She added, "[J]ust knowing that I have one other person [here] that looks like me does make me feel better."

In her first year as a teacher, Lisette juggled the responsibilities of both home life and a full time job, where 21 1st graders all vied for attention. In addition to these two responsibilities, she also managed to take evening classes to pursue her Masters degree in Education. She candidly spoke to her students about the work involved in multi-tasking in this way.

> I tell them I'm in college and I'm going to get my Masters and they think you're my teacher (laughs). And I told them, I'm going to keep going to school and they're like, "You're not tired?" And I told them I'm kinda tired but I have children and you have to take care of your children. I said, when you ask your mom or dad for something and they say, "No," you know how you feel and I don't want my children to feel that way. That's how we talk about it.

These conversations between Lisette and her students allowed them to be part of her life, something she did not expect, but welcomed in her classroom. Discussing higher education with her students in addition to aspects of her personal life surprised Lisette as well, especially since she did not originally plan to attend college. She shared that it simply was not part of her plan after high school since she did not have the necessary funds. Lisette explained that she "just landed in college," blessed to receive a scholarship

because of her athletic abilities in basketball. With a smile she added, “It’s taught me a lot, so I think education is very important.” Hence, this influenced her decision to become an elementary educator.

Naomi and Her Story

Of the five young women I chose for this study, Naomi displayed the most visible level of excitement. She called me shortly after my initial request for the project to inform me that she had shared the news with her mother and sister, both of whom were elated. The knowledge that her experiences would be the central focus of a study was both exciting and emotional for Naomi, one of four siblings who completed college, but not without her own roadblocks that caused her to eventually feel bitter towards her TEP. During our first interview Naomi spoke at length about various situations she experienced in her TEP and was relieved when she and the other African American women were placed in the same cohort during their last semester. She stated, “At that point I was just ready to be finished with it.” I probed her to explain this statement further to provide clarity on why she felt this way about her program of study.

> (Sighs) Because I just saw, I just saw unfairness even with getting into the program. You know you fill out your application to get into the teacher program? And I had to apply like twice because um, the first time they said my GPA wasn’t high enough, and but [then] it *was* high enough. And the next time they denied me. That’s two times! So I could’ve been done a year ago. And the next time they denied me they said I hadn’t finished all those, not the core, but those uh…, like, education classes when you get in there, like 2100 with Dr. Quinn. [T]hey denied me. And when I got into the program it was a lot of White people in my class that [were] still taking Wellness classes, like Biology, like things I had taken. So I said, “How did you get in the program?” And they said, “You just had to write a letter at the same time and they let you in.” They didn’t even make that known to me that was an option.

This initial situation set the precedence for Naomi’s disposition during her teacher preparation. While she desired to become a teacher, the resistance she encountered while

she attempted to enter the program made it difficult for her to maintain the excitement she originally had. Fortunately, Naomi did not allow this to impact the rigor with which she approached her assignments. She explained that she gave her best in her course work during the TEP and transferred that same commitment to the classroom when working with her students.

In spite of setbacks, Naomi persevered and knew that she wanted to teach students at Grand Canyon Elementary, an urban Title I school with a predominantly African American student population. Naomi likened her workplace to having school at her house, stressing that there was a very "laid back" and casual atmosphere. It allowed her to feel more at ease in her classroom without constant scrutiny from her principal. However, Naomi admitted this atmosphere also led students to believe it was acceptable for them to misbehave, and there were often behavior issues in various classrooms. Built to replace an existing building, Grand Canyon's new colorful and well-lit structure housed 488 students in grades PreK-5. Although she had offers from several other schools, Naomi was adamant about choosing to work at Grand Canyon and explained, "Well, I thought, um being new in my field, I could benefit these students more and they needed my expertise more." Naomi knew that her presence would impact the lives of those whom she would teach that year in Kindergarten, so she believed her decision to teach at Grand Canyon was the right one compared to the two other schools she described as suburban with a predominantly Caucasian student population. Her statements about her school were more for commentary than complaint, as Naomi admitted she loved both her principal and her students.

Justine and Her Story

A third grade teacher at Tappen Elementary, Justine had the oldest set of students that I was able to observe. Her classroom looked quite different from that of Lisette and Naomi, whose walls were covered with colorful art and visual aids that introduced initial sounds of the alphabet. Justine's moderate décor did not, however, speak towards her often lighthearted teaching style that was complimented by her corresponding seriousness as a teacher. Both, as Justine explained, balanced well with each other and were not lost on the part of her students.

> I mean, they know when I'm serious with them and they know what I expect from them. Just like James, he knows I play around with him and call him "Done Done" when he has not done his work, so I mean stuff like that. They laugh at it, but they know I'm serious about it.

Justine's class environment was very interesting to observe. My first visit was met by what could be viewed as disorganization. Very few students were in the room at the time and those who were present sat in various positions at their desks with papers scattered about them. Justine sat on a table near the dry erase board in the front of the room with a copy of The Magic School Bus opened to Chapter One. In the midst of her reading out loud to those at their desks, students entered and left the room due to what Justine later explained to me was a DIBELS Reading assessment.

I watched in amusement as Justine read to her students, monitored the traffic in and out of the door, and managed to correct students for inappropriate behavior at the same time. To a little boy who was off track, Justine directed, "Please don't be rude. You just got back to the room. [If you can't behave], I'll just wait until next week to write you up and have you sent out of the room for a week." Her firm, yet loving approach to working with her students was something Justine felt was necessary at this Title I school;

she knew her students were confronted with many personal challenges. These challenges did not prevent her from insisting that they learn accountability in their lives.

> [A] lot of them, some of these kids think that everybody's out to get them. I don't want them to think that I'm that person. Like, even Denise, the one with the little short skirt on, she told me one day, "[U]m, a lot of teachers just wanna be teachers so they can yell at people." I said, "Do you feel that way about me? Do you feel I teach because I just wanna yell? You don't think I do it because I love my job and I love y'all?" She said, "No I don't think you do it just because you wanna yell." But whenever, whenever I discipline them or whenever I take something away from them, I try to make sure…, even though they say yes I want them to know it is not because of me. It is because of your actions that this has happened so, I'm not making a choice for you; you're making it yourself. So if you wanna fix it, your behavior should reflect you wanna fix it.

Justine's determination to make her students recognize their potential as well as her genuine love for them, demonstrated her own elements of culturally relevant practices. She still, however, needed to further develop her understanding of the meaning of CRP while at her school.

One of three schools in Riverside County included in this study, Tappen Elementary was located down the street from a major highway, which made it easily accessible. Although it was considered a Title I school in an urban area, the old building received a facelift several years ago when a new wing was added. Justine was fortunate enough to be placed in the new wing. Out of 475 students, 19 were in Justine's room, eager to provide her with a daily dose of the unexpected. The teachers who worked at this school were, according to Justine, there simply because they loved teaching and working with children. Justine felt as though she was "at home" in this environment where the mission of the school was to create life-long learners.

Nadia and Her Story

Although eager to participate in the study as an interviewee, Nadia respectfully requested that I not observe her while in her classroom at Franklin Elementary. She explained that she was at ease teaching, but still saw me in a supervisory role and admitted that my presence would make her slightly uncomfortable. We agreed upon conducting only the interviews with the intent that our discussions would be as in-depth as possible. Franklin Elementary was considered as rural as Lisette's school, although it was located in Riverside County. There were many positive characteristics of the school that drew Nadia to it, but she admitted she decided to teach there ultimately because it was closer to her house and as a new driver she was concerned about her safety. Nadia shared that the principal's motto of "*If you expect the best in a child, the child will give you his/her best"* was infused throughout the building and in the daily practices of a student population of 478 and a teaching staff of over 30. Nadia informed me that both groups were predominantly Caucasian. Overall, Nadia felt comfortable in her school, but would like to have seen more diversity in the faculty and student demographics.

Seventeen students were part of the gifted program at Franklin Elementary in 2007 with numbers expected to increase during the 2008-2009 school year. Franklin was showered with an abundance of parental involvement, which at times proved to be overwhelming for Nadia who had one parent who constantly complained about her as an educator. When asked to talk about one thing in her first grade classroom that made her most proud, Nadia replied with a smile:

> Hmmm, that would probably be our morning carpet time just because it gives them, it opens their mind and gets them prepared for whatever we're going to learn. And for a lot of them, they don't realize what we're doing is based on education, just [be]cause it's like, we do our calendar. And since the first day of

> school we've been counting the days of the, each day of school with money. We started with one penny and we've gone on and when we got to five pennies the students told me. I didn't have to say anything! "*Ms. Dawson, that's five pennies. That's a nickel. We can make a trade!*" And so things like that [where] they don't realize they're doing every day, those are skills they get every single day, talking about the months of the year, the days of the week, the little songs that we sing. That's my favorite time of the day.

Nadia explained that her aunt, a third grade teacher at Pendleton Elementary, was highly influential in her decision to become an educator. "[S]he's been teaching for 11 years now. She loves [it] even more now than the first day she came in and that motivated me." After her first year of teaching. Nadia also attributed her motivation to remain in education to children and parents.

> [W]hen you have kids who come up to you and they are really in love with you, not like I wanna marry you, but love you with all their hearts, and they truly mean it when they say it to you. It's not just something they heard another kids say. You mean something to them, you, you might be their only stability in life. *That* motivates me and parents that really care. Parents that put forth their effort and their time and appreciate that you put forth your effort and your time. Those are some of my motivations.

I could hear a great deal of pride in Nadia's voice for her classroom as we conversed during both interviews. She eagerly shared that while at Franklin Elementary, a rural school in a small, close-knit community, she and her class won the door decorating contest for Black History Month. Her door title, which celebrated the legacy of Langston Hughes, read "I will not take threat as an answer" to which she added "because we are rising stars." This resonated throughout her classroom in her lessons and through her expectations.

> [A]t the beginning of the year I tried to make it very, it was important that my kids knew that they could do whatever they wanted to do. And so a lot of my stuff talks about what I want to do in the future because you can do anything. We don't say "can't" in my classroom. We spoke those words in our hands and we threw them away. We don't say "I don't know how" because you know how if you try.

> That's the only thing I ask you is to try. You might not get it right; you might not get it perfect.

Nadia emphasized during our interviews that she maintained high expectations and insisted that her students *try* their best in order to *achieve* their best.

Alexandra and Her Story

Alexandra was a special case in this study in that she was not employed as a full time elementary teacher like the other young women. While she did complete the TEP along with her peers, she chose not to immediately enter a classroom setting and began working at the Allentown Community Center as an after school counselor. Her advice to upcoming educators was simple and direct: begin to teach when you are ready.

> If you don't feel that you're ready to go in the classroom, you shouldn't go. I mean, [be]cause it's not gonna help you, it's not gonna help the kids, and that's basically how I felt. So that's why I didn't this year, but I have continued to work with kids and it's been an eye opener. It's been fun and a lot of work at the same time, but I feel, for me I feel I'm gonna go in prepared.

Conversing with Alexandra was interesting because while she had a great deal of information to share, she appeared reluctant to do so. Her demeanor during the group interview was reserved and somewhat distant, behavior I attributed to the fact that she came to the interview directly from work and was more than likely tired. Even in her chosen passivity, Alexandra provided insight into what it was like to be an African American woman educator and the trials that accompanied that role.

The motto for the Allentown Community Center, "*A Positive Place for Kids*" was meant to inspire and encourage students from primary to high school to be their best. As a non-profit organization serving children and youth from all walks of life regardless of their personal backgrounds, the Allentown Community Center made it a point to grow and change along with its young members in order to meet their needs. The center offered

a number of resources for children and youth which included tutoring, physical education activities, technology training, mentoring, and homework help, the latter with which Alexandra assisted. For Alexandra, choosing to work here instead of accepting a position for a self-contained classroom was advantageous in that she was still able to interact with children while she took time to decide what path she truly wanted to take with her career.

The next section examines the nature of the preparation the young women received in a formal setting as they began to develop initial understandings of diversity. This section take as close look at how these understandings evolved through a variety of personal experiences.

Nature of Women's Teacher Preparation Experiences for Diversity

According to the Allentown State University Handbook, the mission of the TEP in the in College of Education was to prepare future educators with the skills and knowledge they would need to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds would attain high levels of academic achievement. The program consisted of content related course work supplemented by hands-on field experiences in classrooms around the county (lab placements). The nature of their particular program was standard for a TEP, according to the young women. They were taught how to write lesson plans, use technology for assignments, and handle discipline related issues. Additionally, they learned how to conduct formal and informal assessments as well as integrate literature into all subject areas. These were aspects of the formal training that the young women anticipated they would obtain.

Part of the appeal of this program model for the young women was that they would be exposed to a variety of classrooms in rural, urban, and suburban settings, which

is one reason they chose Allentown State University over several other colleges in the surrounding area. As stated in the goals and mission for the Teacher Education Department, this program ideally should have been designed to prepare the young women not only to become elementary educators, but to also work with children from various ethnic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. Although a component of the TEP required the Pre-service teachers to practice teaching in three academic settings, the general consensus from the young women was that the overall program did not prepare them or their classmates to teach in an urban environment. The young women expressed that multicultural education was not a topic covered appropriately during the program, which led them to perceive they were inadequately prepared to teach for diversity.

Initial Orientation into the Program

Based upon what was presented, Allentown State University appeared to offer a well-rounded program that would be beneficial for rising educators to enroll. The young women went into the program with high expectations and while there, found that those expectations were either filled or dispelled based upon their own individual experiences.

Several times during her individual interviews and again in the group interview, Lisette used the term "regular" to describe the type of students the Pre-service teachers were prepared to teach. She talked about the courses they were required to take in their program.

> **Lisette:** Well, …the classroom management [course] did help for some students. You know, [in college] they teach [that] you are going to have 25 regular ed students.
>
> **Interviewer:** So let's stop there. What is "regular ed"?
>
> **Lisette:** No learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, they're going to be able to keep up at your pace. They're going to come to school all the time, they're going

> to stay in their seat and they're going to listen. That's a regular classroom. But when you come into the classroom you find out very quickly that things are very different. (laughs)

Lisette's perception of what "regular" meant did not mirror what she witnessed in her own classroom where her students had cultural differences, behavioral issues, and learning needs. She expressed that she expected to possibly see something differing in her classroom based upon how she was trained in her TEP.

Naomi extensively expressed her opinion on her preparation during our first interview. I inquired if she felt her TEP at Allentown State University prepared her for diversity.

> **Naomi:** It didn't. I don't think it did. And even with the um, the management class when it was um… he would give us things like "The kids don't have to, they don't have to be *that* structured where they walk down the hall in a straight line down and you tell them to be quiet all the time." Which it shouldn't be where you can hear a pin drop in your classroom, but at the same time you need a lot of structure down here because like I said, at home it's like none. We got kids they can stay outside, 12, 1 o'clock in the morning.
>
> **Interviewer:** The kindergarteners?
>
> **Naomi:** Uh huh. I mean, *late*. And then, I mean, they'll like watch themselves, get themselves ready in the morning. It's like you need, if you *want* to work in this area you would definitely need to do a student teaching here. And um, you know, just kinda see… and with the rules that the principal has, [be]cause a lot of things they told us, it's like you can make your own decisions, but it's not like that. Like here, all our students, when you're going down the hall you walk on the red block on the right side and wherever you're going there's absolutely no talking. That's how it is. And um, and a lot of the things they told us like create your own game, do PowerPoint and stuff wasn't really realistic in this environment.

Naomi's reality as a teacher in an urban classroom differed greatly from the reality that her professors attempted to train her for during the TEP. She realized this more when she began teaching, but found herself able to adjust to not implement PowerPoint or other creative lesson ideas the way she in her lab placements.

Time and time again, the five young women stated in their own ways that neither the formal classroom instruction nor the curriculum content of their TEP focused on ways to demonstrate culturally relevant practices as educators. During the group interview the young women were in consensus that the majority of their university courses were a waste of time, typical of what many beginning teacher might comment of their TEP if they are unsatisfied with the curriculum.

> **Naomi**: You have to sit through all [of] that just to learn what we need to know. I mean y'all, think about all those papers we've written, um, we wrote, you know, in different people's classes. It wasn't necessary.
>
> **Justine**: Nope.
>
> **Naomi**: It could've been a lot of other useful things we could've been learning like…
>
> **Lisette**: Dr. Nash was the only person I think who had us doing real world stuff.
>
> **Naomi**: And then she gave us a lot of examples of things we could use in the classroom. We did lower grades now, not talking like third, fourth, or fifth, but like Kindergarten and first grade, you know. And um, yeah, that was the only person.

Despite an organized program of study in the TEP, the young women agreed that there were only two to three classes that actually gave them either real world application or taught them useful information. The other courses essentially consumed time where they missed what they believed to be valuable lessons.

Nadia's comments seemed to change between her individual interview and the group interview. While she was in agreement with the other young ladies that several classes yielded no educational value (Nadia commented that the extent of one class was to revise the syllabus during each meeting), she believed she was moderately prepared to work with her students, but not the administrators.

> I had a, I think I had a very good experience because I was placed in many different, a variety of settings, grade levels, rural areas. You know, North Allentown. I was placed all over. So I feel I was able to interact with students from all types of backgrounds and I was able to interact with teachers from all types of backgrounds. I don't feel like I got the training as far as dealing with administrators from different backgrounds. I got to work with students and teachers but you really never saw the principals until we did our apprenticeship. And that was very, that was rare because her (the principal) son was in our class so she tried not to be in there too often.

Her level of comfort with her students, Nadia shared, was in part due to the fact that the vast majority of Nadia's students were Caucasian. By being placed in mainly suburban lab settings, working with Caucasian students in a rural setting did not greatly affect her.

Naomi commented that the TEP at Allentown State did not prepare her to teach in an urban school, but ironically, she believed she could work anywhere since she was a minority. In this instance, Naomi commented that being a minority was to her advantage.

> I think that with my teacher program, I think I'm equipped to go anywhere. See, I can adapt to an inner city school like this but I can also adapt to a suburban school or even a rural area. I can adapt anywhere. I think my teacher education program prepared me for that because um, I was a minority there so I know how to be [in another setting].

Despite her ability to "adapt," Naomi admitted that she believed teaching at a school in the suburbs of Tally County would mean she would not be able to be her true self: a person who jokes and is playful. Displaying less of her true personality would have prevented Naomi from truly giving all of herself to her students as an educator. Her role as a minority, as she explained, enabled her to adapt to any environment, but it also meant she would have to pretend to be someone she was not. It was, however, what Naomi believed would be necessary for her to be employed at a different school.

Justine was the most candid of all the participants when she discussed her opinion of her formal preparation for her third grade classroom. I asked her to reflect on her TEP

and the training that may have helped her work with culturally diverse students. After a long pause she replied:

> **Justine:** None. I mean, when I think about it, some of my lab experiences, I was lucky to get a job where I had one of my lab experiences. I think if anything, being out in the field helps you get a sense of being culturally diverse, but what if you don't? What if you don't get lucky enough to get into a diverse situation and all of your lab experiences happen to be in these so called "perfect" settings? I was lucky enough to get in this lab so, I guess I would have to say my lab. As far as classroom material that helped me be culturally diverse? Nothing.
>
> **Interviewer:** What do you think you were looking for or hoped that you had learned?
>
> **Justine:** I was, you know, I was really hoping, even though, you know, in different classes at certain points in times where you would talk about different things you would hit or miss about, yeah, you'll be dealing with a variety of students. But it never was, what if you're dealing with a variety of students who were a certain race, who have all these psychological issues or have all these emotional issues? It was nothing like, nothing like…, It was just a hit or miss where people kinda shared their experiences, but it was never a formal lesson or a class.

Justine explained she could not do many of the things she leaned in her TEP due to the lack of resources at her school. She insisted that much of what she learned about being an educator could not be attributed to her TEP. It did not give her adequate preparation for the reality of what she encountered each day. Instead, Justine sharpened her skills throughout the year by actually being in her classroom where she believed she learned her best lessons as a new educator.

As the young women elaborated about the lack of preparation in culturally diverse practices, they also gave accounts of different personal experiences they encountered at the beginning of the program.

Early Confrontations and Alienation

Several times during interviews, the young women shared specific situations they encountered that they did not believe aligned with the training they anticipated from their TEP. Nadia commented on her notion of constant scrutiny while in the program.

> I felt that, I don't, I don't know what, I don't know how the others answered this question, but I felt that the six of us [were] watched very closely. And I felt that we were watched because, like my mom always told me, it's like, you always have to do better. You have to be *on top of your game*. I don't, I don't know if they were looking for reasons to pick at us, but I felt like *a lot of things* were brought to my attention that we were under a microscope.

This unspoken evaluation of the young women made Nadia uncomfortable, namely because she felt it was unjustified. Unable to provide a reason for being under "a microscope" by her peers and professors, Nadia simply added this to her list of frustrations while at the university.

Naomi's experiences, which began before she even entered the program, caused her to resent the TEP at the onset. By being refused admission twice, she was a year behind on the road to her certification. More insulting was to find out many of her classmates were admitted missing the same classes for which Naomi had to complete before she was even considered. I inquired if this situation was discouraging for her, to which she explained her choice to disregard the program out of frustration.

> One time I told my mom, "I just wanna quit." I called the University of Sagetown campus in Cayville and I got all of their information and she kinda talked me out of it. She was just like, "You came this far; just go ahead and stick it in. It's going to be a long drive [to Cayville] so you might as well just go ahead and stay there (Allentown). Your credits, they may not take [them at Cayville]." So, I just went ahead and stayed.

Reluctantly, Naomi remained in the program in order to complete her degree after receiving sound advice from her mother. She did not state if she thought it was the *best*

choice, but Naomi was at least relieved that she completed the TEP to receive her diploma.

One individual interview with Justine involved a discussion of how she felt about the way her professors showed favoritism. Most of the professors in the department were Caucasian, save me. Before I joined the faculty, there were only two gentlemen of color: one who was Guyanese and the other whom taught middle grades education and therefore did not instruct the young women during their program of study. Justine shared a personal vignette of her experience during student teaching where her lab teacher, a Caucasian woman made several racially suggestive remarks at Justine's elementary school placement.

> So I'm just doing what's naturally in me, which is to work hard. And you're looking at it as you're not here to be a slave driver? And I'm just thinking to myself I really don't deserve to be referred to as or looked upon as beneath you and that you are superior to me. And then coming from a school where you have nothing but White professors I'm like, who do I talk to about this? And if I go to them, they won't understand. They will have no clue as to why I'm offended by it and why I'm waking up physically sick every morning just because I hate this place. And then finally I talked to Dr. Quinn to get some advice from him and I finally worked up the nerve to go talk to Dr. Lassiter. And you know, it's like, at first to me I felt like she was pretending, acting as though she was very much concerned about it. And then it just kinda got brushed off. What made me even more upset about it is I'm telling you this ahead of time that I don't feel comfortable here, can I get another placement, and you just tell me to deal with it. But here I'm in the same lab school with another White female and she decides that her placement is too far from her house. "Yeah, that's too far to drive, and there's a school five minutes from my home so I'm going to get it switched and that's no problem." So, it just… I don't know…

I asked Justine if she discussed her concern with the placement coordinator on campus, to which she stated she received a "very nonchalant" response to a request that was essentially ignored. To Justine this was a blatant display of favoritism on the part of the professors, which seemed obvious to the other African American young women as well

when discussed in the group interview. The unequal treatment only served to remind the young women of their minority status in the TEP and subsequently caused them to feel marginalized.

According to Lisette she felt very alone at the beginning of her training at Allentown State University, especially since she did not become acquainted with the other African American young women until later in the school year.

> I felt like (laughs) of course I was the minority. I would have been nice to see some people, I guess, the same skin tone as I was. And I don't think the teachers knew how to relate to the Black children because we didn't grow up in that type of environment. We weren't exposed to the same things.

An explanation of the cohort arrangements may provide a clearer picture of why Lisette and the other young women felt alienated the way they did. The Early Childhood Education TEP at Allentown State University was comprised of 3 cohorts with approximately 18-20 Pre-service teachers in each class. Lisette and Tiffany (the latter of whom did not participate in this study) were the only two African American women in the first cohort; Justine, Alexandra, and Nadia were together in the second cohort; and Naomi was alone in the third cohort. This distribution not only separated the young women within the program, it caused them to feel disconnected from their peers. Naomi explained how she felt as the sole African American woman in her cohort.

> Okay, for the first, what was it? The first, the first two semesters I was the only African American *in my class* and that was like 19, 20 people. And I felt, um, alone. That's how I felt, really to tell you the truth. I felt like I couldn't talk to any of them; I couldn't relate to them. A lot of things they said I couldn't, I didn't even feel comfortable commenting on it because the majority of the people in my class wouldn't even consider working in Riverside County and that's what I wanted to do. And a lot of them would be together after class and in the same study groups. Not saying that if I would've said can I be with y'all they would've said NO! But they kinda grouped up together and made their own group. And when I did later on that third semester, which was the last one before my

> apprenticeship, I had other African Americans in the class with me I felt more comfortable. You know, I had more support and we could work together.

Naomi and Lisette were not the only two who felt alienated their first two semesters. Nadia, Alexandra, and Justine also experienced loneliness although they were together in a cohort. Outnumbered in their class, they believed they were often singled out to be the "spokespersons" for minorities during group discussions. They found it difficult to really have a legitimate voice amongst their peers and therefore typically remained silent until they had time outside of class meetings to converse with one another. It was the peer support Naomi mentioned in her discussion along with concern from loved ones that helped her and the other young women cope with their program.

Early Responses: Building Support Structures

Lisette, Justine, Alexandra, Naomi, and Nadia each persevered and remained in education despite what they perceived to be absent in the form of preparation in diversity education as well as their personal encounters with alienation in their program. The young women were able to accomplish this by building three support structures that would be instrumental as they completed their program of study: faculty mentorship, peers alliances, and external support.

Support from Faculty

During the time I was an instructor at Allentown State University I attempted to bring the five women and Tiffany together after having noticed the separation created by the cohort placements. I organized a trip to Campville, Georgia for the young women to attend the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Incorporated (S.C.A.A.S.I.) where they presented a panel on their experiences as African American women at a predominantly White institution. It was the first major conference

presentation for each of the young women and the first time they were all together at once. The ride to Campville from Allentown was a critical time for the young women to familiarize themselves with each other. As they exchanged stories of what they were confronted with in the three separate cohorts, they realized that their experiences up to that point were quite similar. While I drove, I listened to their conversations sprinkled with "Really? I didn't know that!" and "Oh my goodness. Me too!" when the young women discovered that they were not alone in their program. This weekend trip served as the catalyst to unite these young women where they could be a system of long term support for one another until graduation and beyond.

Utilization of Peer Support to Complete Classes

The third semester of their TEP found the young women in class together, as the program was condensed into two cohorts with all of the African Americans placed in one. Naomi, who spent the first two semesters alone, welcomed this change. Although she believed the new cohort arrangement was intentional (there were six African Americans and one Hispanic in one cohort; all White in the other), Naomi was indeed relieved that she was finally no longer alone in class. She, like the other young women, found they had a common bond through similar experiences as African Americans in the program.

Nadia commented on the connection she was able to make with the African American women in the TEP, reminiscent about the group's decision to attend a second conference later that year.

> [F]or the most part we all did get along well. We all, you know, we came to Adenville for the second conference, you know, we all decided to come together. It was nice to have that support because if I couldn't talk to you, I could always pick up the phone and call to Justine or Alexandra, you know? To me, they were, especially Alexandra and Justine, just because I know them and I knew them through the department first, they've become my closest friends outside out the

> education department. They are some of my closest friends. Naomi and I are still close and she invited me to her wedding which made me feel so special, you know? (giggles) But I never really got to have the relationship with Lisette and Tiffany that I have with everybody else, but I still think they're sweet girls. I'm glad I got a chance to know them…

I mentioned to Nadia the advantage of having comrades, especially for Naomi who felt isolated more than the rest of the young women. Nadia replied:

> Exactly and I did not realize that, I think, until we went to Campville and were talking about the six of us and you invited Victor but he declined to come. And I did not realize she was by herself until after that first semester because he had to repeat some classes so when that hit me I was like that's kinda unfair. I don't know how we were placed in our class. I don't even know if race was looked at, but to me it was like maybe [Naomi] didn't choose, she didn't choose, you know… But I mean, I just, it's hard, it was hard enough for the three of us, you know, let alone how she felt by herself, you know in the classroom, but…

In discussing the cohort arrangements, Nadia expressed her sympathy towards Naomi for being the sole African American in a cohort for so long. She also expressed pleasure in her peers of color being placed together.

Alexandra did not comment directly that she received support from her African American peers. However, I was able to conclude that she corresponded with them regularly based upon the statements made by the other young women of how they constantly called each other to "vent". Additionally, I was aware of the close relationship amongst Alexandra, Nadia, and Justine, evidenced by their frequent trips to my office to unpack their emotions from the day's events after they finished class or returned from a lab placement. By talking to each other between classes and making phone calls in the evening, these young women established and maintained a relationship that enabled them to endure a TEP that was many times more challenging than they wanted to bear.

Drawing from External Sources

In addition to the relationships they formed with each other, the young women stated they found support through their family members. Oft times, it was difficult for parents or siblings to directly relate to the challenges the young women faced, but they did avail themselves if needed. Lisette explained that college was not initially an option for her; she just so happened to obtain a scholarship to play basketball. Fortunately, her mother and father encouraged her throughout her college career to achieve her best. Nadia acknowledged her parents as well, but mainly attributed her motivation to succeed to her older brother who recently began medical school. When Naomi became frustrated with what she saw as double standards at Allentown State University and wanted to transfer, it was her mother who encouraged her to remain where she was currently enrolled. Alexandra wanted to quit education all together, stating that her year at Allentown Community Center had been a "headache". Yet, she talked with her mother regularly and was committed to working with the students outside of the classroom.

Of the participants, Justine exposed herself most emotionally as she shared, through tears, her motivation to remain in education despite the many setbacks she encountered.

> **Justine:** What motivated me to stay at Allentown State University, it's like, I just felt like, I had to stay, Ms. Nall. I was just *not* going to let these White people defeat me. And my momma and my daddy had to sacrifice two whole years for me to be able to finish school and I was not about to let them down because somebody else didn't believe in me. And I knew it would have pleased them for me to fail and I wasn't gonna… *I was not going to do it*! It was my family that motivated me and I was like, I'm just, it was my sisters around me. You know, I just, I wasn't going to be a failure to myself or to my family. I wasn't going to do it. Period. Point blank. And I had spent all that time working so hard to get that done and I wasn't going to let these people take this away from me because if I do, that's what they want. I'm just not gonna do it. So if it hadn't been for my family and my own motivation and just having my own goals and I just knew

> from day one, I said I don't wanna do anything else but teach. And I knew what I had to do to get there and I just turned it around into something positive and I just said, this is an experience that it'll make me stronger… and that's what I did.
>
> **Interviewer:** And do you feel like you're stronger because of it?
>
> **Justine:** I do. I feel like I'm stronger because of it and I met six incredible women that I'm still close to now, including you so I got so much more out of it than just a bad experience. Because all of that stuff, everything positive that I got out of it, it outweighs it so much.

A dialogue similar to this took place over dinner in the group interview. The young women acknowledged one another and their family members for supporting them. They revealed their appreciation for loved ones and each other for being the sources of support needed to help them complete the program and obtain their certification.

Each of these young women had to reach out to others in order to gain much needed support and encouragement while in their TEP. They found it in one another as African American women with common experiences and they found it in their family members. The young women's determination to complete their TEP and become educators enabled them to move on to the next phase of their lives: teaching. What was in store for them? What were they to expect? These young women knew they wanted to work with a diverse group of students, but how could they do so successfully if they believed their TEP did not prepare them for what was ahead? They shared that they were determined to reach the goals they set to become elementary educators.

Summary of Section Two

The observations and interviews allowed me to ascertain that the five young women in the study developed ideas and perspectives of their TEP which were triggered by a number of challenges they experienced as African American women educators in the formal setting of Allentown State University. Data revealed that resentment formed

within the young women as a result of constant scrutiny from peers, favoritism to others by faculty, racial remarks by classroom teachers, and unequal treatment in the program. The young women also experienced alienation in the program and were unable to converse with their peer about concerns related to their training. As such, it was difficult for these young women to have a voice in a setting that they originally believed to be one where openness was welcomed. The situations that occurred led the young women to question their initial orientation into the program. This was a critical aspect of the nature of the diversity preparation for these young women; the challenges interfered with their potential to experience training positively.

Due to the situations they experienced, the young women expressed it was necessary to seek support as a means to persevere and complete their certification program. They initially turned to their program, but found themselves disappointed in their preparation. Secondly, they turned to me as a female instructor of color in the department who would listen to their concerns. Next, they turned to each other as African American women in the same TEP who were faced with similar challenges. The young women then turned to their families, specifically their parents, to provide support during what proved to be two very trying years on the path to graduation. The final turn the young women made is to their classrooms. In the section that follows I explore the continued journey for these young women and their encounters in their respective academic workplace settings.

Women's Perspectives of & Incorporation of Cultural Relevance

The next phase in the journey for the young women was to begin to put into action those things they learned in their TEP. Since they stated they did not receive the

training they anticipated, the young women shared with me what *they* believed to be representative of cultural diversity.

Perspectives of Cultural Relevance

The young women shared that while they were in their TEP, they determined that they did not receive the training in diversity education they anticipated. As a result, they entered their classrooms unsure of what may be required to work with culturally diverse students. However, with respect to the absence of diversity preparation, the young women were able to develop their own perspectives of culturally relevant characteristics as exhibited by educators and continued to develop and refine those definitions as they worked with their students.

Lisette's Perspective of Cultural Relevance

According to Lisette, her classroom of 12 Black, 8 White, and 1 bi-racial student was "not as diverse as some classes," which accompanied her definition of cultural relevance. She saw it as "anything pertaining to their (the students') particular culture" and stated that if she had students who were Latino or Indian, her classroom would be more diverse. "The other culture would be able to teach me something and if I leave Georgia or leave this particular school, I'll know how to teach them. I'll know some of their background so I'll be more informed about all my students." This statement indicated Lisette's feeling of being unprepared to work with students from different cultures. Yet this statement also demonstrated her desire to exchange knowledge about cultures. I gathered that her inability to provide me with a clear definition of cultural relevance was affected by the way she viewed the diversity in her own classroom or lack thereof.

While she admitted that she would like to have diversity amongst her students, Lisette commented during our first interview that she saw "dual ethnicities" a limitation for her as a teacher. With a deep sigh, Lisette explained that she stuck to the basic curriculum as required by her school, and rarely altered it unless she saw her students experience difficulty understanding a concept. It was not her chosen method of instruction, and she wished she could expand upon lessons and review concepts more than just at the end of the week. However, due to the scripted curriculum required by her school, Lisette admitted she did not have much time to teach her students about other cultures.

Although Lisette's definition of cultural relevance was somewhat general, she was more forthcoming when describing the characteristics of an educator who demonstrates culturally relevant practices. These included the use of various texts related to students' cultures as well as celebrating holidays other than those traditionally considered to be American. Lisette smiled and shifted in her seat while she spoke with me about her excitement to discuss Cinco de Mayo with her class, but revealed during our discussion that she would have only limited information to share.

> **Interviewer:** Are you going to celebrate Cinco de Mayo or even talk about it today?
>
> **Lisette:** We'll talk about it in Social Studies this afternoon, but it's not required.
>
> **Interviewer:** How much are you going to talk about?
>
> **Lisette:** Just the basic information that Google provides. (laughs)
>
> **Interviewer:** So based upon what Google provided, what are you going to tell your students?

> **Lisette:** It's a Spanish holiday and um, it's a Spanish celebration and, and that's about the most in-depth we're gonna go. Yeah. I don't have any Spanish students in here. And when I say "Spanish" they're gonna say "Wow."

I gathered that Lisette wanted to teach her students about a new holiday that was foreign to them, but due to limited time to investigate the subject in depth, she shared only what she was able to gather from an Internet site. Lisette willingly received my suggestion to discover the students' interpretations of the holiday by having a discussion of their prior knowledge, but I am unsure if it came to fruition. More than once during my visits, Lisette mentioned that she was simply unable to utilize a variety of tactics, similar to the ones she developed during student teaching, due to time constraints. I anticipated that there would be more discussion in the future on what Lisette saw as hindrances to her creativity as a teacher. The other young women indeed discussed similar notions during the group interview.

Naomi's Perspective of Cultural Relevance

Naomi had difficulty understanding my request to define cultural relevance during the first interview. She fluctuated among discussing the school environment, her teaching style, the students' background, and her own culture before she finally settled on a description that she deemed most suitable.

> Okay, well the culture I feel the majority of my students are used to is uh, different from my culture and uh, the relevance is the way that I, uh attempt to relate to them. And you know, so that they…, I try to expose them to more because what they're used to is uh, not too diverse. And so um, I try to bring things on their level, but at the same time try to expose them to more.

Her explanation, albeit piecemeal, showed that Naomi felt it was her personal responsibility to provide those things for her students that might be lacking outside of the Grand Canyon walls. In particular, Naomi attempted to show her students aspects of

other cultures whenever time permitted. Before I departed after an observation one afternoon, Naomi showed me the many items she purchased for a luau she planned to have with her class at the end of the day. Visibly excited, Naomi explained to me that using these visual aids and having light snack with music was her way to teach her students about the Polynesian culture.

As with Lisette, Naomi believed that educators who demonstrate culturally relevant characteristics would make use of literature that dealt with the specific students in the classroom through introducing trade books in the core reading program.

> They (the students) don't see a lot of books with people that look like them or that's in their culture. So I would like to see a teacher that brings in books or like trade books that can relate to their culture so they can see people that look like them.

Naomi mentioned music as another way for educators to incorporate their students' culture into learning. Knowing that her students enjoyed hip hop music, Naomi taught the classroom rules as a rap, using a genre with "an upbeat tempo" so the students would have a fun way to relate to her specific expectations. Another strategy she used was to teach hers and the other two grade level classes the lyrics to "I Believe I Can Fly" along with corresponding hand gestures for the promotion assembly.

Fortunately, Naomi did not struggle when discussing Cinco de Mayo with her students, and felt that a culturally relevant educator would facilitate a discussion about holidays similar to the holidays she had. "I just told them yesterday, How many people have had cookouts on Fourth of July? That's an American holiday. So today is the same holiday for Mexico. So kids in Mexico are having parties tonight like we have cooks outs, but they celebrate on Cinco de Mayo which is May 5th and ours is July 4th." Naomi determined this exchange between herself and her students was successful by her

students' ability to tell her about their family gatherings and how they were similar to children's experiences in another country.

Justine's Perspective of Cultural Relevance

"Cultural relevance to me means what these kids bring with them into my class and based upon their experiences in their outside world, they bring it here. And it is very much relevant to how they act within these walls." The students' behavior was an integral part of Justine's definition of cultural relevance and surfaced several times during both the first and second interview. She suggested that their behavior was a direct result of their cultural environment and according to what they may have experienced; their attitudes could range from pleasant to disruptive.

> I don't look for perfection in them, but I look for people who…, they have no sense of direction and what it means to follow direction. No sense of respect towards adults, especially those who are trying to help them. It's almost like they feel like it's them against the world, like everybody's out to get them. -- It's just, their attitudes are horrible.

Justine's body language exhibited what I called a two-fold frustration. On one hand, she was disappointed in the negative attitudes her students often displayed, yet on the other, she felt compelled to make a difference in their lives. I gathered that Justine believed she *had* to accomplish the latter in order to change the prior.

> It puts me in a position where I *want* to teach them the correct way to do things, but when they don't do it, I try not to get angry with them. I try to let them know that I don't appreciate it and there's a certain way to do things. But it has taken me this entire year to realize that they brought to me what they know and I cannot hold them responsible for not knowing. I can only try to teach them and hope that one day it'll sink in that you know, she was really trying to help me and she wasn't trying to be mean and hurt me.

By stating that it "took [her] this entire year to realize" that the students brought her what they knew and she could not "hold them responsible for not knowing" implied that

Justine may have initially blamed her students for their errors. However, she hinted toward her growth by insisting that she wanted her students to behave appropriately, learn how to correct their errors, and reflect on their actions. She did not offer the source of her personal revelation (i.e. reflection of training from her TEP or gradual development while teaching), but Justine did demonstrate that she later rejected the inclination to apply a deficit label to her students. Although not textbook driven, Justine's definition demonstrated a beginning understanding of cultural relevance as it involved several aspects of a child both in and out of the classroom, regardless of that child's circumstances.

Justine's explanation of culturally relevant practices she expected from other teachers was similar to the standards she had for her own. When asked what she would want to see from another teacher, Justine replied:

> What I look for and what I have seen, which made me interested in working here, is that people, all the teachers here they don't, the majority of them, the ones that I work more closely with, they don't look at these kids based upon their color, based on their gender, based on anything that they bring from the outside in here. They do it because they love what they do and that's what I wanna see. I just wanna see people who love what they do no matter what you look like, no matter how you act, just loving what you do and showing these kids that you may be a terror sometimes and you may make me wanna pull out my hair, but I still love you.

The solace Justine felt working with some of her colleagues gave her confirmation that choosing this school was wise. Together, she said, they strove to create an inviting environment for the students who might otherwise not receive that warmth away from school. She hoped to provide some form of stability for her students and wanted them to look forward to attending school each day. One source of this stability was student collaboration. On the day of my first visit, I observed behaviors from Justine and her

students that appeared to be characteristic of building a classroom community. Several student were absent from the room during guided instruction due to a mandatory grade level assessment. Upon their return to the room in the midst of independent work, I watched as peers immediately got up to help those who were not present for directions from their teacher. Justine gave quite acknowledgement through a nod or a smile to those who volunteered their help. Meanwhile, Justine provided assistance to those who needed more personalized help. This community atmosphere was one that had to be established early in the year in order for things to run seamlessly and without major disruptions.

Nadia's Perspective of Cultural Relevance

Nadia seemed well prepared to share her own interpretation of cultural relevance with me. Her standards for her students indicated she had high expectations for their success even though they were only in the first grade.

> I, to me [cultural relevance] is having a vast, not necessarily a vast understanding, but at least some understanding of different backgrounds and you can work with them. Whether it be in the educational field or any type of working environment so you can work with different groups. Someone who is able to identify with all of their students, not necessarily as far as knowing what's going on at home, but being able to understand things because of their differences, their culture.

Within her explanation she spoke at length of a little girl from Puerto Rico who was placed in a fellow teacher's classroom. Based upon the school's policy, this little girl could not receive special services in Language since Puerto Rico was not her original birthplace. Nadia expressed her concern about this situation:

> [I]t's hard for this little girl to stay balanced in first grade even though she might be very bright [and] make all A's at her old school, she had a lot of changes. So the fact that she's here and nobody speaks English to her at home besides her father. Her father speaks English, her mother speaks Spanish, and her siblings speak Spanish. So, she has a lot going on, but to me it's important to identify with them and be able to make some sort of connection so they can get more focused. If possible, if she was my student, I would try to get a Spanish speaking teacher in

> the school, even though it's not in her paperwork, to serve her. To just give her more instruction than I can give her since I don't speak Spanish that well.

Her desire to provide additional assistance for a student who was not on her roster demonstrated Nadia's understanding that working with culturally diverse students will require a commitment beyond simply repeating terminology to them. "[T]o me [it] isn't really helpful," Nadia stated, "because if she doesn't understand it the first time, she's not going to understand it the 25th time." She argued that much more would have to be involved in helping the child began to realize success in the classroom. It might include additional learning tools or human resources, both which Nadia offered to supply if necessary.

"I don't know if you know this, but I don't have any little African American girls in my class." Nadia brought this to my attention during our first interview. Earlier in the day when I stopped in to say hello, Nadia introduced me to her 17 first graders: 12 Caucasian boys and girls, 4 African American boys, and 1 bi-racial girl of Asian and Caucasian heritage. I asked Nadia how she felt with no African American little girls in the room. She replied:

> [T]hat kinda bothered me at the beginning of the year because to me I might not be for all of them, but I feel I'm a role model to my students, and I try to be. And I would just *love* the opportunity to have a little girl that looks like me and feels like they can relate to me even if there is something going on at home. And I, initially I was supposed to have one but for some reason when her mom came to register, her principal told her, "Oh, she goes to Ms. Grimes, not Ms. Dawson." She was like, "But she's on Ms. Dawson's list." And she was like "Oh, just put her with Ms. Grimes." I don't know why, I don't know what happened, but I just don't have any this year.

In her opinion, Nadia's classroom did not represent diversity. Nevertheless, she insisted she would not treat her children any differently if they *were* more diverse. Her lessons would still expose them a variety of cultures and she would still attempt to engage them

in discussions about others who were not like them, which is why she enjoyed their reading program.

> "[T]hey have a lot of books that are diverse. They have books about Jamaica, about the island of Jamaica. We have books that are about uh, the Artic and Antarctica. It's a lot of different places that the kids can go; it's kinda set up for them to go on adventures in their mind.

Nadia liked to capitalize upon lesson ideas she learned from mentor teachers along with new ideas of her own to teach her students and maximize their leaning. The best knowledge, she felt, took place when the students had fun and were *unaware* that they were learning.

Alexandra's Perspective of Cultural Relevance

Since Alexandra was not part of the series of individual interviews, she did not provide a personal definition of cultural relevance before the final group meeting. By not observing her at work, I cannot accurately summarize how her interactions with her students in grades K-12 displayed characteristics of a culturally relevant pedagogue. The data I have on Alexandra were gathered solely during the group interview. There she was not as vocal as the other participants. However, she did share her experiences fro the past year as an academic counselor at the Allentown Community Center. Next, I discuss the classroom practices for each of the young women and how they dealt with the challenges they experienced in their academic workplace settings.

Participants' Workplace Experience

"They just gave you the, I guess, a fairy tale story of teaching." This was Lisette's perspective on how the TEP at Allentown State University suggested elementary classrooms would be once Pre-service teachers graduated from the program. Her idea of the "fairy tale" they were presented included technology savvy ways to teach students

from privileged homes that came to school carefree and attentive throughout the day. It was a picture perfect model of school to which the young women in this study simply could not relate as urban educators. Their primary complaints were limits in their work environments and students' personal issues, both of which are discussed in the following sections.

Work Environment Limitations

Naomi, who stated she could adapt in any school setting because she was already a minority, spoke highly of the materials she used at her lab schools. While in student teaching, she was able to plan and implement lessons using technology such as Smart Boards. However, those same items were not available in her classroom. She commented on what she was told in her TEP:

> **Naomi:** They told you [that] you would have an abundant amount of time to plan, and you'll get a lot of support from parents, and you'll have a lot of technology. You won't have only one computer and that's for me and the kids to share. And we have LeapFrog and that's it. But there they have…what do you call those boards?
>
> **Interviewer:** I know what you're talking about.
>
> **Naomi:** The wireless boards and you write on them. I mean, I don't even have an overhead. I do have a projector with the screen pulled down.

Lisette echoed that sentiment during her second interview, frustrated after a Math lesson on place value where her first graders missed the opportunity for hands-on learning due to too few materials. **"**You see how much I have? (points to manipulatives) It's just not enough for everybody. I think I only have five 100's. I have a thousands block but I only have about five 100's. I have about ten 10's and maybe about fifty 1's." Both of these young women recognized the potential for innovative lessons as presented

in their TEP, but understood the limits they faced due to a lack of resources within their schools.

Not only did the sparse resources pose a problem for creating certain lessons, the young women also felt hindered by the administration at their respective places of employment. Whether it was constant micromanagement from principals or the rigidity of prescribed curriculum, these young women believed their students could not always enjoy the best of them as educators due to the limits imposed by the system. For example, assessment procedures often prevented Naomi from doing the work she would like to with her students.

> [L]ike I said, we had a Reading First group and a lot of our grant money is based upon test scores and I think that assessing the students as much as we do is really hindering them. Because today I could have been teaching them more because they're reading more and it's small group, but we have to do this check point assessment and it's really long and you see how long it took me for one student. We have to do that every six weeks on top of those DIBBLES scores so they're testing three or four times in a six week period. It's a lot and so I don't like that and it's supposed to be [that] everything is based upon your data, but a real teacher [doesn't] have time to evaluate them all the time so I don't like that.

On the morning to which she referred, I observed Naomi administer the DIBELS assessment. Other students were engaged in individual assignments at their tables while Naomi evaluated one child at a time. It was a very repetitive assessment: she followed the same format for each child and when she finished, called on another. It did not allow her to read with the students past the designated assessment and in her opinion, took away from valuable time that she could use to read with more students.

Lisette and Justine both commented that their school rules were so "rigid" they were unable to make modifications as often as they needed. Lisette stated:

> We're on a rigid schedule. Our schedules are posted almost everywhere. They have one at the front desk. You need to be where you need to be and doing what

> you need to be doing at that time. And it's just that way. They come…, because my principal just went on maternity leave it's not as rigid, I guess, as it used to be. [B]ut you don't have, you can't talk about anything because you have to get finished with the lesson and everything is planned, everything is scripted and they really believe in organization. It's going to be done this, this, this, this…

When asked about incorporating cultural relevance into her curriculum, Justine sighed and commented:

> (sighs) To be honest, as a teacher I don't feel like I do anything with these kids that is culturally relevant to them. This… I feel like I am in such a tight box with this program, you know. The stuff that they have to do means nothing to them at all. And days like today where they're pulling my kids out and you know, if I'm not doing a certain thing at a certain time then it's you're not doing what you're supposed to do. You know? Stuff like that. So it's like I spend the majority of my day doing this reading program and then the second half of my day, by the time we get back from lunch and get settled, I spend it doing Math. Because reading and math are the two things they need the most.

The young women agreed with Lisette when this topic resurfaced in the group interview. Although they could appreciate overall school organization, they were not in favor of a curriculum that they viewed as limiting and were frustrated by the inflexibility. According to Nadia, she and the other young women wanted more opportunities to deliver some lessons using their own creative style. For them, making sure their students grasped a particular concept was more important than adhering to the scripted curriculum each day. These limitations made the young women feel as though they were placed in boxes, restricted in an environment where they envisioned having more creative control.

Limited resources and an overly structured work environment prevented the young women from using hands-on approaches to learning with technology and manipulatives as taught in their TEP. However, these were not the primary roadblocks that confronted these young women. More than any other challenge they were bound to face, the young women had to ultimately deal with the students themselves.

Meeting Students' Basic Needs

"You go out to [those] schools during labs in Tally County. Unless *you know what reality is*, that's not it at all." Justine's statement regarding her experiences in urban versus suburban schools mirrored a conviction held by the other study participants. Although they chose their places of employment specifically because they wanted to help students who "needed them most," the young women recognized their tasks were much harder than the Pre-service teachers who graduated with them. The students were not "regular" in the eyes of Lisette or the other four young women, who attempted to offer their students as many cultural experiences as possible. These included discussing different holidays and ethnic customs, but attempts were often usurped by the need to attend to students' personal matters. Naomi explained the types of incidents that often prevented her from introducing more cultural aspects into her day.

> I mean you would like to include all of that (culturally relevant lessons), but they have so many emotional problems that you're trying to get them, just like the basics. Like this morning, Kris came in. You saw that little boy eating oatmeal? His mom came in like, "Ms. Cheeks, do you have anything to eat? It was too late to eat breakfast." Then Randy came up to me and said "My mom didn't put me on socks this morning." I keep socks and underwear because that's just the basics, but I don't have any socks right now. We're all out. We have to do that many things. It's *a lot*! I mean, you're like a parent. I mean, it's just a lot of stuff that they just don't get.

I witnessed the particular incident to which Naomi referred the morning of my first observation. It was an unfortunate, yet realistic situation: two students in need of a morning meal and the proper attire before the day of learning began. However, the beauty in watching Naomi navigate these two incidents was her ability to integrate them into the normal flow of the morning routine as though nothing was out of order. No child was singled out for ridicule and there was no indication that the students had made

inappropriate requests of their teacher. Although it is unclear if this skill was addressed in the TEP, Naomi was able to maintain order in her classroom while preserving her students' dignity, minimizing disruptions by and distractions of the other students.

Student Behaviors Displayed in the Classroom.

Behavioral issues occurred daily for the young women and were so common they found themselves discussing it through laughter during the group interview. Lisette and Naomi both had students whose temper tantrums escalated to the point that the students who were having the tantrums ran out of their rooms. Alexandra experienced a little boy at the community center curse and scream for half an hour one afternoon until his mother came to get him. Justine and Nadia gave accounts as well of their students who had to be temporarily sent to other rooms because they could not behave with their peers. Kicking, biting, jumping on tables, running away and hiding during field trips; all of these were behavioral issues that would seem unbearable to many, but to the five young women in the study it was part of their reality. Moreover, the incidents paled when the young women considered the possible reasons their students behaved in these ways.

Students' Personal Issues

Instead of placing blame directly on her students for their outbursts, Lisette attributed their behavior to essentially a defense mechanism. She explained this during our first interview.

> **Lisette:** I have one student who has a very bad anger management issue. And you have to be ready when he gets to his place. Hops on chairs, turn over tables, he fights adults, he fights children, he chokes people, any and everything. Stabs you with pencils. Whatever he has to do…. You have to be ready.
>
> **Interviewer:** What do you think contributes to that?

> **Lisette:** Home life. He has brothers that beat him up and things so that's why he has to retaliate. He thinks everybody's out to get him. That's what I think is the problem.

Justine offered a similar explanation for behavior she saw her students display, actions that indicted they felt a need to defend themselves from others because it was "them against the world."

> Yeah, their culture, the majority of my kids a lot of them, they come from backgrounds where their parents don't read or can't read. They come from backgrounds where their parents show a lack of concern or interest in their education. They, I don't know. It's almost like nobody cares. Nobody has instilled it in them how important this time is in their life. They come from backgrounds where their parents [are] around the same age as I am, and this is just my own personal opinion. They haven't matured yet, so it's almost like they're still kids themselves. Many of my kids before they come to school, they go to daycare. They spend 7-7 ½ hours with me, then they go *back* to daycare. So by the time they get home, well guess what? *If* they even eat, it's time to eat, go to bed, then get ready for the next day. I don't, I don't, just knowing what they tell me when they come here and my interactions with their parents, I don't think there's a lot of interaction on their parents' part. A lot of them come from single parent homes.

I did not surmise that through Justine's statement she sought to blame her students' problems on parents who were rearing their children alone. She, I believe, was passionately expressing the frustration she felt as she watched her students repeatedly come to her with problems. Her words and actions demonstrated a genuine concern for the well being of her students.

Equally as frustrated was Alexandra, who had little to say during the group interview. She explained how her frustrations gradually melted away the more she got to know her students and better understand their circumstances.

> My challenges were the kids. (group laughs) All the ones that y'all [are] talking about, "I didn't take my medicine today" or the ones that's running around the classroom hitting other kids, after they leave y'all they come to me. And unlike y'all where y'all have 20 kids and you have maybe five at the most that were your problem kids, we have at least 200 on roll and we see at least 100, 150 everyday. And when I first got there I saw these kids and I was like, these are the baddest

> kids I've ever seen in my life! I can't deal with this! And after the first week, I was ready to quit. I was ready, I'm finished. I'll go work at the grocery store before I work here. And it got to the point too, I was like, what's going on with y'all?! What's wrong with y'all?! And they'd come and sit down and they'd be like, "Miss Alexandra, this is going on at home and I can't, I can't deal with it. I'm not staying with my mom when this is going on with my dad" and all kind of stuff. And you know, now they feel comfortable coming to me and talking to me like, "Miss Alexandra, I can't do this today." I was like, that's fine. Go sit down over there, get you a book. Okay. And then it's…they'll let me know if something's going on with them and that really helps. They should know, so, I guess just communicating with them [has been helpful].

By dialoguing with their students and offering them open communication, the young women were able to learn more about what the students were dealing with and could thereby devise the best way to work with them.

It was Naomi who coupled the problems her students experienced with what she felt was "commendable" teaching. She applauded Mrs. Hurley who won teacher of the year at her school after teaching a third grade inclusion class where the students fought each day. Yet Mrs. Hurley achieved 100% of her class on benchmark and 95% passed CRCT for the year.

> They act like we're (other teachers) not even there, but she can control them, and then she teaches summer school. So if you can work at my school and you can get your kids to pass and you don't know what they went through the night before... They live at the hotels, they get put out, their parents fight all night, they see their mama stab people and you still gotta work with them and they've got so [many] emotional problems. So, if you can get *them* to learn, I know *anybody* can learn. If you teach at one of those little perfect schools in Tally County, I mean, that's not really commendable if you can work with them kids and they all benchmark, you know? If you work at *my* school you *really* see [their] progress.

For Naomi, teaching in a privileged school did not indicate that an educator was skilled or successful. To the contrary, she was more impressed by teachers like Mrs. Hurley who taught students no one else could handle and still managed to help them excel academically. Teaching in the midst of challenges was extraordinary education to Naomi.

She wanted to be one of those types of educators. Each of the five young women strove for success for all of their students. Despite the limits placed upon them at work or the extra baggage the students carried with them each day, these young women attempted to move their students beyond their circumstances by demonstrating they were committed to seeing their students succeed.

Summary of Section Three

The young women continued to grow on their journeys as educators, making the transition from facing challenges during their formal training to encountering new ones in their respective workplaces. Here, they formulated their own perspectives of what it meant to display culturally relevant practices and were still were in the developing stages of refining those definitions. One challenge for the young women was to overcome the limited resources in their schools. There were many activities that the young women would have liked to implement, but they were unable to do so because of limited materials or lack of technology. Aside from sparse manipulatives to distribute in class, the young women were also faced with student issues. These issues included students' unmet basic needs, inappropriate behavior, and personal circumstances from home. Despite the challenges they encountered at the university and at work, I witnessed the young women demonstrate developing characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogues. In the next section I discuss examples how each young woman displayed several of these characteristics.

Cultural Relevance in Action

As I spent time with the young women during interviews and observations it became clear to me that their definitions of CRP were very limited. They did not exhibit

the scholarly rhetoric that accompanied a textbook definition of what it meant to use culturally relevant practices with students. This can be attributed to what the young women stated was a lack of instruction in diversity preparation. They explained during the group interview that they did not receive a course in multicultural education nor were they trained how to work with diverse student populations. Adding to this complaint, Justine commented that she believed the program "catered to young White females," failing to take minorities into consideration when training Pre-service teachers. This comment hinted toward the young women's awareness that their TEP did not address matters of diversity. Their limited knowledge was evident in the definitions they shared when asked "How would you define cultural relevance" during individual interviews. Their definitions were very generic, accompanied by an air of uncertainty. Quite often the definitions were essentially explanations of how the students behaved, the type of issues the students faced, and how the young women dealt with these issues as educators. When giving their working definitions of cultural relevance, the young women did not use terminology as offered by Ladson-Billings (1994) or other scholars in education. By making statements that defined culture through their students' backgrounds or the use of trade books, the young women indicated they still had a great deal to learn about culturally relevant beliefs and practices.

In spite of their need for more formalized training, the young women did demonstrate developing dispositions, attitudes, and instructional strategies that reflected culturally relevant characteristics. Namely, they rejected deficit views of their students and continued to hold high expectations for their students' success. This was evidenced in their conversations and teacher/student interactions. I pondered how the young women

were able to establish meaningful relationships with their students, help them succeed academically, and encourage them to feel good about themselves, despite not learning about how to do so in a collegiate setting. The young women hinted at the source of their knowledge for working with their students through their statements and behaviors. Specific examples of these behaviors are shared in the next section.

Culturally Relevant Dispositions

Each of the young women had their unique way of displaying culturally relevant dispositions with their students. These dispositions included mothering, nurturing, modeling appropriate behavior, and establishing special relationships with all students Nadia explained her reasoning as it related to being a woman of color:

> Well, one thing that my mom has always taught me is uh, African American mothers don't play with their money or their kids and I feel like these are my children. I really am very compassionate towards them. I really, they, these children I feel like they're a part of me.

Nadia's comment represented a theme that was prevalent throughout the study, presenting the five young women as nurturers to their students. They seemed to have a mothering demeanor about them, quick to respond to the needs of their students. Since they stated this mothering came naturally to them, they were convinced it was not something they could be taught in their TEP. Lisette explained the reasoning:

> I feel like I'm just mommy all day now instead of teacher. You know you wear so many hats. You gotta be the nurse, you gotta be the janitor, you gotta be the um, counselor, you gotta be the referee. You wear all types of hats and (sighs). I don't know, it's this, teaching from what you learn in the classroom is so different from the real world.

As the participant who had two children of her own, Lisette had no problem allowing her motherly instincts to guide her when working with her students. The other four young women were not mothers; however, they behaved "motherly" towards their

students. They stated they felt compelled to do so by what I interpreted as a personal responsibility to care for the students as their own. As most parents strive to positively impact their children, these young women felt that part of their obligation as educators was to influence their students in positive ways. Lisette accomplished this by sharing with her class that she was enrolled in college again to receive her Masters degree and encouraged them to attain as much education as possible. Nadia refused to let her students use any words with negative connotations (i.e. can't) and emphasized their ability to be whatever they dreamt in life.

Naomi strove to model appropriate behavior so her students would know how to behave in class and in public. Justine, who said her students were happy to have an adult in their class who "looked like them," attempted to influence her students by carrying herself in ways she believed represented positive examples of behavior. Each of these young women strove daily to be examples for their students. What I observed in each of these young women was what appeared to be a special relationship between themselves and their students. This relationship seemed to be instrumental in how the young women were able to influence their students. Again, the young women did not comment that they attained this from their TEP, but indicated that it came as a result of their desire to nurture their students when interacting with them.

Alexandra sought to be a positive influence for her students as well. Her task was a bit more daunting, though, for several reasons. First, she was not in a self-contained classroom and therefore had to work with several different groups of students each day in the homework room at the community center. Second, she did not teach a specific subject area and therefore was responsible for tutoring and supervision as opposed to instruction

alone. Third, her students were in grades K-12, so she was faced with academic, behavioral, and personal issues on all levels. Despite these factors, Alexandra noted that she was able to evolve into someone who her students saw as personable and trustworthy, who was available listen to them when needed. Their level of comfort with her was such that they could share their personal fears as it related to issues at home, which affected their emotions and ability to work. Open, unbiased communication, as Alexandra saw it, was what her students needed from her as their educator.

Providing breakfast and clothing for students, listening to their concerns, being "mommies" away from home: these were not characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogues that were developed within Pre-service teachers at Allentown State University. These were things the five young women expressed came naturally to them; it was common within their own culture as African American women reared by other African American women. Having been socialized in their own cultures to care for both immediate and extended family members, these young women demonstrated an aspect of their ways of knowing that mirrored what they were taught. They did what they knew their mother and grandmothers would have done had they been placed in the position to be educators.

Just as the young women were compelled to nurture their students from something that naturally came from within – that is from the values their communities and families had inculcated within them – they also found ways to work with the students using culturally relevant practices although they were not formally trained to do so. These practices were probably unbeknownst to them, but were evident in their speech and their student interactions.

Examples of Culturally Relevant Practices

It was stated earlier that the young women perceived that they did not receive formal training in diversity education at Allentown State University. The majority of the preparation in the TEP was geared toward working with a homogeneous group of students in schools where resources were in abundance and there were few student issues. Additionally, in the opinion of the five young women, this TEP was noted for not catering to minorities but rather to White female Pre-service teachers, the majority of whom would end up teaching in suburban school districts. Elements of CRP could most certainly be lost on the part of the young women. To the contrary, the young women displayed many characteristics that could be classified as culturally relevant. While they did not posses all of the characteristics, each young woman exhibited at least two either verbally or in their teaching practices. I will explain these characteristics as themes by discussing how they were manifested in the young women based upon our conversations and what I observed in their classrooms.

Although she considered herself to be a strict disciplinarian, Lisette was often playful with her students, and explained her students knew the difference between work time and play time. This statement suggested her *conception of social relations* and the dynamics of the type of relationship she could have with her students. She realized it was possible to connect with all of them in some way, and as she made these connections she was mindful to keep her students focused on the academic goals set before them.

Like Lisette, Naomi often found time to joke with her students, but made it clear to them that they were expected to abide by classroom rules. Randy, one of Naomi's most challenging students, was transferred to her Kindergarten room from a first grade class in

the same school as a result of behavior and academic concerns. At first, Naomi was unable to understand why she was chosen by her principal to educate a little boy who had spent the first part of the school year at home as a result of suspension. She even struggled initially on how best to handle him; he was the smallest of all her students, but the biggest bully. However, Naomi revealed in the group interview that Randy managed to not only excel while in her class, but also avoid facing disciplinary action. Naomi took pride in her ability to reach Randy unlike his other teachers. There was something in the way she interacted with him each day that tempered his behavior to the point that she was able to get him to learn and interact with his peers appropriately. I was able to observe the way in which she spoke to Randy with a very calm tone and the way she invited him to help her with small tasks when he finished his work early. Initially, I found this scenario a bit difficult to categorize, but later considered that here Naomi demonstrated a *conception of social relations*. It is not necessary that educators have a connection with all of their students in the same way, only that they *connect*. By constantly working with Randy in the gentle, yet authoritative manner in which she chose, Naomi eventually managed to get him to the point where he was excited to be a contributing member of the class, which was evidenced in his eagerness to be a teacher helper as well as proudly have his work displayed around the room.

The following statement is an example of Justine's *conception of social relations* and how she managed to connect to her students.

> I think that's why I'm much more understanding of my kids, you know. I just say, we all have bad days sometimes, but some of the stuff these kids tell me, they've been through I'm like (laughs) my bad day is *nothing* compared to theirs. I can get over mine in a heartbeat, but for them they carry it with them for days and months and years and you know, I'm like… It's just…. I just want them to know: you know what? If you go home and nobody cares, when you come here Monday

> through Friday, I do. So regardless of how mis….behaved they may be sometimes, just knowing that these kids know that I care about them, it outweighs all that stuff and it makes me realize, you know, it kinda makes me realize I wish y'all would come see me now.

What Justine referred to above were the challenges she endured in her TEP. She was proud of the way she overcame those obstacles so she could be the best educator possible for her students. One example where Justine displayed that she understood the situations her students encountered took place on the day of my second interview. There was a little girl who fell asleep with her head on the desk during a lesson. Justine looked in that direction at least twice, but chose not to awaken the little girl. When I inquired later of her decision not to disturb the little girl, Justine explained that she was familiar with the little girl's home situation. After school, the little girl's mother took her all over the city from one errand to the next, kept her out late, and often left little to no time for the little girl to complete her homework and rest. In sympathy, Justine occasionally allowed the little girl to rest so she could be attentive the remainder of the day. Justine admitted during the interview that she only wished for her former professors to visit her in her own classroom a year after she completed the TEP so they would see how far she had come; she was molding minds of the future.

It was a struggle to get Alexandra to open up during the group interview. She did not voluntarily respond to the inquiries, but would answer at length if questions were directed specifically to her. I listened intently to each word she said, searching for examples of statements that would classify as culturally relevant. What I heard from her seemed to combine a *conception of social relations* and of *knowledge*, although it was not easy to come to this categorization. Alexandra expressed a paradoxical frustration that was unlike the other young women; she was unsure of what move to make professionally,

yet she could not help but be drawn to the children with whom she interacted each day. She began as an educator who wanted to quit after the first day and soon became one of the students' strongest confidants. Rather than simply help them with homework, she also availed herself to listen to their concerns and give them a personal time out if needed to just take a mental break. I asked all of the young women what they felt their biggest challenge was during the year and Alexandra quickly responded, "The kids!" When later asked her greatest accomplishment she replied,

> Just being able to, for the kids to feel comfortable to come and talk to me. If something's going on at home they come and let me know. --- It just makes me feel good that they trust me and they can come and talk to me and let me know these things.

She made a connection with her students that had potential to influence them in positive ways she will never fully understand.

During my first observation I watched as Lisette reprimanded a little boy for having sat at his desk for 20 minutes during independent work and only managed to complete 25% of the first of 4 pages of an assignment. "Is this all you've done?" she asked. "You are not going to sit here today and not do any work." Lisette's strategy was to reprimand the little boy privately at his desk so that he did not endure public embarrassment. She helped him with his work, but was sure to make him accountable for his laziness. Her *condition of academic excellence* with this little boy was the same expectation Lisette had for her other first graders. She offered her reasoning for why she required so much from her students.

> I want all of them to go on and be productive… just like our belief statement says that they can become productive individuals, but I know that some of these kids it's just a struggle for them to get to school, you know. And some of them may not eat until they come to school and I just… they come from just… not all of

> them, some of them they come from where things are hard at home. And I try my best to just make sure that they know school is an okay place to be.

Aware of their personal issues, Lisette was sympathetic towards her students, but she did not allow their issues to be an excuse for failure.

Observations in Naomi's class were the most entertaining, as I was always amused by the way Naomi reacted to her students' actions or statements. She acknowledged all requests and gave attention to each incident, yet she somehow filtered out foolishness and nonsense to make room for meaningful learning. Participation in center time required that everyone be on task and those who chose not to do so by wasting time or distracting others were reprimanded accordingly. Likewise, during carpet time, Naomi expected her students to give her their full attention and accurately respond when questioned about their knowledge of a particular subject. When she introduced me to her class as her teacher the first day of my visit she said, "She's here to see what we do each day, how smart you are, and how much you learn." By these statements, I reasoned that Naomi not only verbalized her expectations of *academic excellence* from her students, she also demonstrated this by insisting that they give her their best at all times.

It is possible that Justine's approach to teaching and discipline differed from that of the other young women because she had an older group of students. The third graders in her class were a bit more "mature" as they liked to believe, which prompted Justine to deal with them accordingly. Her conversations with them were always straight to the point and all direct comments were never to be mistaken for being "sugar coated". She demanded the best and expected her students to deliver. I found the following statement representative of her idea of *academic excellence* and the parameters she set for her students' academic achievement and behavior.

> What has the most influence on my attitude towards them? I have seen it, and I'm still struggling with whether or not it's right. Their attitude kinda molds mine. If I see they're doing nothing I get so upset because they know, I just, I want them to do nothing but the best. When I see them just like half doing stuff they know it makes me upset. I told them straight up, this is just, this is not acceptable and I know you can do better and I want you to do better. I take things away from them. I tell them, you know, I *ask* them, do you care about your books? Do you care about your school work? Do you care about being in school and getting good grades? And I say, well, you know, if you do care then your work would reflect it. But my attitude a lot of times is based upon theirs and what I do with them is based upon their attitudes. So if I get ugly it's probably because they're making me that way.

Several times during my visits to Justine's classroom I saw interactions with her students that confirmed this statement. One afternoon I watched as Justine calmly listened to one of her students offer a reason for why he did not complete an in-class assignment within the allotted time. When he was finished, Justine told the little boy that she did not accept his poor excuse since he knew the requirements for the assignment. She proceeded to send him to another room where he was instructed to complete his work before he returned to class or he would miss the next recreational group activity. Like in Naomi's classroom, I found this to be comical because the students would soon acquiesce, fully aware that they had not completed an assignment or had gotten caught misbehaving and it was impossible to outsmart Justine.

In an effort to be affirming, I observed Lisette compliment all of her students when they answered questions correctly or if she "caught" them staying on task. These compliments were evenly distributed amongst both genders and all ethnicities, although none of the statements were culturally specific. What *was* culturally specific was the collection of books Lisette kept in her library with titles such as Loud Lips Lucy, Moja Means One: Swahili County Book, A Family in Australia, Scotland, and Me & Nessie. Even though the curriculum at her school was very rigid, Lisette tried to facilitate

cultural capital to integrate culture into the curriculum, such as familial traditions, language patterns, dietary customs, and ways of learning. While displaying a collection of books does not indicate full integration of culture into the curriculum, Lisette stated that she often used literature as learning tools during her lessons.

Lisette's *conception of knowledge* was evident when she expressed her desire to have more students in her class who were from different cultural backgrounds. She believed that by doing so, the distribution of knowledge could be reciprocal. I doubt Lisette was familiar with the textbook description of knowledge as being "pliable," but she did verbalize her willingness to be an educator who exchanged knowledge with her students rather than just impart it upon them. While watching her teach one morning, I observed Lisette praise her students for providing an unexpected answer to one of her questions. Waiting for a response to match the scripted lesson, Lisette was pleasantly surprised to hear an alternative answer, to which she told the students, "That's correct too! See, *you* taught *me* something today. Good for you!"

On more than one occasion during the interviews with Naomi, she stressed how important it was for her to be an educator who made positive contributions to her students, and offered this as a primary reason she chose to teach in an urban, Title I school. As she talked, I could detect the sincerity in her *conception of self and others* where she, positioned herself as a professional who gave back to her community. She had the option to teach in several different schools, one of which was in a suburban setting, but she believed her presence would be more advantageous to her current group of students. During one of the individual interviews, Naomi revealed that at least two other schools offered her teaching positions. While the offers were attractive based upon the

suburban locations of the schools and their abundance of resources, Naomi insisted to me that her present school was a much better choice because she could provide more for her minority students.

Determining areas where Nadia demonstrated culturally relevant practices was more difficult because I did not observe her. She desired to be a positive influence for her students and had high expectations for them, but I was unable to document actual incidents when this took place. Her conversations during the interviews provided some evidence of what she practiced in her room. During the first interview, Nadia verbalized what could be considered as the *conception of self and others.* When looking for an educator who demonstrates culturally relevant practices, Nadia explained this person would be "[s]omeone who is able to identify with all of their students, not necessarily as far as knowing what's going on at home, but being able to understand things because of their differences, their culture." I previously mentioned that Nadia and her peers in the study gave limited definitions of CRP. However, Nadia's explanation here did include that educators should have a broader span of knowledge in order to best relate to their students. According to Nadia, she saw the ability to connect with and be strong examples for students as an integral part of being an educator. She did not have any African American girls in her room, but she did not allow this to hinder her from availing herself to all of her students. She strove to be a positive role model for all whom she taught, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This was most likely another example of *self and others*.

Justine's *conception of self and others* became evident when she explained during our second interview:

> [T]eaching is something, is something that I always knew I was made for. I never really considered that I would do anything else or wanna do anything else. And I think part of that is like what drives me to give these kids 150% every single day.

It was not enough for her to simply teach them; she had to help them visualize their futures above and beyond their current situations. Their current circumstances, Justine believed, would not be their destinies and while they waited for their breakthroughs, they needed to know she was part of their safe haven.

Listening to her conversations during the group interview was one way to determine Nadia's demonstration of her understanding of *critical consciousness*. Here she revealed her struggle with several parents who asked that their children be removed from her room either at the beginning of the year or at various points in the middle of the year. Nadia could not determine if these transfers were because of her age (she was in her early 20's) or her ethnicity as an African American woman, but she did express deep sadness from it. Thereby, she suggested a desire to in some way teach her students how to recognize situations that hinted towards racism. It was her intention to heighten her students' awareness of social injustices and help them learn how to treat others fairly, especially those who were different from them, but she still struggled with how to do so.

Naomi admitted that most of her Kindergarten students had little to no contact with Caucasians outside of the school walls, which made them a bit apprehensive to interact with the Literacy Coach and Instructional Specialist. The reality was her students would have to face the real world one day where people did not look like them and spoke differently, so she regularly attempted to better prepare them for situations that required appropriate conversational etiquette.

> I know they're used to using incorrect English or whatever so sometimes, *a lot of times* I'll correct them on how they say things just to um, just to let them know

> it's another way, well it's a certain way you're supposed to say things. And sometimes I will say, like, you know, I'll use correct English with them, just kinda get down on their level. They'll say all the time, um, (pause), "Is this us pencils?" Like that. And I'll say, "Are these *our* pencils?" And I'll say, "What should she have said? Are those *our* pencils?" Or something like that.

The *condition of critical consciousness* was a part of Naomi's daily routine; she wanted her students to be aware of how things functioned in society and prepared them for situations they would surely face as they got older. Moreover, Naomi wanted her students to become accustomed to interacting with individuals from other ethnic groups. While the students had few classmates who were non-African American, they came in contact with faculty and staff who were from various backgrounds. Naomi expressed her desire to acclimate her students to social interactions that would occur *outside* of the classroom as well.

Summary of Section Four

It was not expected that the young women would know with precision the definition of CRP. After all, they stated they had not been trained to teach diverse groups of students while in their TEP at Allentown State University. Nevertheless, the young women still showed, through their conversations and behaviors, that they had a preliminary concept of what CRP may mean. One source of their behavior was from within; as the young women believed that being nurturing came naturally to them as African American women from the ways in which they were reared. Secondly, the young women seemed to, unknowingly, behave in culturally relevant ways as evidenced by their stated beliefs and actions in practice. They did not posses all of the conditions and conceptions as described by Ladson-Billings (1994), but each young woman behaved in ways that exemplified at least one culturally relevant characteristic. In my final chapter, I

provide a summary of the study, offering recommendations for future research and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the nature of preparation for African American educators that provided them with tools needed to teaching in culturally relevant ways. This study also examined how culturally relevant practices were manifested in the classrooms of five African American women educators after they graduated from a teacher education program (TEP). Using the shared experiences of the young women, the purpose of this study was to determine how the lessons learned in one TEP could influence how other TEPs prepare African American Pre-service teachers in the future. This chapter will provide an overview of the study that took place including data collection on five participants and their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), along with a summary of the major findings. Additionally, this chapter will offer recommendations for future educational research and pre-service teacher preparation at the university level.

Overview of the Study

There has been a dramatic shift in student demographics in schools across the nation. NCES (1996) reported that an increasing number of ethnic minorities enter classrooms each year. In contrast, the teaching force has continued to consist of mainly young White females from middle class backgrounds, with low percentages of minorities in the field of education (NCES, 2003). African American women who have sought to become educators have often found themselves disproportionately represented during their preparation and subsequently feel marginalized amongst their peers. Their

experiences during training are largely influenced by programs that adopt a mono-cultural approach to teacher preparation where gender, class, and race are ignored (King & Castnell, 2001). As it is necessary to prepare all Pre-service teachers to meet the academic and social needs of diverse students. TEPs must design their curriculum in such a way that Pre-service teachers develop culturally relevant practices.

In the literature on Pre-service teachers, there has been sparse documentation of African American women educators and their experiences in their respective TEPs. More specifically, the literature has not discussed how African American women educators choose to work with diverse student populations despite little to no formal diversity preparation.

The purpose of the study was to explore the diversity preparation experiences of five African American women and their teaching experiences following completion of their teacher education training. These young women, who chose to work with ethnically and culturally diverse students, expressed concern that their TEP did not adequately prepare them to enter their chosen urban work environments. This sentiment prompted the initiation of this study where the following specific questions were addressed:

1. How do five African American women educators perceive their experiences of diversity preparation during their Teacher Education Program (TEP)?
2. How is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) manifested in the pedagogical perspectives and practices of five African American women educators during their 1st year of teaching?

The methodology chosen to answer these questions was critical ethnographic case study. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), Black feminist thought

(Evans 2005/2006), and womanism (Phillips, 2006) comprised the theoretical frameworks to guide data collection. These theories were paramount to the development of this study for several reasons. First, CRP provides a concept of celebrating differences under the premise that culturally relevant pedagogues posses a deep seeded belief in the ultimate success of all students. Secondly, Black feminist thought serves to validate the voices of African American women, demands social justice, illuminates African American women's experiences, and explains how they come to understand the world around them. Lastly, womanism offers the opportunity for open dialogue regardless of background, personal beliefs, or stage of theoretical development. Five African American women were chosen as the participants for this study, each of whom recently graduated from an Early Childhood Education program at a four year institution in the Southern United States. The young women were all in their early to mid 20's. Four of the young women accepted positions at elementary schools as lead teachers in self-contained classrooms while the fifth young woman chose to work with students in grades K-12 at a local community center.

Observations in participants' natural contexts and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data for this study. Since there were five participants, cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995) was used to view each young woman as an individual case. Thereafter, the young women were looked at collectively for similarities and differences that facilitated new themes. The participation of the young women was as follows: three were involved in both individual interviews and classroom observations, one was involved in individual interviews only, and one was not involved in individual interviews or observations. All five of the young women took part in the final group interview. Individual interviews

were 35 to 45 minutes in length and the group interview was approximately two hours in length. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and stored electronically for analysis. The interviews were coded by hand for overall general themes and then conversational segments were recoded as additional themes emerged. All field notes taken during observations were hand coded for emergent themes. Electronic software was used throughout the course of the study to store and manage the data. Member checking was utilized with the participants in order to establish trustworthiness of the data.

Summary of the Major Findings

The five young women chosen for this study were unique as individuals with different family backgrounds, personalities, and teaching styles. However, they shared the common characteristic of being African American women who were trained in the same TEP. This training took them on a journey to develop as culturally relevant pedagogues first in a formal setting and later as they attempted to put their visions of cultural relevance into practice.

Women's Perceptions of Diversity Experiences

All of the young women were trained under a program model designed to foster within Pre-service teachers the ability to help students achieve academic success, as stated in the online program description. During their time at Allentown State University, the young women faced a number of challenges that initially oriented them to their training program. A common theme that emerged was what the young women believed to be the absence of preparation to teach diverse learners. Rarely were the five African American women assigned to lab placements in urban settings. Instead, they were often placed in suburban schools around the district and had minimal exposure to a variety of

settings that would include urban and rural schools. Moreover, the young women argued that the courses they took while in the TEP focused little to no attention on diversity and offered images of classrooms that were unrealistic at their current places of employment. Therefore, the young women felt as though they were inadequately prepared to work in urban classrooms with diverse learners.

As five of only seven minorities in this particular TEP, the young women in this study spoke at length about their concerns of how they believed they were treated during their program. This theme surfaced primarily during individual interviews where the young women shared vignettes of instances when they considered that the supervisory faculty within the department handled situations inequitably where minority and non-minority Pre-service teachers were involved. A third theme that emerged from the young women's experiences in their TEP was their tendency to feel alienated. In a program where 35 Pre-service teachers were placed in 3 different cohorts, the young women were divided amongst themselves. This imposed separation often caused the young women to experience loneliness, alienation, and disconnection from their peers who formed their own alliances. There were also no African American women professors in the department until I joined the faculty. Upon my departure, the young women once again felt alone in their program.

Confronted with inadequate preparation in diversity education along with inequity amongst peers and feelings of alienation, the young women were often discouraged. However, they managed obtain their certification in ECE and go on to become educators in various academic workplace settings through their tenacity and ability to build several support systems. In my interpretation, their initial source of support was meant to be the

TEP itself, however, the young women found themselves disappointed that the program did not meet their expectations. Therefore, they found support in me as the sole African American woman faculty member in the department. My interactions with them led to my bringing all of the young women together as a group. They then turned to each other as a second source of support. Increased interactions with one another helped them to realize that their specific experiences were not unique; there were other individuals who faced similar difficulties in the program. With this knowledge, the young women reached out to each other and talked through their challenges as a way to cope with the program.

A final support system for the young women was their families. As each of the participants shared stories of how they overcame challenges in the TEP, they complimented those stories with statements of how they received unyielding support from mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Maternal support was mentioned most often, as the young women felt extremely close to their mothers and frequently turned to them for advice on the most appropriate way to deal with situations at the university. Familial encouragement, peer bonds, and singular faculty mentoring served as the sources of support for the young women while they attempted to become educators.

Women's Perspectives of and Incorporation of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Each of the young women offered their own perspective on what it meant to demonstrate culturally relevant characteristics as an educator. As they provided definitions of cultural relevance, they explained how they interacted with their students, what they might expect to see from colleagues, and how aspects of a students' life might impact the meaning of culture for that particular child. Most of the definitions were

general due to the young women's continued development of their own understanding of this term.

Challenges in Participants' Classroom Practices

The young women carried their working definitions of cultural relevance with them into their academic workplace settings as they began to interact with their new students. One challenge the young women faced was the pressure to work with their students with limited resources and rigid schedules. Matriculating from a TEP that presented elementary classrooms as ideal settings where there would be an abundance of materials and all students performed at grade level, the young women were disappointed when they realized this was not the case at their urban and rural schools. They did not have access to the same technology or supplies as utilized in their mock lesson planning at Allentown State University and their students often had to share manipulatives.

Classrooms where the schedules were bound to strictly monitored patterns, resources were sparse, and several of their students struggled academically, prevented the young women from implementing specific lesson ideas they learned in their TEP. Since the young women purposefully chose urban and rural settings in which to work, the realities of the classroom did not come as a complete surprise. However, they expressed that in their opinions the TEP did a poor job of presenting a realistic image of resource availability.

The next challenge for the young women related to dealing with their students' basic needs, behavior, and personal issues. The first area, meeting students' basic needs, dealt with the young women's responsibility to see that the students were prepared to learn each day. Secondly, the students' behavior was often challenging and all of the

young women confirmed that they often had students who acted inappropriately. The young women used various methods to discipline their students, but expressed that they were often frustrated by the occasional disruptions. Dealing with the students' personal issues was a final challenge for the young women. As explained by one participant, most of the students dealt with so many things at home that they found themselves skeptical of everyone with whom they came in contact. The young women desired to help their students understand that the schools and the community center were safe havens for them regardless of what may occur at home. This brought about what the young women saw as a natural ability to care for their students.

Examples of Cultural Relevance

A common theme that emerged throughout the study was that of nurture. Only one of the participants had children of her own, yet all of the young women expressed their inclination to care for their students. They were in consensus that it was natural for them to attend to their students as their "children". One of the participants attributed this to what her mother told her was "within" African American women to care for those for whom they are responsible. It was revealed that this trait, though learned, was not acquired while in the TEP. The young women were socialized in their own cultures before they became teachers. Their "othermothering" mirrored behavior they witnessed from the women in their own lives.

A second theme that emerged relative to working with students was that of culturally relevant practices. Conversations with the five young women in this study revealed that they did not have a precise definition of cultural relevance. They typically referred to it coupled with a description of what their students experienced at home or

how an ideal classroom setting would look. However, observations and interviews provided insight into how the young women were able to demonstrate characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), although they may have been unaware they were doing so. Each of the young women displayed at least two conditions and/or conceptions of CRP through the way they interacted with their students, spoke to them, or taught lessons. These characteristics were also evident in the way they verbally expressed their genuine passion for their students' successes and their desire to avail themselves when needed.

Discussion of Findings and Implications

The African American woman's experience is one that is often overlooked in the field of education, yet it is indeed one that deserves consideration. This study devoted particular attention to those experiences. Using interviews as primary sources of data collection and subsequent data analysis allowed for in-depth revelation from the participants in this study. The five young women shared that their tenure at Allentown State University did not match their expectations for a positive undergraduate student experience. Coming from a culture where the exchange of knowledge as women of color is strongly encouraged (Collins, 2000a) and familial bonds are regarded highly, these young women found it difficult to cope in an environment where acts of alienation were ignored. As Cozart and Price (2005) explained, the feelings of alienation and bias African American women encounter force them to develop coping mechanisms in order to deal with the challenges in their TEP. In an analysis of the overall presence and preparation of teachers of color, Dilworth and Brown (2008) surmised that racially ethnic groups respond to treatment toward them in different ways. African Americans in particular see

themselves as outsiders during their university experience (Hulsebusch & Koerner, 1994). This has implications for individuals of color who enter institutions of higher education. Given that minorities continue to represent a small portion of those who attend college and more specifically, are in the education profession, these individuals must be able to gradually recognize their role in their respective places of learning. TEPs must assist Pre-service teachers of color as they attempt to reach a point in their program where they believe that their contributions are meaningful to the learning community. TEPs must then seek ways to foster inclusive education during pre-service preparation.

While Black feminist thought offers an avenue for African American women and other marginalized groups to engage in meaningful dialogue, further research is needed to investigate new arenas in which these dialogues can take place, particularly at the university level. By sharing their experiences while in TEPs, African American women have the power to not only influence a restructuring plan, but also encourage other minorities to share their experiences as well. The disclosure serves as an outlet for frustration as well as a learning tool. It demonstrates the power of one person's story to bring about change for others.

Delpit (1995) explained that there exists a culture of power, generally invisible, and most commonly owned by those who are dominant in society. Therefore, the rules of that culture often are imposed upon individuals who live outside of the power structure. At an institution such as Allentown State University where the faculty and student demographics are primarily Caucasian, it happened that the curriculum in the TEP reflected ideology of this particular dominant culture. Consequently, the African American women enrolled there received preparation accordingly. Aside from myself,

there were only two additional faculty members of color. With only three minorities in the department it was difficult for the young women to find someone to whom they could relate. I remained at the university for one year, during which time the young women visited my office frequently for support. Unfortunately, after my departure the young women once again realized a gap in their professional connection to the department. Since these young women assumed they were unable to connect to other faculty in the department, the implication for this particular TEP was that there was a gap in the professional relationships that the department was able to establish with their students.

In order to prevent similar experiences for future minority Pre-service teachers, the Teacher Educator department at Allentown State University can address this implication by engaging in an examination of the current faculty demographics at their institution and reflect to what extent selection committees have made efforts to diversify the faculty. As well, careful consideration must be given to the varied views on education and society that prospective faculty will bring to the department. Pre-service teachers must be comfortable with those whom they will work closely during their TEP with an assurance that they will not be swayed to think in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes towards diverse student populations.

Each of the five participants in this study agreed that Allentown State University was, overall, a highly accredited institution that provided a quality education for the students who attended. However, the specific TEP in which the young women were enrolled failed to meet their expectations by neglecting to train them for diversity in the classroom. It is plausible that the program model for teacher preparation as offered by Allentown State University was not originally designed for diversity education, as there

was no course in multicultural education offered at the undergraduate level. Limited formal instruction in diversity had implications for how the young women developed their notions of culture. Data from this study revealed that the young women did not have a concise definition of "culture" and varied those definitions depending on the context in which they used it. When discussing culture, they defaulted to only referencing students' environments, home experiences and behavior. While I may have approached this study with the notion of culture as inclusive of ethnicity, familial practices, language, customs, traditions, and environment, my participants viewed it differently. As their understandings of culture were still developing, so were my understandings of CRP, which was a major component of this study.

CRP provided one lens through which I viewed this study, however, all facets of this particular theory may not have been observed the way they have been in other studies. Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995) offered that CRP is comprised of six specific conceptions and conditions, all of which an educator must possess in order to fully encompass the breadth and depth of this theory. While the young women I studied demonstrated one to two characteristics, they had yet to develop all characteristics in their entirety. The statements the participants made during interviews provided few examples of their understanding of CRP. As well, observations did not yield a sufficient amount of evidence to demonstrate that these young women were indeed culturally relevant pedagogues. This has implications for classroom practices, how lessons are delivered, and how future teachers are trained. Due to these limited definitions and understandings of culture, TEPs must add to their curriculum a component that explains this concept more thoroughly. For educators who are currently in the classroom or other academic

settings, there is the need for professional development that assists educators as they grow in their understandings. By using a womanist lens, I realized that while this professional development takes place, it is acceptable for these young women and others like them to struggle with their definitions

Aside from the course content, the majority of lab placements were not reflective of the school environments in which these particular minority Pre-service teachers chose to become educators. While the study participants had at least one rural or urban placement, they were most often assigned to suburban school settings. The conditions at these placements presented an “ideal” perspective of schooling, which was not applicable in all schools, and usually did not represent student diversity. This may be explained by the number of partnerships among Allentown State University and the surrounding school districts. It would not behoove the university to partner with schools whose academic and discipline reputations were below standard. By placing Pre-service teachers in struggling schools, it would invite the possibility for complaints from those in the program. The implications for this arrangement lie in the limits placed on what Pre-service teachers are exposed to when they report to their practice teaching assignments. By selecting mainly suburban placements, teacher educators prevent both minority and non-minority Pre-service teachers from full exposure to a variety of academic settings. This then limits the range of knowledge they are able to attain to better understand diverse populations. One recommendation is for the TEP at Allentown State University to establish partnerships with schools in a wider range of settings that include more urban and rural placements. These new schools will serve as additions to the placement schedules for Pre-service teachers and give them greater exposure to diverse classrooms.

Teacher preparation was once viewed as a singular event where teachers were trained in educational theories and concepts and then sent out to practice those things learned in the program (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Currently, the trend is that teacher preparation should have a more constructivist approach, where new teachers learn while they share the knowledge and experiences they brought with them into the program. As well, there should be a knowledge exchange between teacher educators and future teachers. Therefore, teacher education for social justice mandates attention to the "intellectual and organizational contexts that support the ongoing learning of teacher educators" to deal with issues related to racism and diversity in education (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 13). When Pre-service teacher enter their own classrooms they must then feel comfortable with their decisions to work with their students in ways that are most effective to maximize learning.

One purpose of education is that students learn the way the world works for them as individuals and contributing members of society. Teachers must have space to accomplish this for their students. During interviews, at least three of the young women expressed that they believed their schools hindered the progress of those things they hoped to do with their students. They stated that the nature of the scripted curriculum, in addition to limited resources, placed them in positions where they were unable to introduce creative strategies for learning or utilize teaching methods that were culturally relevant in nature. While this presented dilemmas for the young women in their classrooms, it also has social implications beyond school walls. When teachers assume they must adhere solely to the curriculum as prescribed by the school, they prevent their students from being visionaries. Ladson-Billings (2001) explained teachers must

encourage their students to critically examine what they learn in school in order to have power over their own lives outside of the school walls. Moreover, students must gain ownership of their learning (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) without limits in the instruction they receive. It is important for students to recognize that their academic achievement connects to their social and emotional lives as well. Therefore, the inflexibility associated with state mandates cannot be allowed to stifle the growth of students who can transcend where they are to where they have the potential to be.

Most schools do not fit comfortably into a shared space with oppositional pedagogy, or teaching practices that reflect mainstream ideology. Schools where curriculum mandates do not allow room for innovation or authentic cultural integration frown upon deviation from the prescribed plan and can regard this as non-compliance. Following the theory of Freire (2002), those who intend to revolutionize education must be willing to stand opposed to praxis that continues to limit those outside of the dominant group. This does not imply that teachers demonstrate defiance against their administration. Rather, it calls for institutions of education to allow for a greater integration of culturally relevant practices in the curriculum in order for students to can be exposed to curriculum that places them at the center of learning.

Research on cultural approaches to learning (Martin, 1997; Banks & Banks, 1995; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Sheets, 1995) stress the necessity of utilizing strategies that emphasize equity and make use of the cultures of those receiving instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1994) has the potential to improve both the quality of instruction and influence the beliefs of Pre-service teachers who are in training to become educators. Research on program design is necessary for institutions of higher

education that offer teacher preparation. TEPs that adopt a culturally relevant approach to learning can improve teacher preparation by developing ways to foster within Pre-service teachers' beliefs that all students can be successful if reached in ways that celebrate their diversity (Ladson-Billings, 1994). When redesigning TEPs, it is critical to convey that CRP should not be limited to instruction, but that efforts focus on the core issue to change belief systems of teachers who view minority students as incapable learners.

With the vast amount of research conducted on teacher education in general and diversity preparation in particular, the question arises why do the issues associated with these areas persist? According to Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries (2003), the cause for continued discussion is a result of inconsistency in research findings. Small scale studies have offered that there is an absence of diversity integration into TEPs (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996), but due to limited funding and low priority there have been few longitudinal studies (Weiner, 2000). Hence, there is a need for additional research in the area of diversity teacher preparation, which allows room for a study such as this to emerge with the potential to contribute to the existing literature.

Recommendations

This study was not designed to generalize to all Pre-service teachers nor to all African American women. However, it was intended to provide a snapshot of the experiences of five individuals in particular and consequently may offer insight into how TEPs can improve for future minority Pre-service teachers who seek to become educators. In light of the findings from this study, I recommend that TEPs adopt a program model that encompasses aspects of cultural relevance that will devote careful attention to improved instructional practice based upon the literature on teacher

education. The program model I propose, geared toward both female and male minority Pre-service teachers, is comprised of three specific components for diversity preparation with CRP as a foundation: faculty mentoring coupled with a network of support for minority students, urban based field experiences, and critical reflection, all of which are connected in order to increase the effectiveness of TEPs (See Appendix K).

Proposed Program Model

Mentoring and Support

The first component of the proposed model involves faculty mentors and a support network for Pre-service teachers. As TEPs recruit additional faculty of color into their departments, these faculty members can avail themselves as one-on-one mentors for minority students. Key to this mentorship is an examination of the ideals that the specific faculty members hold in regards to diversity. Not all educators of color have high expectations for minority students and consequently, maintain a deficit perspective towards them. In as much as this is the case, teacher educators must be mindful when making recommendations for mentor/mentee partnerships. Students who know they have instructors willing to converse with them and provide guidance while in their program have the potential to excel rather than feel discouraged when they face issues. As well, faculty can serve as leaders of networking groups established for the purpose of providing support for minority students during the program. A critical aspect of the prospective support groups is the opportunity for dialogue, a component of both Black feminist thought and womanism where conversation is strongly encouraged. Missing from the TEP at Allentown State University was an open forum in which the young women could converse about their experiences.

Womanists view dialogue and interaction as a group experience. According to Phillips (2006), it is difficult to separate the individual from the whole since all are asked to participate in the conversion of thoughts and ideas. Thus, mentoring for Pre-service teachers within this proposed model must be grounded in a central focus of commonweal which represents the optimal state of well being for humans (Phillips, 2006). In a group mentoring experience, mentors and mentees unite for a common goal of social change, personal improvement, and theory exchange. The proposed model consists of one faculty member paired with one to two Pre-service teachers to conduct informal mentoring sessions throughout the extent of the program. These sessions are used as times for mentors and mentees to discuss issues within the program that confront the Pre-service teachers and for mentors to provide invaluable guidance based upon their own area of expertise. While paired mentoring is ongoing, consistent group mentoring sessions are vital to the well being and ultimate success for minority Pre-service teachers in teacher preparation programs. The group sessions embrace the spirit of the culture for minority groups, especially for African American and Latino groups where collectivity is celebrated.

The young women in this study were able to draw upon their cultural references for encouragement to remain in a TEP that did not meet their expectations. They were confident in the buttress of family members and peers of color to provide the emotional and spiritual support necessary to complete what they began in order to become educators. These actions speak to the traditions within the African American culture upon which these five young women relied, including a socialized sense of caring and maternal embrace that encompassed who they were as an ethnic group (Beauboeuf-Lafontant,

2002). Moreover, this ability to remain strong could not be avoided; the young women brought these characteristics with them into their TEP. Therefore, the foundation for them to persevere despite their experiences in their program was always present; they simply had to realize the natural resources that were available. This realization helped them to build a network of community support among minority students in the TEP.

Urban Based Field Experiences

The second component of the proposed model is urban based field experiences. Studies on teacher preparation have revealed that most TEPs include some form of field experience as a component to build a bridge between theory and practice for new teachers (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Results have shown that teachers' mixed reactions to their experience in the field ranged from viewing urban field experiences as positive for their development (McCormick, 1990), to having a better conception of working with students of color (Cooper, Beare, & Thorman, 1990), to still feeling unprepared to teach in urban settings (Sconzert, Iazzetto, & Purkey, 2002). It is conceivable that the range of these results suggests an inconsistency in the structure by which field experiences are organized. Moreover, the effects of being in urban school placements will likely vary amongst minority versus non-minority Pre-service teachers and among different schools. Nevertheless, consistency in requirements for field experiences across program models offers a possible remedy to these issues. Teacher candidates who complete field experiences in urban areas during their TEPs have greater potential for understanding their students' culture than those whose training is limited to courses taught in the university classroom (Mehan et al., 1995; Sleeter, 2001b). Field experiences must logically connect to the course content taught at the university (Deering & Stanutz, 1995)

as well as be reinforced conceptually and seamlessly throughout the extent of the program (Olmedo, 1997). Since many Pre-service teacher candidates will be unfamiliar with the students they will teach and since there is often a disconnect between what TEPs teach and the realties of diverse classrooms, it is imperative that Pre-service teachers practice in realistic settings where they can then apply what they learned in their courses.

Hammerness (2006) argued that the ability to glean value from field-based learning is critical in the teacher education process because Pre-service teachers must be able to identify coherence in theories generated from TEPs to practice in the actual classroom setting. Within the proposed model for improved TEPs, the culture of field experiences is introduced immediately after Pre-service teachers enter the program and begin coursework. Pre-service teachers engage in situational learning by way of a mock classroom setting. Here, instructors spend a considerable amount of time in the initial portion of the program helping Pre-service teachers become acclimated to possible situations with which they may be confronted once in the actual classroom. This is very different from simply *telling* the Pre-service teachers what they might see; this involves role play and deep conversation in order for Pre-service teachers to get a glimpse of what is ahead of them. Mock situations modeled in the university classroom are generally applicable, which indicates that the lessons can be applied in any setting regardless of the circumstances.

Results from the study of these young women revealed that the strategies taught in their TEP were intended for use in settings where ideally there would be an abundance of resources and student ability levels were middle to high. Since this will not be the case in all schools, Pre-service teachers must lean how to teach lessons with the least amount

of resources possible. This will then force them to be creative in lesson planning while in their preparation programs so they will be better prepared for their own classrooms. Pre-service teachers are required to demonstrate how they might deal with each situation while they reveal their preconceived notions and general dispositions regarding students in urban settings. Situations that occur during the field experiences are shared during course instruction and strategically addressed in a continuum across the program.

The unique aspect of the urban field experiences in this model is the additional requirement for Pre-service teachers to become immersed in the community that surrounds their particular school placement. Teachers who devote time to gain a more in-depth understanding of their students' cultures *outside* of the classroom are more likely to develop a stronger connection with the students *in* the classroom (Lynn, 2006). Hence, urban field experiences for Pre-service teachers must be coupled with authentic immersion experiences within the community. TEPs that utilize training models grounded in CRP reduce the possibility that teachers leave their programs with the notion that their experiences failed to contribute to their current knowledge. Watson et al. (2006) suggested that a TEP designed properly, coupled with culturally relevant school-based programs, will assist teachers in their efforts to function effectively as urban teachers.

Critical Reflection

In all educational settings, teachers bring with them their personal experiences, their beliefs about the world, and their thoughts on how knowledge should be disseminated. Therefore, the final component of this proposed program model is for Pre-service teachers to reflect on their thoughts, their current practices, and their reactions to the training they have received. According to Howard (2003), critical reflection is essential to

growth for Pre-service teachers in TEPs. Often the information offered in schools is received without question. Unfortunately, this lends itself to passivity and a general level of misguidance on the part of students, which makes it easy to influence thought patterns that view hegemony as common and acceptable (deMarrais & LeCompete, 1999). Reflection in the proposed model will take place in two ways: externally towards the programming and internally of self. First, Pre-service teachers will critically reflect on those things they learn in the program and during their field placements. They will be encouraged to engage in inquiry that questions if what they witness during training in the field can be appropriately addressed using strategies and theories taught in the TEP. Questions Pre-service teachers are encouraged to consider are: *Does this program equip me as a teacher with those things necessary to effectively meet the needs of each of my diverse learners? Does this program simply allow narrow minded, unjust ideology to persist? How is what I learn applicable in the contexts in which I chose to teach?* Secondly, Pre-service teachers will reflect on their experiences as trainees in the program by asking the following: *What were my expectations for the training I hoped to receive? What have I done to contribute to the knowledge exchange during my program? What support have I received to help me grow as a future educator?*

Self reflection will come in the form of autobiographies, which allows Pre-service teachers to discuss their lives and reflect on their personal experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000a), and through focus groups that provide a safe environment for discussion (Schmidt, 2005). Howard (2003) suggested that critical reflection is an opportunity for Pre-service teachers to look deeply into their own experiences, discover how those experiences influence their thinking, and recognize the impact those experiences may

have on their teaching styles. He goes on to explain that Pre-service teachers who believe that culture and demographics prevent students from academic success must reexamine their conceptions of learning and ask themselves how those views can potentially be detrimental to their students. This act of examining one's own knowledge assists in the process of transforming future teachers into more responsible monitors of their teaching practices.

When TEPs are structured to allow Pre-service teachers to "grapple with and (re)negotiate their initial beliefs" (Mueller, 2006), future educators can use critical reflection to unpack and rearrange their thoughts in ways that are more culturally responsible as they seek to help students feel comfortable in different learning environments (p. 157). Minority Pre-service teachers may use this time of reflection as an opportunity to express how they have experienced situations within the TEP and the impact those experiences have had on their learning. Many times, reflection takes place after Pre-service teachers have been exposed to a variety of cultural contexts other than their own, achieved through cultural immersion and field experiences (Watson et al., 2006; Hammerness, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000a). Pre-service teachers under this proposed model are not forced to wait until they complete their program to engage in reflection. Reflection, like professional development, is ongoing and gives Pre-service teachers time to devote critical thought to what they experienced and how they hope to grow.

Conclusion

There were several things that I hoped to observe during this study. One of those was evidence that the five young women knew and understood what it meant to be

culturally relevant pedagogues. I did not witness these young women as fully developed in this area, yet I was able to note that each of them possessed a deep seeded belief in the success of all of their students. They expressed this verbally and on occasion, demonstrated it in their actions with their students. I was convinced that the young women wanted their students to succeed both academically and socially and that they desired to be instrumental in helping their students to achieve this success. Secondly, I looked for the young women to openly express their perspectives in regard to their experiences as women of color in their TEP. This was accomplished, and it brought with it the ramifications that there was a need to establish a suggested model for teacher education programs to consider when working with Pre-service teachers in the future. Lastly, I sought to determine what experiences the young women had in their current occupational settings and how the experiences in their TEP had an impact in a different context. What I learned is that these young women were profoundly affected by what they experienced as Pre-service teachers. However, they were resilient and did not allow their limited exposure to diversity to prevent them from attempts to implement culturally relevant teaching in the best way they knew possible.

The results of this study, taken individually, are not novel concepts. Students have often lamented over their university experiences, with an expressed discontent toward the quality of their program (J. Dangel, personal communication, October 2008). Therefore, it is not unusual to find that the participants from this study perceived their experiences in their TEP as unfavorable. However, when viewed collectively to establish a more comprehensive representation of the data, this study was a major accomplishment for education. By engaging in a critical examination of the experiences of five African

American women educators during their transition from teacher preparation to actual practice, this study revealed that the resilience demonstrated by the participants was achieved by a self-engineered support system. This is a significant addition to the current literature on minority teachers in TEPs which have documented the low percentages of teacher retention for minority PSTs (Root, Rudawski, Taylor & Rochan, 2003; Waldschmidt, 2002). This trend does not have to persist if there is someone to work for the cause and speak for those who do not typically verbalize their experiences. This study showed that not only is it possible to retain African American women educators who earnestly believe in what they do for their students, it is conceivable for these same women to grow from their experiences.

Using a feminist perspective, Clark & Brown (1990) told an intimate story of the journey Mrs. Clark took to organize schools for Blacks adult learners and to register Blacks to vote. The passion with which Mrs. Clark advocated for people of color is the same passion with which I attempted to advocate for my participants. The tenants of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2001a) gave me the lens through which to view the experiences these five young women encountered in their TEP and as new educators. It was the specifics of their narratives that now speak volumes in the field of education. The stories that they shared are unlike others due to the particular bonds that were formed by their own admission. Womanists would argue that the young women's disclosure was not only acceptable, but necessary for their growth as individuals and as champions for their students. The beauty of choosing CRP, Black feminist thought, and womanism as theoretical underpinnings for this study was that I was authorized me to use my identity as an African American woman to capture the powerful experiences of the women who

viewed me as someone whom they could trust to share those stories. This study presented the voices of five extraordinary young women and their journey in diversity preparation as Pre-service teachers and later as early childhood educators. Collecting these narratives and examining the figurative and literal meanings attached has placed me in a position where I must speak on their behalf in order to seek improved preparation for Pre-service teachers of color. As well, I must celebrate the young women's tenacity to persevere and remain committed to pushing their diverse students toward success.

There is still much work to be done in the efforts to improve teacher education programs to be more sensitive to the needs of their minority trainees. The experiences in one setting, though challenging, do not have to determine the outcome in another. In spite of numerous challenges, the young women in this study became educators although each still has a great deal of growing to do in order to develop into culturally relevant pedagogues. As they continue to find their own ways, their experiences smooth the road for other minorities, who also choose the noble path of education.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Georgia State University
Department of Early Childhood Education
Informed Consent

Title: Finding Our Way: A critical ethnographic case study of five African-American women and their struggle to personally develop into culturally relevant pedagogues.

Principal Investigator (PI): Mr. Lou Edward Matthews, Ph.D.
Student (PI): Ms. Rachel Nall, M.A.

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this qualitative research inquiry is to examine the struggles that African American women face, as recent graduates of an Early Childhood teacher education program (TEP), as they attempt to display culturally relevant dispositions and strategies when interacting with culturally diverse students in various academic settings. You are invited to participate because you are an African-American woman in your first full year of working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds at the elementary level. A total of five participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require a total of twelve and one half hours of your time over a one month period in order to conduct interviews and observations.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sit for two indivdual interviews and one group interview. The first interview will take place during the Spring semester, which is in the beginning of the second half of your school year. The second interivew will take place approximately two weeks after the first interview. Both the first and second interview will last approximately one hour during a time and in a place that is most convenient for you as the participant. The final interview, which will take place approximatley four weeks after the study has begun, will involve you and the four other participants in the study. This group interview will last approximately one and one half hours, allowing you an opportunity to speak at length on your concerns with other inviduals who may have similar interests. The reseracher will facilitate each of the interviews and will digitally record the interviews in order to review the conversations at a later time. *All interviews will occur outside of school hours so as not to interfere with your instructional schedule.* The researcher will also visit your academic setting on three occassions to observe the instructional strategies you use and the interactions you have with your students with the intent of looking for culturally relevant approaches to learning. The researcher will take field notes during the observations. Each of these observations will last for approximately three hours where the researcher will observe both formal activities (i.e. Mathematics, Science) and informal activities (i.e. recess, free

time), in which you work with your students. The timeline for your participation will commence as follows: Week one = 1st individual interview and 1st observation; Week two = 2nd observation; Week three = 2nd individual interview and 3rd observation; Week four = group interview.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, the researcher looks to gain information about the personal experiences you have had as an African American woman at the elementary level attempting to teach culturally diverse students and what role your teacher education program played in those experiences now that you have become an in-service educator. The information has the potential to further scholarly dialogue with peers and other researchers. This research is designed to protect the anonymity of those who are willing to participate. Your employer will not be involved during the process of this research, and therefore, your employment status ***will not*** be impacted positively or negatively as a result of your participation.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any point during the study. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

The researcher will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The researcher will use a pseudonym in place of your name on all documents related to you in this study. Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide. It will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office located on the 5th floor of the College of Education at Georgia State University. The key code sheet that identifies your name with the pseudonym will be stored separately from the data in order to project your privacy. Audiotapes will be kept separately in a locked file cabinet in the office of the Principle Investigator. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when the researcher presents this study or publishes its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. The key used to identify participants will be kept for a minimum of one year. After that, all identifying information will be destroyed.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Lou Edward Matthews at 404.413.8407, lmatthews@gsu.edu or Ms. Rachel Nall at 404.413.8251, rnall1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-463-0674 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

The researcher will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.
If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____	_____
Participant	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent	Date

APPENDIX B

Georgia State University
Department of Early Childhood Education
Informed Consent

Title: Finding Our Way: A critical ethnographic case study of five African-American women and their struggle to personally develop into culturally relevant pedagogues.

Principal Investigator (PI): Mr. Lou Edward Matthews, Ph.D.
Student (PI): Ms. Rachel Nall, M.A.

I. Purpose:

Your child's teacher has been invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this qualitative research inquiry is to examine African American women, as recent graduates of an Early Childhood teacher education program (TEP), as they attempt to display culturally relevant dispositions and strategies when interacting with culturally diverse students in various academic settings. Your child's teacher has been invited to participate because she is an African-American woman in her first full year of working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds at the elementary level. A total of five teachers will be recruited for this study. Your child will not be directly involved in the study, however, your permission is needed since the researcher will be present in the classroom.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to give consent for your child, he/she will not be expected to participate in the study in any way, but will see the reseracher on three occassions. The researcher will visit your child's academic setting on three occassions to observe the teacher's instructional strategies and the interactions she has with her students. This will be to look for ways the teacher uses culturally relevant approaches to learning. The researcher will be present for three hours during each observation to view formal activities (i.e. Mathematics, Science) and informal activities (i.e. recess, free time) in order to take field notes. Your child will not be interviewed nor will any of his/her personal informaion be included in this study. This research focuses soley on the teacher.

III. Risks:

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than he/she would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

This study may not benefit your child personally. Overall, the researcher looks to gain information specifically about African American women at the elementary level attempting to teach culturally diverse students and what role their teacher education program played in helping to shape who they have become as in-service educators. The information has the potential to further scholarly dialogue with peers and other researchers. This research is designed to protect the anonymity of those who are willing to participate. Your child's name will not be used during the process of this research and therefore, your child's grade ***will not*** be impacted positively or negatively as a result of your signature.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to have your child involved in activities taking place while the researcher is in the classroom. If you decide to sign consent for your child and change your mind, you have the right to withdraw this consent at any time. Whatever you decide, your child will not lose any benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

The researcher will keep all records private to the extent allowed by law. The researcher will use a pseudonym in place of the teacher's name on all documents related to her in this study. Only the researcher will have access to the information provided. It will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office located on the 5th floor of the College of Education at Georgia State University. The key code sheet that identifies the teacher's name with the pseudonym will be stored separately from the data in order to project your privacy. Your child's name and other facts that might point to him/her will not appear when the researcher presents this study or publishes its results. The findings for the study will be summarized and reported in group form. You child will not be identified. The key used to identify participants will be kept for a minimum of one year. After that, all identifying information will be destroyed.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Lou Edward Matthews at 404.413.8407, lmatthews@gsu.edu or Ms. Rachel Nall at 404.413.8251, rnall1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-463-0674 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:
The researcher will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.
If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____
Name of Child

_____ _____
Parent Providing Consent

_____ _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX C

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Participant	**School**	**Grade Level**
Nadia Dawson	Franklin Elementary	1st
Naomi Cheeks	Great Canyon Elementary	K
Justine Hanover	Tappen Elementary	3rd
Lisette Johnson	Greystone Elementary	1st
Alexandra Kites	Allentown Community Center	K-12

APPENDIX D

FIRST INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

How would you define cultural relevance?

What characteristics of an educator would indicate to you that he/she is demonstrating culturally relevant practices?

What training did you receive during your time as a pre-service teacher that would prepare you to interact with culturally diverse students?

How are you using what you learned in your teacher education program in your current classroom practices?

Describe how you felt as an African-American woman in your cohort while a pre-service teacher and explain why you felt that way?

What do you believe motivated you to persevere and remain in education?

Please give examples of things you do now with your students that you consider to be culturally relevant.

Describe a personal experience that stands out most in your mind while you were a pre-service teacher where you felt strongly about your teacher education program in either a positive or negative way.

APPENDIX E

SECOND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

How have you seen yourself evolve as an educator since you began working with culturally diverse students full time this year?

How often do you rely upon the training from your teacher education program to influence the decisions you make in your classroom?

What has the most influence on your attitudes and strategies when working with your students?

How do you feel your ethnicity and gender play a role in who you are as an educator?

In what ways do you feel that your teacher education program contributed to your ability to work with culturally diverse students as an African-American woman?

APPENDIX F

GROUP INTERVIEW

Use one word to describe your journey this year as an African-American woman educator and explain why you used that word.

If you had the opportunity to restructure the teacher education program you attended, what changes would you make for future African-American Pre-service teachers?

What do you feel has been the biggest challenge and greatest accomplishment for you this year as an African-American woman educator?

As you reflect on your work with your culturally diverse students, to what extent do you feel you have been able to reach them in meaningful ways?

APPENDIX G

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Teacher: _____ **Grade**: _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Activity observed (formal/informal): _____

Evidence of Interactions with All Cultural Groups
Description of Cultural Aesthetics within Academic Setting
Evidence of Culturally Relevant Literature
Statements of Cultural Affirmation
Instances of Culturally Relevant Practices/Strategies
Description of Room Arrangement
Unanticipated Events

Description of Observations

Evidence of Interactions with All Cultural Groups *Researcher will make note when teacher distributes her interactions as evenly as possible with all students of different cultural backgrounds in the classroom. When attention appears to be directed toward specific groups of students more than others, the researcher will make note of this behavior.*
Description of Cultural Aesthetics within Academic Setting *The researcher will note within the classroom evidence of cultural celebration. This may be in the form of art work displayed or words translated into different languages to label items in the room.*
Evidence of Culturally Relevant Literature *The researcher will look in the classroom library for evidence of books that focus on a variety of different cultural groups. Those books can be from any genre and can be in any form (art books, music books, recipe books, etc.), but must reflect more than one culture.*
Statements of Cultural Affirmation *The researcher will listen to the teacher as she interacts with her students to make note of statements that affirm the students' cultural differences. Those statements include, but are not limited to, words or phrases that encourage students to use their personal cultural capital for problem solving and/or to contribute to classroom discussions.*
Instances of Culturally Relevant Practices/Strategies *The researcher will make note of how the teacher integrates culturally appropriate practices into her curriculum in ways that seek to include students' personal knowledge into the learning process. These practices are not to be reserved for specific times during the month (i.e. Black History Month), but rather are to be incorporated throughout the daily activities. An example of such as practice would be to take students for a walk in their neighborhood in order to develop mathematical problems and allow students to come up with their own solutions by which to solve the problems.*
Description of Room Arrangement *The researcher will write a description of the way in which the room is arranged. This includes the placements of student desks, the teacher's desks, the literacy center (i.e. couches, bean bags), evidence of culturally affirming student work samples, etc. One thing to note is if student desks are arranged in groups, pairs, or in rows. This provides evidence of whether the teacher encourages cooperative or individual learning.*
Unanticipated Events *The researcher will make note of anything that takes places during the observation that was not anticipated in the planning of the visit. This could include, but is not limited to, fire drills that might interrupt the flow of the lesson, an observation from an administrator, a child bringing in something from home that he/she wishes to share with the class, and a field trip that allows for open discussion on culture.*

Date/Time	Category	Evidence
	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Students positively reflected - in classroom activities - in lesson plans - through art - through literature	
	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Lessons contextualized to reflect students' cultures	
	Culturally Centered Pedagogy Students' language incorporated into lessons and activities	
	Equity Pedagogy Teacher use strategies to help students think critically	

Appendix H

Interview and Observation Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
			May 1	**May 2**
May 5 *Lisette* Obs1 (AM) Intv1	**May 6** *Naomi* Obs1 (AM) Intv1	**May 7** *Justine* Obs1 (AM) Intv1	**May 8** *Naomi* Obs2 (PM)	**May 9** *Lisette* Obs2 (PM)
May 12 *Nadia* Intv1 *Justine* Obs2 (PM)	**May 13** *Lisette* Obs3 (AM) Intv2	**May 14** *Naomi* Obs3 (AM) Intv2	**May 15** *Justine* Obs3 (AM) Intv2	**May 16** *Nadia* Intv2
May 19	**May 20**	**May 21**	**May 22**	**May 23**
May 26	**May 27**	**May 28**	**May 29**	**May 30**
June 2	**June 3**	**June 4**	**June 5**	**June 6**
June 9	**June 10**	**June 11** Group Interview	**June 12**	**June 13**
June 16	**June 17**	**June 18**	**June 19**	**June 20**

Note. Intv: Interview. Obs: Observation

APPENDIX I

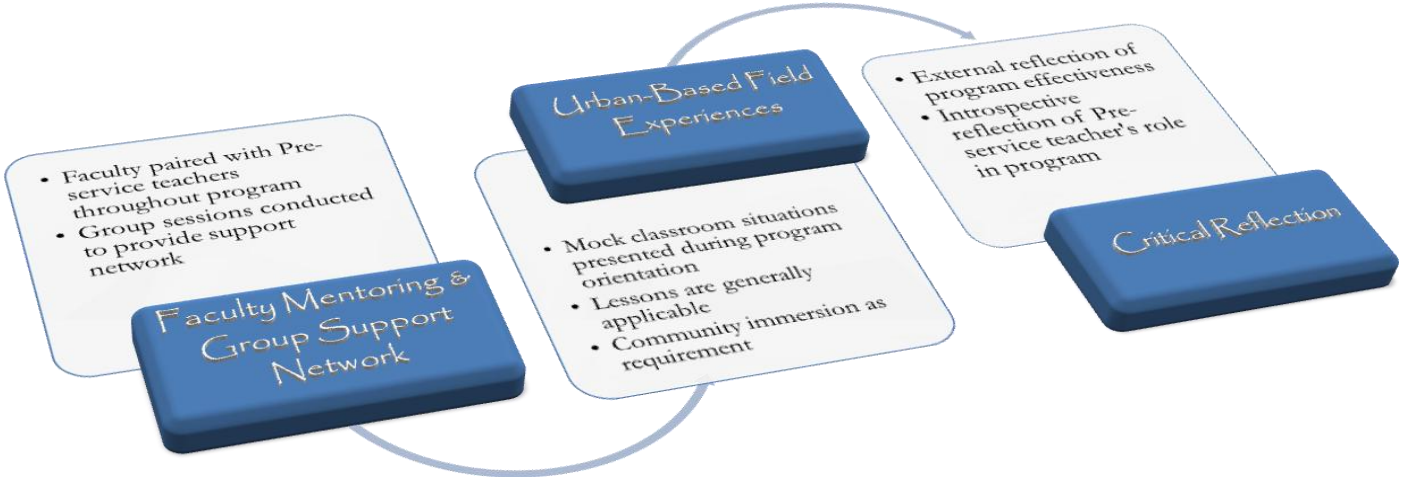
CODES AND THEMES

Code description	Code Symbol
Nurturing	Nut
Isolation	Iso
High expectations	HExpt
Racism and bias	R&B
Lack of preparation	LoP
Gender as a factor	Gen
Ethnicity as a factor	Eth
Meeting students' needs	Needs
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Academic Excellence	CRP: AE
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Critical Consciousness	CRP: CrCn
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Cultural Capital	CRP: CuCa
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Self & Other	CRP: S&O
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Social Relations	CRP: SR
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Knowledge	CRP: Knw
Limited idea of cultural relevance	Lmtd CR
Limitations from work environment	LmtsWE
Personal Creativity	PersCrea
Student Resistance	StRstnc
Set Positive Example	PstvEx
Coping	Cop
Student Issues	SI

APPENDIX J

CULTURAL APPROACHES TO PEDAGOGY

Text or Approach	Description or Specific Characteristics
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Gloria Ladson-Billings	All students can be academically successful Curriculum should include culture Make students socially conscious Understand social relations Understand exchange of knowledge Understand themselves and others
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Phuntsong, Martin	Looks at individuals' ethnicity, religion, class, etc.
Culturally Centered Pedagogy Sheets	Student culture is at center of learning process
Equity Pedagogy Banks	Student become critical thinkers and challenge things that hinder them through social class bias
Politically Relevant Pedagogy Beauboeuf-Lafontant	Pays special attention to limits experienced by groups of color
Ready from Within Cynthia Stokes Brown	Author narrates story by speaking in 1st person of woman she interviewed Author goes on personal journey as she seeks to learn more about Civil Right movement. Discovers more than she expected by listening to Ms. Clark. Ms. Clark's approach is to teach adults to be literate by whatever means she has. Empowers adults
Teaching Children of Color Susan Goodwin & Ellen Swartz	Effective teachers of students of color have to use 7 constructs simultaneously. Teachers as Professionals; Families & Communities; Emancipatory Pedagogy; Cultural Knowledge; Systemic Analysis; Student Experience; & Classroom Environment
Crossing Over to Canaan Gloria Ladson-Billings	Explains how to change TEPs & help new teachers by sharing her own story. Relates the vignettes to the journey teachers have. By studying a particular TEP she saw how to change her own program. CRP helped her to see how TEPs played a role in helping teachers become more effective in diverse classrooms.
Cultural Modeling Carol Lee	Detailed discussion about the education of African Americans. Explains that we must explore several planes in order to understand how learning is situated. By using an interactional model, each plane can contribute to and interact with the others. The three planes are *culturally inherited patterns of a group, social interactions within a group, and individual efforts*. When cultures participate in activities, what they inherit is changed.

Appendix K

Teacher Education Program Model Grounded in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy