An Exploration of Teachers’ Use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Ethic of Care, and Reflectivity

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An Exploration of Teachers’ Use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Ethic of Care, and Reflectivity

by

Johan von Ancken

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Program Development with a concentration in Educational Innovation
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December 18, 2019

Keywords: culturally relevant teaching, teacher care, teacher reflection

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazingly supportive and loving wife and family. It has been with Cara’s persistent urging and reassurance that I completed this journey. I am so thankful to have her positive influence throughout this process and through all of life’s challenges. In addition, few words can express how understanding my three boys have been, as I worked through weekends and holidays to finish this dissertation. I hope my persistence set a good example for the three of you and that you embrace that nothing comes without hard work. We are a family who never stops growing and learning and I feel this process has in many ways reflected the journey that we as a family take every day. I love you all so much and am so thankful to be blessed with such a wonderful family, bestowed upon by our Lord and Savior.
Acknowledgements

I want to begin by thanking Dr. Black for his unrelenting guidance and feedback throughout this process. Without your unwavering support and persistence, I would never have gotten to this point. I also want to acknowledge the remainder of my committee members, Dr. Johnston, Dr. Dedrick, and Dr. Ponticell, all of whom collectively helped me to overcome some significant challenges early in the IRB approval process. It was with this group that I felt comfortable sharing openly my opinions and concerns, and always felt validated and respected throughout this daunting process. I especially want to thank you Dr. Ponticell for helping initiate the original partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) and setting up the infrastructure for such a program to exist and for pushing me to continue this journey of continual learning. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Mann for introducing me to Appreciate Inquiry and Organizing; this singlehandedly changed my perspective on leading and serving in organizations and positively impacted my perspective throughout life! Furthermore, I would like to thank the members of the original Ed.S turnaround cohort, as these people were instrumental in always motivating me and keeping the learning fun. I also need to acknowledge there were so many people within HCPS who helped get this learning opportunity partnership off the ground, especially Tricia McManus. The learning that I experienced throughout this journey has helped me better support the teachers, and ultimately the students I am privileged to work with every day. I have grown as an educator and learner and hope to continue to inspire the students of tomorrow. I would like to acknowledge my parents, Hans and Kirsti von Ancken, grandmother, Charlotte “Oma” von Ancken, brother and sister’s families, sister-in law’s family,
and mother-in law, Carol Miltner. It is with all these individuals’ relentless support and collective focus on the value of education and persistence that I was able to get where I am today, despite my misgiving as an adolescent. These individuals have encouraged me throughout this journey and throughout life. I also want to recognize and celebrate Jeff “PD” Miltner, my father-in law who bravely fought leukemia until September 2018 and was not able to see me finish this work. He was a true inspiration to education, spending over 30 years advocating for students, and arguably the single most positive person I knew, especially with kids. He is the reason I entered education almost 20 years ago. I hope you are proud of my work. I miss you.
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Trust - Support
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Respect - Names
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Abstract

A variety of educational reform literature discusses the “ethic of care” and “building relationships,” along with culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy (Gorski, 2013; Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., & Casaperalta, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995). In addition, “Appreciative Organizing in Education (AOE)” (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) with its emphasis on strengths-based analysis of organizational change shaped my perception that a “Culture of Care” in our schools and with our teachers, administrators, and most importantly students, is necessary.

The notion of “culturally appropriate” (Au & Jordan, 1981, p. 139) pedagogy began over 35 years ago and incorporated aspects of “students’ cultural backgrounds into their reading instruction” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995). However, today’s context magnifies the importance of providing culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995) instruction and curriculum for our black and brown children, reflected in the body of work that is read and studied in schools, as well as culturally responsive teaching, defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for [students]” (Gay, 2010, p. 31).

Despite the literature that suggests schools will struggle to overcome the societal barriers that students bring with them every day (Berliner & Glass, 2014, 2015), there are teachers who are capable of excellent teaching for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995), by “demonstrating understanding of who students are (and who we are, as teachers), how, and why they operate in
the world, and then making decisions about what will be learned based on this information”
(Walter, 2018, p. 25)
Chapter One: Introduction

Schools throughout the nation can be defined in a variety of ways. Of increasing interest nationally are schools that struggle most to educate their students, either because of challenges and disadvantages of communities’ socio-economic status, lack of K-12 students’ preparedness for school, or adequate capacity. Such schools are known as “turnaround” schools.

Turnaround schools are plagued by cycles of poor academic achievement and high referral and discipline rates (Duke 2015; Valencia, 2015). Barriers to success can include high levels of poverty, teacher apathy, low teacher retention, poor student achievement and weak leadership. These barriers can be overcome and must be overcome if we are to truly turn schools around. One of the most critical elements is having the right teacher with the students (Duke, 2015), particularly those teachers who employ culturally responsive pedagogy (Warren, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

In order to impact change in turnaround schools within Hillsborough County, it is beneficial to determine the characteristics of highly effective teachers who have impacted student learning across ethnicity, socioeconomic status, perceived academic ability, and background. Teachers are able to take students from where they are academically and transform their learning and experience to be more highly engaged and productive students. The question is, what do these teachers do, and how do they do it?

Most educators believe that all students can learn at high levels. In addition, having a sense of urgency to close the achievement gap, decrease discipline disparities, and begin to
create a culture that supports learning for all students is crucial if we are trying to positively impact student well-being. Administrators and teachers who know the plight that their students deal with on a daily basis, such as their living conditions, struggles at home, and the environment to which they are exposed sense the urgency to build a culture of care that pervades classrooms, schools and the district (Duke, 2015; Valencia 2015).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explored ways teachers reflect on teaching behaviors that contribute to a positive classroom environment, through the ethic of care and culturally responsive practices, positively impacting students of color and those on free and reduced price lunch (FRPL). These behaviors remain fundamental to creating a caring culture in their classrooms, thereby empowering students to feel engaged and productive in the classroom environment.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways do teachers reflect on culturally responsive behaviors they use in their classrooms?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their level of care in the classroom?

**Coming to the Study**

I have often thought about ways to ensure that all students within my school are treated equitably and with dignity and respect. I often become frustrated when I learn of teachers who do not treat all students in this manner and subject them to an unproductive learning environment. The teachers and staff at my school have taken many steps to provide incentives
and organized behavioral management systems that will align teacher practices among classes, and this school year there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of calls that are made to the office indicating that students are insubordinate and need to be removed. I have been deliberate on focusing on making parent contact prior to referring any disciplinary concerns to administration and being very clear with expectations for students so they know how to be successful in the class.

With clear procedures and a combined focus on giving students an opportunity to be successful in their classrooms, some teachers are better able to connect with students of color, prevent and mitigate classroom disruptions, and engage these students to perform at their best in class. In doing so, the students may avoid disciplinary issues that they face in other classes, with other teachers. As I observe and interact with these teachers, I wonder whether these teachers exercise an ethic of care and utilize culturally responsive pedagogy in their classes intentionally. Empowering students to learn and utilizing curriculum that they are interested in, providing students with a voice in their learning, learning students’ stories, and building trust while holding students accountable, like being a warm demander (Ware, 2006) are all ways teachers create a sense of care in their classrooms. I have identified ways that teachers connect with students and build meaningful relationships with students, especially our black, Latinx, and low SES students, wondering if these teachers are intentionally utilizing an ethic of care and culturally responsive behaviors.

As principal of ABC Middle School, I worked with many principals and administrators, focusing on turning around schools. It was clear that teacher effectiveness mattered, and I became more and more interested in highly effective teachers and the learning environments of their classrooms. I was curious about whether a positive relationship existed between teachers’
classroom culture (i.e., their ability to build strong, healthy relationships between the students and themselves) and students’ overall performance at the end of the year.

As a result, I began to explore the HCPS- Danielson framework, with two specific domain components, Respect and Rapport (2A) and Culture for Learning (2B) that were loosely coupled to classroom environment and dynamics. Working with the district’s Office of Assessment and Accountability, I looked at the district’s data on teacher evaluation. I took a summative average of how teachers did in these two components, utilizing both the peer and principal ratings. I directly sorted the summative average with the “Value-Added Measure” (VAM) that determines an individual teacher’s student performance, based on a relevant population. With over 15,000 teachers district-wide, it appears both Domain components 2A and 2B appeared to align with the respective teacher’s students’ performance averages (figure 1).

![Graph](image)

**Figure 1.** Graphs showing comparison of VAM scores to Domains 2A and 2B of the district’s teacher observation system.
After noticing this alignment between VAM and the ratings for Domain components 2A and 2B in the teacher observation system, I reviewed the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (2007). I felt that Domain component 1B Demonstrating Knowledge of Students, combined with Domain component 2A Environment of Respect and Rapport and Domain component 2B Culture for Learning, might relate to teachers’ ability to create a culture of care.

Now I became curious about evaluation ratings across these three domain components. Table 1 shows the percentage of teachers in the district achieving ratings on the district’s evaluation continuum of Required Action, Progressing, Accomplished, and Exemplary in each of these three domain components.
### Table 1. Percentage of Teachers by Ratings in the Three Domain Components in 2014-2015 (n=12,671)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Danielson Rubric Component</th>
<th>Required Action Rating</th>
<th>Progressing Rating</th>
<th>Accomplished Ratings</th>
<th>Exemplary Ratings</th>
<th>Not Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1B. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B. Establishing a Culture for Learning</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Hillsborough County Public Schools, Office of Assessment and Accountability

Data indicate that more teachers received “Progressing” ratings in Domain component 2B Establishing a Culture for Learning (25.6%) and Domain component 1B Demonstrating Knowledge of Students (16.6%) than in comparable components. A higher percentage of teachers received an Accomplished rating in Domain component 2A, Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport (88.3%) and the literature on culturally responsive teaching indicates that such teachers build caring student-teacher relationships (Roberts, 2010) in order to promote respect. Teachers receiving an Accomplished rating (88.3%) in Domain component 2A, Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport would appear to have built such relationships.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is based on teachers’ knowledge of students and their needs and the ethic of care may be seen as a connection to why they build relationships with students. It seems apparent that if teachers were supported in these two areas, then perhaps their ratings in these two areas, demonstrating knowledge of students (16.6% with a Progressing rating) and establishing a culture for learning (25.6% with a Progressing rating), may increase.
Interestingly, this previous exposure to how teachers’ culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care may be directly linked to the current system of evaluation, it helped press my work further to explore how to look for the practices teachers use at my school to connect with students. Focusing on how they build trust and a positive classroom culture, I developed an observation and coding protocol to capture the data from the observation and connect it to the research on an ethic of care and culturally relevant pedagogy. Creating a separate protocol is important as the current system of observation and evaluation in the district is from the Charlotte Danielson model (2007), and very little of this model’s rubric focuses on the need to develop an ethic of care, culturally responsive pedagogy, and build meaningful relationships with students, thus possibly impacting their ability to learn and successfully understand the content being delivered. My intention in beginning this work was to improve my overall practice as a principal, focusing on an issue that was local and immediate to my school and perhaps gaining some insight on how to offer guidance to teachers who have a diverse, heterogeneous group of students.

This work is significant to me as a building principal because of the potential to inform my ability to provide professional development and coaching as I work with teachers. While I cannot replicate or duplicate the work of these effective teachers I studied, the hope was that from this study I can better assist other teachers who are looking to implement responsive pedagogical practices and exercise an ethic of care in their classrooms and more directly impact the learning for students. As time progresses, this study may hold the key to uncovering how to reduce the achievement gap that we see in schools, perhaps providing insight into the idea that it is not only fundamental that we teach rigorous material, but also how we connect with students along the way.
Leveraging Strengths

As we increasingly consider ways to inspire a culturally appropriate level of curriculum and instruction, more discussion about innovation emerges. For example, the same technology that seems to isolate a cluster of students standing alone, texting independently on their cellphones, almost appearing apathetic toward anyone else around them, is also the beginning of true collaboration. Legg provided a description of his school in a neighboring county instituting “collaboratoriums” (Johnston, 2017), building on students’ use of technology and social media. Students who may work in isolation through some technology also have been equipped through technology to utilize their knowledge and skills to work together in a forum not yet explored. Identifying students’ strengths and assets in technology and the experiences they have with social networking, albeit seemingly isolated, may be an avenue to truly tap into. Legg asserts that moving forward is a challenge, mainly because teachers are not accustomed to this divergent method of inquiry and thought (Johnston, 2017), but by again accepting things may be intentionally awkward and “off-balance on purpose” (Thurmon, 2010), we can begin to see the benefits of this unique learning.

This concept of leveraging students’ strengths in an environment that is conducive to their learning style and experiences is included in the work of Daniel Pink (2009). We begin to allow our students the opportunity to develop intrinsic rewards for success, by removing the often overused incentives and truly place the learning back in their hands. Pink (2009) discusses autonomy and mastery purpose, and while these notions are clearly fostered through the concept of a collaboratorium for students, we also can imagine how as teachers there is an essential development of self that must occur.
The notion of school turnaround is not in itself a new idea. Scholars, academicians, and school leaders have been batting around the various frameworks that impact school reform and school improvement for quite some time, all the while making little traction forward. This “wicked problem” is not easily identified and even further difficult to fully conceptualize, let alone leverage or manage. Whether we consider the various theoretical frameworks that Valencia (2015) suggests may explain the reason education and society suffer from a deficit mindset, explore the supposed cultural suppositions that Ogbu (1988) asserts may influence the various beliefs and assumptions, or discuss the Systems Inequality Model (Valencia, 2015) that presupposes that institutional racism is the fundamental cause of inequity, we cannot overlook the various ways the “achievement gap” divides our students.

**Beyond a Deficit Model**

Much of the literature on school reform focuses on the notion that students must be able to connect to their own learning by feeling empowered through their own voice around issues relating to their community (Guajardo et al., 2008; Pink 2009; Ladson-Billing 2009; Valencia, 2015). When students have the ability to introspectively assess themselves as we see in the work from the Guajardo brothers (Guajardo et al., 2008; Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015, 2015b) they are able to more meaningfully connect to the learning environment and subsequently become more academically successful. In addition, Ladson-Billings’ work (1995) suggests that when students become a “community of learners” where the teacher, school leaders, and district leaders learn to adapt the curriculum for students, allowing for authentic engagement and true relevancy and understanding, students become genuinely active in the learning process and positive success ensues.
Instead of teaching “decontextualized stuff” (Theobald, 1997, p.137), education might instead attend to context and offer “place conscious instruction” (Azano, 2014, p. 62), recognizing the “power of place” (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015, p. 39.). In addition, learning that “culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 17), “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2010, p. 4), or “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004, p.712) matters as means to provide students with an opportunity to take ownership in their own learning.

**Appreciative Inquiry and Organizing (AOE)**

AOE is a theoretical approach (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) that allows individuals to reject the deficit model and harnesses “students’ cultural strengths” into the learning environment and design (Azano, 2014, p. 62). The AOE perspective seeks to identify assets and resources within our marginalized students, families, and communities, providing them hope (Tschannen-Moran, M. & Tschannen-Moran, B., 2011; Shuayb, 2014). The traditional problem-solving, deficit model assumes our struggling students are a burden and liability (Guajardo et al., 2008; Guajardo, F. & Guajardo, M., 2015, 2015b; Trueba, 1999; Wyatt, 2014; San Martin & Calabrese, 2011).

**Conceptual Framework**

The evolution of the ethic of care was highly influenced by Carol Gilligan (1982), who felt strongly that every individual should receive equal treatment and worth and feel included, regardless of their differences. This insight is reflected when Jorgensen references Kohlberg’s 1984 theory of moral development, where all “people, including women, are seen and heard within the context of their own histories” (Jorgensen, 2006, p.186). In addition, Roberts also reiterates the importance of Noddings’ work (1984, 2002) and how it contributes to this concept,
by discussing the importance of differentiating for various learner needs, particularly in regard to “different educational and cultural needs [and] from various ethnic and racial backgrounds” (Roberts, 2010, p. 452).

Seldom have academicians explored the connection between the ethic of care and its relationship to culturally relevant pedagogy (Roberts, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995), for example, said there must be a connection between students’ perspectives and their inherent culture to help them “create meaning and understanding [of] the world” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.110). This raises a question of how caring behavior may actually be culturally responsive and how culturally responsive teaching or pedagogy may be seen as an evolution of this framework. Culturally responsive teaching is the application of care in the classroom, moving beyond just making things relevant, but rather meaningful and implementable for all students.

Moreover, AOE is instrumental in identifying the connection between the genuine care that arises from a focus on what is "right" with kids. This concept combines the various behaviors that emerge from culturally responsive teaching, with the notion that focusing on appreciative student tenets (i.e. using positive responses, holding students accountable with dignity, and allowing for genuine student participation) generates positive outcomes (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) for students, allowing for all these frameworks to intersect.

Below is a graphic representation of elements I perceive as influencing a culture of care in the classroom (Figure 2). The depiction suggests that when teachers combine the elements of care and culturally responsive teaching within their classroom, they are more likely to generate engaged and productive students. Understanding the connection between genuine care for students and teacher disposition is Warren’s (2018) assertion that deliberate teacher behaviors
can be “summaries of act frequencies” or “trends in behavior” (Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 301) that we can explore and attempt to capture. This level of intentionality is derived out of active reflection and is a “basic characteristic of consciousness” (Noddings, 2018, p. 70). Care in the classroom also requires dialogue between the teachers and students, because through dialogue we learn more about the other, and we need this knowledge to act effectively [as teachers] and we are helped in our efforts by the feedback we get from the recipients of our care” (Noddings, 2018, p. 231), thereby impacting our reflectivity and intentionality.

**Figure 2.** Representation of elements influencing student engagement and productivity in a highly effective teacher’s classroom.
Overview of Research Design

This was a qualitative study, using purposive sampling to identify seven teachers, from a sample size of over 27 highly effective rated teachers, who could participate in one-one-one transcribed, structured interviews. The seven teachers studied were at ABC Middle School, all rated highly effective by state rating, and selected by a researcher developed rubric that was conducted by the leadership team, focusing on those who establish an ethic of care and utilize culturally responsive practices to build positive relationships with predominantly minority and lower performing students and those who qualify for free and reduced price lunch. By exploring the level of reflectivity those teachers who are currently utilizing culturally responsive and caring behaviors, this study informed my practice on what actions may positively impact classroom culture and ultimately benefit student learning, by improving professional practice.

The study was conducted by interviewing selected highly effective teachers and identifying practices that are closely associated with an ethic of care and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010, p. 31; Warren, 2018; Roberts, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995), identifying their level of reflectivity. Seven teachers were identified by the leadership team, using an aggregate method based on the highest rubric ratings. These teachers were then contacted by the researcher, a USF doctoral student and given parameters to help them decide if they would like to participate. The subjects who agreed, were contacted via Zoom video conferencing and asked a standard series of questions that probed their level of reflectivity in the domains of ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. The study explored whether their perceived teacher behaviors were aligned to the domains of ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 305 characterize these teacher dispositions as those which “may not be disconnected, isolated teacher moves”, but
rather “represent (a) visible patterns in behavior demonstrated by teachers as they are interacting with individual students, (b) their priorities with (certain groups of) youth, and (c) the habits of mind that drive other aspects of their professional decision-making” (Warren, 2018, p. 172).

**Significance of the Study**

Issues that inherently pervade low-performing schools are not new, yet school leaders are continuously confounded by their inability to explain the ongoing achievement gap in the United States, most significantly impacting students of color and those who are impoverished (Valencia, 2015; Duke, 2015).

High needs schools need teachers who care about their students, empower them, believe in them, and hold them accountable for learning. Exploring how teachers reflect on their use of ethic of care and means to establish positive classroom culture, helped me understand how effective teachers tailor the students’ learning experiences to meet their needs. These students need teachers who understand that the culture and climate in their classrooms impact their academic lessons and possibly student success. These highly effective, culturally responsive teachers exist in Hillsborough County—teachers who have high levels of student achievement and whose classrooms are warm, inviting communities for learning.

Studying the work of teachers who have demonstrated an exceptional ability to relate to students of all backgrounds and have shown their ability to positively impact their students’ performance, has helped me learn how to better support our other teachers to allow all students to feel successful in schools.
**Definitions of Key Terms**

**Highly Effective teachers:** Teachers who have achieved academic results with their students, using a system similar to the “FLDOE High Impact” (FLDOE) model, which identifies teachers whose students’ actual performance, outperforms their expected results, for at least 30% of the students (FLDOE) over several years’ (3+) time.

**Ethic of Care in the classroom:** The notion that with intentional and deliberate actions and an awareness of students’ backgrounds, teachers can create a positive, caring learning classroom for students. Combines (Noddings 1984, 1988; McCollum, 2014, Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008) work and how it contributes to this concept, by discussing the importance of differentiating for various learner needs, along with an understanding of how students want to be treated.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching/Pedagogy:** The ability to utilize certain practices that help students connect with their classroom and the learning experience, usually specific to students of color. An evolution from culturally relevant curriculum as it is grounded in students’ perspective (Roberts, 2010) and Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995) and application and meaning for students, along with an intersection of caring behavior in the classroom. In this study, the term culturally responsive will be used to imply an understanding of both care and cultural awareness.

**Teacher Reflectivity and Intentionality:** The ability to explore teachers’ consciousness and explicitness with their behaviors toward students, specifically in regards to a culturally responsive and caring lens. Reflections allow a teacher to be more intentional in their instruction because they know what they are doing and why (Perry, 1998; Schon, 1983), helping them to further become more effective and efficient as professionals (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984).
Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, how I came to the study, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and definition of key terms. Chapter 2 will provide a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 will present the methods to be used and the rationale for their appropriateness for the study. Chapter 4 focuses on the results of the study and the findings from the seven teacher interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the implications for such results, as it connects with the literature and the field of educational leadership.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

As educators we often state that we need to try to figure out how to “fix” schools or teachers, or even low performing students themselves. The notion that a remedy can be applied and address all the inadequacies seems ideal, but most who have been faced with the challenge of working in a high-needs school understand the intricate nature of the work and just how difficult it is to institute change. While many critics argue that we should simply replicate the systems of success in one district or school into another, those with the institutional knowledge of working in high-needs schools embrace that we cannot fire our way to high achievement, and in public schools, our parents send us the best kids they have.

Utilizing the work of Don Clifton in *First Break all the Rules* (2016), one must quickly embrace the reality that we cannot change most peoples’ innate behaviors and attitudes. If someone is predisposed to skeptically scrutinize new ideas and judge their plausible effectiveness, we as managers should consider resigning ourselves to accept their attitudes and provide opportunities for them to concentrate on this type of work, rather than trying to change them. Too often as principals we are empowered and pressured to “fix” those employees who are not producing and not of the mindset we look for. Perhaps their attitude does not fit the mold we seek, and so as leaders we assume it is our obligation to change their values and have them embrace certain beliefs. Clifton (2016) may argue that perhaps our role may be that of a manager and not of a leader, especially in schools that require a multitude of support and change. While leadership is often perceived as the next rung of success above management (Clifton 2016, p. 62), identifying the different attributes each role has is fundamental to discussing how to possibly impact change within organizations. Our education system seeks individuals who can
balance new ideas, innovations and inventions with the reality that not all students will approach learning the same way. Furthermore, recognizing that not all teachers will possess the values and beliefs and approaches to learning we want or expect them to have is also critical.

These inherent contradictions between what an effective manager is and the notion that all principals should be strong leaders often sets us on a blind path toward futility. It seems as though we could consider that our values may impact our decisions more than we realize. If we utilize the “Values Inspired-Action” (VIA) concept that Murphy (2016, p. 63) speaks of, we could conceivably move away from trying to change people’s behavior and perhaps leverage their strengths instead. This appreciative approach overshadows the negative thinking that often accompanies those who feel leaders in schools should hold everyone accountable to the same rubric and ensure all stakeholders are contributing. In fact, Murphy (2016) suggests that the uneasiness that occurs with allowing opportunity to let individuals carve their way is crucial (Murphy, 2016, p. 125) and arguably a challenging aspect any leader may face. Amazingly, whether we assert that school principals should be called managers or leaders, their roles are undoubtedly uncertain. Embracing the notion that we have to accept the tumultuous nature of leadership and not run from the discomfort is central to addressing high-needs schools.

Daniel Duke cleverly points out how school administrators in high-need schools are truly “designers, architects, and builders” (2015, p. 4) who must be able to act as a visionary, as well as a detailed planner and communicator. Duke (2015) discusses the importance of leaders being patient and flexible as they create the sense of urgency in their school. Without alarming the stakeholders, principals must convey the idea that things need to change, and the importance of collaboration and discussion is crucial for this process. While these ideas are not novel, they do require systematic planning, similar to the manager role defined earlier that Clifton mentions and
not the charismatic leader we often imagine a school principal should be. Duke discusses the “first order” (2015, p. 87) solutions to school turnaround being more pragmatic and basic, like shifting the school to an instructional focus. As obvious as this may seem, the long-term ideas of school turnaround may be grounded in finding ways to build sustainable innovation, perhaps concepts that truly get students and teachers to think differently. While the issues of low-performing schools will never easily be “fixed” and no matter how many state interventions or plans for turnaround are suggested, a principal must not lose sight of his VIA that hopefully is driving his strategies for change.

**Organization of the Literature Review**

The literature review that follows falls into four broad areas: (a) the ethic of care; (b) the ethic of care in classroom; (c) culturally responsive pedagogy; and (d) teacher reflectivity and intentionality.

**Ethic of Care**

Nel Noddings first described the importance of care in her work “Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Obligation” (1984). In this text she described the origin of this movement in care, as being derived from the women’s feminist roots (Noddings 2013), thus making this an important aspect of the title. While Noddings concedes that the use of “feminine” may polarize certain groups, she was cautious about oversimplifying the cause as solely a woman’s effort and yet still maintaining the “centrality of the women’s experiences in care ethics” (Noddings, 2013, p.11). Noddings eventually releases a revised version of this work, with the term “relational” replacing feminist, in an effort to make the approach more inclusive of all individuals.
Noddings is very intentional about discerning between “caring about” (Noddings, 2013, p.11). and “caring for” (Noddings, 2013, p.11), pointing out how “aesthetical caring” (Noddings, 2013, p. 41) focuses on ideas and concepts instead of real people, and making a clear delineation that the former is more abstract and based on the notion that we have interest and perhaps concern about an issue, but the latter term suggests an implicit need to respond and interject in a manner that produces actionable results (Noddings, 2013). Interestingly, Noddings continues this notion even further by suggesting that people may act as care-givers, therefore physically caring for or watching individuals, perhaps as educators with children, as discussed in the ethic of care in the classroom section that follows, but yet may care very little about their overall well-being (Noddings, 2013). Carol Gilligan suggests that “the ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the world of connection so that no one is left alone” (Gilligan, 1982, p.62).

Discussion about the moral responsibility to help others is raised throughout this work and Noddings asserts that a true ethic of care is generated from an inclination to assist (Noddings, 2013), rather than a “moral obligation” (Noddings, 2013, p. 12) and when natural caring does not exist intrinsically, “ethical caring seeks to restore or replace natural caring” (Noddings, 2013, p. 14). Noddings discusses the associated “burden” (Noddings, 2013, p. 12) that we assume as we care for others and how this role of responsibility can translate into a variety of arenas, including health care, education and parenting. Milton Mayeroff describes caring as “to care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (Mayeroff, 1971, p.1). Caring is largely “reactive and responsive” (Noddings, 2013, p. 39), as we often attempt to understand the needs that may not be met or the concerns that the individual possesses (Noddings, 2013). The ethic of care focuses on the idea that we
must also be willing to view situations and make decisions based on other perspectives and not only our own (Noddings, 2013), explaining that ethical caring requires a sense of volition or act in order to make change, unlike natural caring, which embodies the idea that we care about others beliefs and suppositions (Noddings, 2013). While many critics suggest the ethic of care is a moral theory, other theorists suggest it encompasses the assumption that transformation for the betterment of society should be a primal factor (Held, 2006), explaining the complex interplay between care and justice (Held, 2006), establishing the basis for why an equitable system of education for students is so essential.

**Ethic of Care in the Classroom**

Teachers and educators in schools often state they care about their students and seldom would one argue that teachers are indifferent toward students’ success and learning. Yet, often there is difficulty discerning whether the teacher or students, or both are at fault (Noddings, 2013). The reality is that more often the situation itself is the cause of the issues (Noddings, 2013) and it is only through surveying the conditions and environment that educators can render options to build meaningful relationships with students (Noddings, 2013, 2018), recognizing that teachers should use caring as a “lens through which all practices are examined” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172).

The concept of care in the classroom is focused on the premise that educators must establish meaningful and consistent relationships with their students (Noddings, 1984), establishing dialogue (Noddings, 2018) “as a means by which we evaluate the effects of our attempts to care” (Noddings, 2018, p. 231). As educators the balance between the technical understanding of the content and the relational interactions among students is what outlines a
successful classroom (Noddings, 1984, 1988 & McCollum, 2014). Care is generally separated into several major tenants or categories that serve as a method of explanation for how caring behavior positively impacts students. Caldwell (1999) outlines these themes into four major categories, which are student-oriented, work oriented, engaging students, and active. Interestingly, Noddings (1988) identifies four components with slightly different classifications: modeling, practice, dialogue and confirmation as the ways in which teachers identify caring behaviors for students. Regardless, there is a resounding understanding that students must see tangible examples of how teachers care for them in their classroom.

The student-oriented category outlines the major premise that students feel there is a sense of belief in success from the teacher (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). The students feel connected with their teachers by feeling respected and listened to, particularly in how they are addressed by name and challenged to think (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008).

The work-oriented model illustrates the flexibility students appreciate when their teacher not only challenges their learning, but also provides the space and time to let them work through personal conflicts and situations, have adjusted learning designs, and adequate time to process information and learn concepts (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). This type of caring teacher is conscientious about ensuring that every student can succeed.

The engaging students and active component focuses on how students view their teacher’s commitment to their learning. Just as with the work-oriented system, students who feel engaged also sense their teachers’ flexibility with their learning style and appreciate the attention to detail in making adjustments to their daily teachings (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). Students express that they feel engaged because their teachers genuinely care, displayed by telling authentic stories and providing content that is meaningful and relevant (Caldwell & Sholtis,
Students expressed that they also want to feel they have a variety of ways to demonstrate their comprehension and a teacher who employs formative assessments beyond standard testing helps employ a much more holistic system of assessment that students deem is fair (Vacca & Vacca, 2005).

Furthermore, if students of certain ethnicities do not sense trust and care from their teacher, they are less likely to perform academically. Caring teachers (a) provide scaffolding during a teaching episode, (b) reflect a kind disposition through actions, (c) are always available to the student, (d) show a personal interest in the student’s well-being inside and outside the classroom, (e) and provide affective academic support in the classroom setting (Garza, 2009). These characteristics of care are interestingly defined as the difference between caring as relational and caring as a virtue (Noddings, 2005), with the latter generally more consistent with the notion of “academic care” (Addison, 2012) and “teacher immediacy” behaviors (Christophel, 1990), which focuses on the notion that students should be challenged with relevant and exciting learning experiences, knowing that the journey will push them to both success and failure (Craft, 2011), in order to build the student-teacher relationship in class. The structures that teachers use to foster this sense of academic caring are crucial for success and ultimately these teacher behaviors help influence the perceived level of care students feel and impact their level of comfort and eventually their level of learning (Addison, 2012).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is expressed through how teachers care for students, regardless of what they teach. It can be expressed in the no-nonsense, structured classroom that demonstrates a sense of care to African-Americans as “warm-demanders” (Ware, 2006, p. 436),
in the relationship of “confianza” (Harris & Kiyama, 2013), or in the use of multicultural literature that expands a child’s educational opportunity to the highest potential (Goughnour, 2013). Literature in this area demands that students be exposed to a diverse repertoire of work that harnesses positive relationships and where student thought is pronounced.

Groulx and Silva (2010) assert that many teachers enter schools with a disconnect between their own backgrounds, diversity, and social classes and those of their students (Savage et al., 2011). The authors suggest that it is crucial for teachers to understand how dynamics of language, culture, privilege, prejudice, and economic equity affect learning and teaching, as well as recognize how their own backgrounds affect teaching perspectives (Savage et al., 2011). Therefore, teachers should respect and celebrate students’ cultural differences, holding high expectations for them and developing caring relationships with them. Groulx and Silva (2010) claim that potentially the best way to connect meaningful culturally responsive instruction is to provide experiences that will help shape the instructional work force and allow for authentic practice, guided by critical race theory (CRT).

A qualitative study by Garza (2009) focuses on Latino and White high school students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors that convey caring. Five dominant themes emerged from the research; these included how teachers provide scaffolding during a teaching episode, reflect a kind disposition through actions, are always available to the student, show a personal interest in the student’s well-being inside and outside the classroom, and provide affective academic support in the classroom setting (Savage et al., 2011). Responsive caring for students is a critical “source of motivation, especially for culturally diverse students who may be at risk of failing or who may be disengaged from schooling” (Garza, 2009, p. 102) and is perpetuated through intentional teacher behaviors that allow a student to flourish.
A qualitative study of African American urban teachers explored whether the traits, beliefs, and practices found in the review of the literature could also be identified in interviews and classroom observations (Ware, 2006; Sampson. & Garrison-Wade, 2010). Ware was specifically looking at how each teacher described her instructional practices and beliefs, what similarities and differences existed between the teachers’ practices and beliefs, and evidence that the shared cultural/ethnic background of teachers and students influenced instructional practices. Ware (2006) identified eight characteristics that focused around the idea of “warm demanders” or teachers who blended the ability to provide an ethic of care in their classrooms while acting as authority figures, disciplinarians, and caregivers, all to challenge their students to learn. Ware (2006) asserts that culturally responsive pedagogy may both impact a student’s overall achievement, as well as build trust and a positive relationship.

It is fundamental to understand the connection between cultural competence and relationships. Milner (2010) describes in his qualitative study a white science teacher who through his culturally responsive understanding of students of color is able to generate authentic interaction and productive learning. Yu (2013) asserts that teachers who are trying to allow for more self-directed learning with at-risk students must know their students’ ability levels, but also effectively support their learning by developing students’ skills to more critically reflect on their own learning. One of the significant impacts from this literature is the importance of pushing students academically, but with an ethic of care in mind. Teachers need to reinforce students’ capability, not just be unwilling to accept mediocrity. Teachers need to differentiate based on their students’ cultural background and understand that students learn in different ways. Roberts (2010) proposes that providing culturally responsive pedagogy is in many ways an act of caring.
behavior, perhaps rarely associated with traditional definitions of teacher care and compassion. Roberts labels this as “culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC)” (p. 451).

The most recent literature suggests the importance of students truly taking ownership of their learning. Prominent is the idea that students must be able to connect to their own learning by feeling empowered through their own voice, around issues relating to their community (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015). When students have the ability to introspectively assess themselves and see their work as “academic activism” (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015b), they are able to more meaningfully connect to the learning environment and subsequently become more academically successful. According to Guajardo et al. (2008), without a strong relationship with students who are of different cultures, teachers will be unable to impact positive change. For example, Guajardo describes how a student named Carmen developed into an “activist-researcher” and became empowered to understand her own cultural background and significance in such a manner that she seeks knowledge and a way to apply the knowledge she has gained for herself, but also for the greater good of the community (Guajardo et al., 2008). Milner similarly described a teacher, Mrs. Shaw, who felt committed to “serve” her students, by bringing about “change”, through their [students] “calling in life” (Milner, 2014, p. 12).

Culturally responsive pedagogy in an ethic of care provides “empowerment through care” (Johnson, 2014, p. 148) through a “commitment and connection to the larger community” (Johnson, 2014, p. 148). A culturally relevant context provides an authentic way for students to fundamentally relate to their own learning and become more engaged (Vega, Moore & Miranda, 2015), but it also helps to overcome the deficit model of thinking and demonstrates that our traditionally underrepresented students have valuable resources to share, specifically through their community stories (Guajardo et al., 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015).
Teacher Reflectivity, Intentionality & Efficacy

John Dewey (1904, 1910) asserts that reflection is the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1904, p. 6). Typically, one begins reflection “when an individual is perplexed or uncertain about an idea or situation and ends with a judgment” (Laboskey, 1993, p. 10). Throughout the process, the person works to identify the problem or issue, conceive several viable solutions, as well as plausible solutions (Laboskey, 1993; Perrone, 1989). Most critical to Dewey’s theory is the notion that:

“Reflection thus implies that something is believed in (or disbelieved in), not on its own direct account, but through something else which stands as witness, evidence, proof, voucher, warrant; that is, as ground of belief.... Thinking, for the purposes of this inquiry, is defined accordingly as that operation in which present facts suggest other facts (or truths) in such a way as to induce belief in the latter upon the ground or warrant of the former, (Dewey, 1904, p.8-9).”

Much of Dewey’s concepts are predicated on the belief that as we undergo the process of inquiry, we avoid rendering a decision and withhold judgement (Laboskey, 1993). This concept of “suspended conclusion” (Laboskey, 1993, p. 10) allows the participant an opportunity to thoughtfully process the reasoning and decisions made, with an emphasis on remaining alert, accommodating, and inquisitive throughout the process (Laboskey, 1993).

Dewey (1904 & 1910) was in fact a strong advocate of reflective teacher practice and education, believing that educators should strive to become "thoughtful and alert students of education," (Dewey, 1904, p. 151), instead of just proficient practitioners (Laboskey, 1993). Dewey asserts that "unless a teacher is such a student, he may continue to improve in the
mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life" (Dewey, 1904, p. 151).

Hullfish & Smith (1961) also state that "if young people do not learn to think while in school, it is fair to ask: How are they to keep on learning?" (p. 3). They assert that "true education is concerned with the steady, unremitting, progressive development of intelligence as revealed through an increasing capacity and disposition on the part of each individual to think" (Hullfish & Smith, 1961, p. 132). In fact, this very notion that we constantly strive to improve or “kaizen” is what where the reflective teacher education program arises from, giving credence to the idea that "it is but to state the obvious to note that those who intend to foster thought on the part of others must understand, first, the nature of thought and, second, how their own thought has been developed" (Hullfish & Smith, 1961, p. 216). Therefore, it is reasonable to state that the best teachers utilize the same metacognitive strategies for themselves, making sense of how and why they act the way they do, as they support their students’ learning. In order to teach their students how to think, teachers must be able to think for themselves and understand those thought processes (Laboskey, 1993). Therefore, as a school leader, it is imperative to help "teachers…learn to think while in school, [to ensure] they to keep on learning" (Hullfish & Smith, 1961, p. 210), emphasizing the importance of how language, culture, privilege, prejudice, and economic equity affect learning and teaching, while also remaining cognizant that their own backgrounds affect teaching perspectives (Savage et al., 2011).

Therefore, one must recognize that “reflection and passion in teaching are not mutually exclusive” (Laboskey, 1993, p. 11) and that highly effective teachers who are aware of how to improve their practice and introspectively recognize strategies that improve instruction also may empower “individuals to think, to be mindful, to make sense, and to reach beyond” (Greene,
This concept of teacher efficacy refers to the “collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities” (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190) and Greene (1986) asserts that this reflection process involves “emotions, passions, and as well as logical thinking processes” (Stanley, 1998, p. 584). In addition, Dewey’s (1910) “attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness that require teachers to examine multiple perspectives of their own and others’ beliefs and practices are essential to reflective action” (Stanley, 1998, p. 584), with the goal of ultimately impacting student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Schon’s (1983) framework discusses the process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, which delineates the way in which people implement the introspective process. Educators have focused on the “definitions of reflection, the processes of reflection, and, most recently, the investigation of evidence of reflection” (Stanley, 1998, p. 585) in order to better help teachers develop reflective practices that will allow teachers to refine their positive and productive teacher behaviors, which would hopefully lead to positive student outcomes (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Ross, 1992; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

This notion of reflectivity is intended to provide greater awareness of classroom decision-making and help educators become more aware of their practices outside of class (Duckworth, 1987; Perrone, 1989), thereby giving them the capacity to better respond in the heat of the moment and possibility change the instructional delivery or type of feedback provided to students (Stanley, 1998). Reflection allow a teacher to be more intentional in their instruction because they know what they are doing and why (Perry, 1998; Schon, 1983), helping them to
further become more effective and efficient as professionals (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984). This collective efficacy differs from individual efficacy, as collective is not just based on individual performance perceptions, but rather on beliefs that the entire faculty can improve their capability with a focus on reflection (Goddard et al., 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Despite that constructs are independent of each other, they nevertheless do influence one another in reciprocal ways (Goddard & Goddard, 2001), as “teachers with a low sense of individual self-efficacy might perform differently in a low collective efficacy environment as opposed to a high one, and vice-versa” (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p.191).

“The process of developing of a reflective teaching practice can be represented as a series of phases: (a) engaging with reflection, (b) thinking reflectively, (c) using reflection, (d) sustaining reflection, and (e) practicing reflection” (Stanley, 1998, p.585), but not necessarily in that particular order. This process is profoundly important because by influencing teacher behaviors, “collective efficacy beliefs influence student achievement” (Goddard et al., 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p.191). “The collective teacher efficacy of a school organization influences how teachers instruct students, manage their classrooms, and motivate students. Collective teacher efficacy influences student achievement because greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which results in better performance” (Allinder, 1994; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gusky, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988).

As educators, there is tremendous significance in this work, because we must become increasingly aware of how cultural differences play out in how students receive information and instructional delivery from their teacher. This process of reflecting on how to be culturally responsive and show care toward students is crucial and can ultimately impact the way students learn by way of the success of the teacher’s practices. If teachers are not reflective of their
practices and behaviors, they miss the importance of being intentional (Schon, 1983) when they communicate with students (Groulx and Silva, 2010), as well as recognizing how their own backgrounds affect teaching perspectives (Savage et al., 2011).

**Chapter Summary**

There are three themes that emerged from this review: culturally responsive teaching, ethic of care in the classroom, and reflection, awareness and efficacy, all of which may impact student learning. These ideas have evolved over the past few decades, with the initial focus being on the idea that with better professional development and the right training (Rodriguez, 2010), teachers can become more aware and focused on culturally responsive and caring teaching. Additionally, throughout this time period, there were increasing discussions about how poor relationships with students effectively rendered teachers powerless in their ability to impact positive change and success.

Most recently emerging among educators are calls to empower students, regardless of their cultural background, to become “academic activists” (Guajardo 2015) in their own community and with regard to their own localized issues, allowing them to make their own learning more meaningful and purposeful. This more holistic approach synthesizes the work of previous scholars, suggesting that “care” is demonstrated by a deliberate and intentional understanding of all cultures, a sincere relationship of respect and responsibility between the student and the teacher, and an authentic voice and perspective afforded to students, allowing them to have ownership in the “great work” that matters to them (Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015), giving rise to social consciousness and not just test performance.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to impact change in turnaround schools within Hillsborough County, it is important to explore the behaviors highly effective teachers use in their classrooms to affect student learning, in particular, potentially culturally responsive and caring behaviors that shape the learning environment and ultimately affect student learning. Additionally, in order to understand how teachers’ think about their practice and ways to help leaders provide coaching and support to other teachers, it is useful to capture the intentions of highly effective teachers and how they reflect on their decisions in the classroom.

This study explored ways teachers reflect on teaching behaviors that contribute to a positive classroom environment through the ethic of care and culturally responsive practices, potentially having a positive impact on students of color and those on free and reduced price lunch (FRPL). These behaviors remain fundamental to creating a caring culture in their classrooms, thereby empowering students to feel engaged and productive in the classroom environment.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways do teachers reflect on culturally responsive behaviors they use in their classrooms?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their level of care in the classroom?
Background of the Study

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) currently serve over 215,000 students, with over 15,000 certified teachers and 25,000 full-time staff (HCPS, 2018). HCPS is the eighth-largest school district in the country with over 250 schools (HCPS, 2018). The enrollment by race/ethnicity is approximately 33% white, 36% Hispanic, 21% Black, 4% Asian, and 6% Multiracial (HCPS, 2018). Sixty-three percent of all students are on FRPL (HCPS, 2018). Roughly 12% of all students are English Language Learners (ELL), and the district graduation rate for 2016-2017 was 82.9% with over 11,000 students graduating (HCPS, 2018).

Issues of inequity and disparity within the district became even more prominent when the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (HCPS, 2015) began investigating a complaint of alleged discrimination against African-American students, stating they are subjected to harsher punishment than white students and that black students are denied access to certified teachers in Title I schools. As a result, there were efforts made throughout the district to provide additional support for struggling, high-need schools. Several programs were created, including a partnership with the University of South Florida that focused on an Educational Specialist program in School Turnaround. Because of this program, I began exploratory research into how these high-need schools could benefit from having culturally responsive, highly effective teachers on staff to build relationships with students, create positive learning experiences for students, and ultimately improve students’ learning environment.

Exploring this work is significant because while HCPS has made a concerted effort to build strong school culture (HCPS, 2018), little work has been done to identify specific ways that principals can provide guidance and leadership in the arena of focusing teachers to be more cognizant of culturally responsive and caring behaviors in their classrooms. The potential for
this work to further reduce both the achievement gap and the challenges the OCR has identified with behavior, are critical to both HCPS and my school. Much of the conversation that is taking place currently is about equity, which is a crucial piece, but missing within the context of this conversation is the need to differentiate based on students’ individual needs.

I studied seven teachers at ABC Middle School, who are rated highly effective by state rating, on a researcher developed rubric, that was conducted by the leadership team, focusing on those who establish an ethic of care and utilize culturally responsive practices to build positive relationships with predominantly minority and lower performing students and those who qualify for free and reduced price lunch. By exploring the level of reflectivity these teachers who are currently utilizing culturally responsive and caring behaviors, this study informed my practice on what actions may positively impact classroom culture and ultimately benefit student learning, by improving professional practice.

**Teacher Evaluation in Hillsborough County**

The current teacher evaluation instrument in HCPS consists of a principal evaluation and a value-added measure (VAM). The district’s teacher observation system is based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (2007). The framework consists of four Domains, each with five to six components of teaching: Domain 1 Planning and Preparation; Domain 2 Classroom Environment; Domain 3 Instruction; and Domain 4 Professional Responsibilities. Teachers receive ratings on each of the components in the four domains. The ratings fall on a continuum of Required Action, Progressing, Accomplished, and Exemplary. The value added score (maximum 40 points) is based on three years of student test results. Teachers are provided a yearly written evaluation score that is generated from observations and feedback from
the principal, as well as a VAM score that is tabulated from comparable achievement scores within a teacher’s comparable demographic group. Therefore, teachers are compared to other teachers who have a similar demographic group of students, teaching the same course. Once the VAM score and written score are combined, teachers are given an overall evaluation score.

The School

ABC Middle School is located in Southern Hillsborough County, FL in a quickly burgeoning area that is experiencing rapid growth in housing. The school had been identified as a Title 1 school until 2016, at which time the rate of FRPL dropped below the 67% FRPL threshold, until the 2018 school year, where the FRPL rate increased to 72% (HCPS, 2018). The school currently has 1,325 students enrolled and the demographic make-up is 40% white, 29% Hispanic, 21% Black, and 3% Asian (HCPS, 2018).

The school has been facing additional political and community pressure from neighboring charter schools, as parents now see many alternatives to the traditional public school. In fact, with the recent addition of a K-8 charter school directly across from ABC, the total number of schools that now compete for student enrollment with ABC totals eight schools within a 10-15-mile radius (HCPS, 2018).

I had served as principal of ABC since October 2016. I have been intentional about creating a leadership team that is student focused, with a lens on how to improve instruction and build a positive learning environment. The Leadership Team is comprised of three Assistant Principals, 3 Guidance counselors, 2 ESE Specialists, Social Worker, and Reading Coach. The Leadership Team will use a literature derived rubric that assesses the frequency of specific
teacher behaviors that are developed from the literature and aligned to the characteristics of ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy, helping to select the teachers for my study.

Since my arrival at ABC, I had worked with my team to create an emphasis on planning and teaching to the complexity of the Florida Standards. I had spent a great deal of time developing professional development around the importance of supporting teachers in their development of lessons, so that classrooms remain engaging, exciting and full of learning opportunities. In addition, I had worked with my Leadership Team to develop programs that will encourage positive behavior and a collegial culture for both the students and staff. The Leadership Team implemented Positive Behavior Incentive Program (PBIS) at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year and subsequently the rate of referrals has declined. Furthermore, we have seen academic performance increase since the inception of PBIS, with more of our students maintaining at least an 80% average in all their classes, from the prior year. Moreover, this work has translated into an increase in the overall Florida Performance Rating, with ABC gaining an average of 74 points this past year in Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and End-of-Course Exam (EOC).

ABC for many years has been stigmatized as middle to low socioeconomic school, with little parental involvement. Consequently, many of the tenured teachers at the school have become conditioned to believe that they can say and treat students however they want, with little regard to negative consequences or parental response. I had spent a great deal of time addressing professional behavioral concerns that have occurred inside the classroom and appropriately documented these with Professional Standards. Unfortunately, there has been little situational awareness and accountability of how the students of ABC deserve the same level of dignity and respect that any other student deserves or even how we may treat our own children until recently.
Thus, many of the prescribed interactions and teacher behaviors may not be associated with best practices for treating students with an ethic of care or in a culturally responsive manner.

Many teachers have been hired over the past two years at ABC, with approximately 50 new teachers being hired during this period. Many of these teachers, who have been rated highly effective from their previous administration, are transfers from other schools. The overall teacher faculty consists of 93 teachers, with the following ethnic breakdown: 12-Hispanic, 65-White, 16-Black, with 65 female and 28 male teachers. In addition, out of 93 teachers, 18 are out-of-field. Approximately 28 teachers have been teaching for 1-5 years, 20 teachers for 6-12 years, and 28 teachers have been teaching for 13 years or more. These numbers do not include additional staff members who are instructional, but not roster bearing (guidance, social worker, psychologist, etc.), as well as vacancies still unfilled.

As of June 2019, I am no longer the principal of ABC Middle School, as the IRB had concerns with my position and the potential to influence the study or exercise coercion over the participating teachers; thus, I left my post and resigned from the district.

**Teacher Evaluation at the School**

With so many teachers being replaced over the past three years, I was eager to see how teachers reflect on their behaviors toward students, through a culturally responsive and caring lens. With an understanding that intentionality begins with reflection, I offered teachers an opportunity to deepen their insight on culturally responsive pedagogical practices and caring behaviors. While the Danielson model (2007) places emphasis on reflection in 4th domain (4A), little discussion on teachers’ awareness and intentionality or consciousness in how they interact with students is explored. Part of my study examined how teachers build trust and a positive
classroom culture, through the ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy, as the Danielson (2007) system of observation and evaluation in the district focuses very little on the need to develop an ethic of care, culturally responsive pedagogy, and build meaningful relationships with students, thus possibly impacting their ability to learn and successfully understand the content being delivered. My intention was to improve my overall practice as a principal, focusing on issues that are local and immediate to my school and perhaps gaining some insight on how to offer guidance to teachers who have a diverse, heterogeneous group of students.

This work is significant to me as a building principal because it better informed my ability to provide professional development and coaching as I work with teachers. While I cannot replicate or duplicate the work of these effective teachers I studied, this study was intended to help me better assist other teachers who are looking to implement responsive pedagogical practices and exercise an ethic of care in their classrooms and more directly impact the learning for students. As time progresses, this study may hold the key to uncovering how to reduce the achievement gap that we see in schools, perhaps providing insight into the idea that it is not only fundamental that we teach rigorous material, but also how we connect with students along the way.

**Research Design**

This was a qualitative study, using purposive sampling to identify seven teachers, from a sample size of over 27 highly effective rated teachers, who could participate in one-one-one transcribed, structured interviews. The seven teachers studied were at ABC Middle School, all rated highly effective by state rating, and selected by a researcher developed rubric that was conducted by the Leadership Team, focusing on those who establish an ethic of care and utilize culturally responsive practices to build positive relationships with predominantly minority and
lower performing students and those who qualify for free and reduced price lunch. By exploring the level of reflectivity those teachers who are currently utilizing culturally responsive and caring behaviors, this study informed my practice on what actions may positively impact classroom culture and ultimately benefit student learning, by improving professional practice.

The study was conducted by interviewing selected highly effective teachers and identifying practices that are closely associated with an ethic of care and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010, p. 31; Warren, 2018; Roberts, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995), identifying their level of reflectivity. Seven teachers were identified by the leadership team, using an aggregate method based on the highest rubric ratings. These teachers were then contacted by the researcher, a USF doctoral student and given parameters to help them decide if they would like to participate. The subjects who agreed, were contacted via Zoom video conferencing and asked a standard series of questions that asked about their level of reflectivity in the domains of ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. The study explored whether their perceived teacher behaviors were aligned to the domains of ethic of care and culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 305 characterize these teacher dispositions as those which “may not be disconnected, isolated teacher moves”, but rather “represent (a) visible patterns in behavior demonstrated by teachers as they are interacting with individual students, (b) their priorities with (certain groups of) youth, and (c) the habits of mind that drive other aspects of their professional decision-making” (Warren, 2018, p. 172).

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways do teachers reflect on culturally responsive behaviors they use in their classrooms?

2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their level of care in the classroom?
Participant Selection Criteria

The Selection Rubric located in the appendices was created as a method for objectively selecting the teachers for this study. The rubric was created from the literature on Ethic of Care and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and aligns to the Questioning Protocol that is also listed in the appendices of the study.

The concept of the Ethic of Care in the classroom focuses on the notion that with intentional and deliberate actions and an awareness of students’ backgrounds, teachers can create a positive, caring learning classroom for students. This concept combines the literature of Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; McCollum, 2014; Noddings 1984, 1988 by discussing the importance of differentiating for various learner needs, along with an understanding of how students want to be treated.

The domain of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy centers on a teacher’s ability to utilize certain practices that help students connect with their classroom and the learning experience, usually specific to students of color. This domain is an evolution from culturally relevant curriculum, as it is grounded in students’ perspective (Roberts, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995), providing application and meaning for students, along with an intersection of caring behavior in the classroom. In this study, the term culturally responsive pedagogy will be used to imply an understanding of both care and cultural awareness.

On the Selection Rubric, the domain ethic of care emerges from the literature and can be classified under the constructs: 1) student’s trust 2) teacher respect 3) teacher’s care.

On the Selection Rubric, the domain, culturally responsive pedagogy, can be classified under the constructs: 1) appreciative language 2) empowering students 3) student voice and 4) student ownership.
The following behaviors coincide with each of these research domains:

**Ethic of Care**

**Student Trust**- Derived from the students’ perceived level of care from a teacher and asserts that a true ethic of care is generated from an inclination to assist and support students’ learning with positive behavior feedback (Noddings, 1984, 2013).

**Teacher Respect**- Recognizing positive academic responses from students and utilizing students’ names when asking questions and providing feedback (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018) allows the students to feel connected with their teachers by feeling respected and listened to, particularly in how they are addressed by name.

**Teacher Care**- A focus on building meaningful relationships with students (Noddings, 2013, 2018), recognizing that teachers should use caring as a “lens through which all practices are examined” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172) and focusing on ways to challenge students to think (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008) and stay focused on learning.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

**Appreciative language**- Avoiding a deficit response to students by providing positive behavior management corrections, instead of negative (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2008).

**Empowering students**- Students being allowed to choose their assignments, groupings, or how they complete activities, giving them ownership in the learning process (Gay, 2010; Goughnour, 2013; Harris & Kiyama, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995; Roberts, 2010; Warren, 2018).
Student voice and ownership—Students sharing personal stories or connecting to the learning with experiences that help students understand better who they are and organizing students in successfully structured cooperative activities that allow for true student voice to be heard and then reaffirmed and shared by their peers (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015; Roberts, 2010; Vega, Moore & Miranda, 2015; Yu, 2013).

In order to be eligible for this study, teachers must have earned an overall evaluation rating of “highly effective” (n=27) on the State VAM system. The Leadership Team, comprised of three Assistant Principals, three Guidance counselors, two ESE Specialists, Social Worker, and Reading Coach, all whom received the list of teachers eligible to participate in this study by an administrator on the team and carefully rated the frequency of the teacher behaviors, in order to generate a sample size of approximately eight to twelve (8-12) teachers. Each member of the Leadership Team rated the provided list of teachers individually and the doctoral student then sorted the list, based on the highest number of points, in order to generate the potential subjects. The Leadership Team had conducted many walk-through observations and already played a critical role in identifying teachers who are highly regarded throughout the school in other capacities, as they were aware of who had an ability to build meaningful relationships with all students and avoid classroom disruptions because they exercise effective classroom management. By using collective inquiry from my Leadership Team and the research designed rubric, I avoided creating any personal concern for someone not selected and also accessed an informed expert perspective within the school. All classes selected should be racially balanced, with a representative level of SES distribution across all classrooms, as this is set-up through the construction of the master schedule.
Privacy

Privacy of all participants is protected. Participants were not known by the principal, but rather nominated from the Leadership Team, using the research designed rubric. A USF doctoral student not affiliated with HCPS or Eisenhower MS facilitated the study. This person had been trained in IRB interviewing procedures and recently conducted research for his dissertation and had a copy of all IRB forms. All interviews were transcribed using a third party service, Landmark Transcription, and the principal only received the transcribed, redacted interviews with pseudonyms (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.) to identify the subjects. All interviews were done through Zoom video conferencing and once all interviews were uploaded to the transcription service, all original interviews were destroyed. The principal investigator only received the redacted transcripts, with no teacher names and all analysis was conducted after leaving the principalship. In the appendices is the selection rubric, which was created to identify the teachers whom the Leadership Team thinks utilize culturally responsive and caring behaviors in their classroom. Each individual teacher behavior was rated on a 5-point scale (5-1) and the total points indicated were recorded at the bottom of the page.

Data Collection-Questioning Protocol

In reading literature on culturally responsive teaching, ethic of care and demonstrating caring behaviors, and reflective teaching, I noticed that aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy are not assessed in the district’s current evaluation model, e.g., celebration of differences and equity, student voice, and student empowerment and ownership of their learning (Guajardo et al., 2008). Furthermore, because the aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy intersect with the ethic of care, it prompted me to develop a questioning protocol that explores behaviors and
actions the teachers may use that better create and sustain meaningful relationships with students and an environment where all students can be successful. The protocol developed combined the concepts that Noddings (1988), Caldwell & Sholtis (2008) and Guajardo et al. (2008) expressed were fundamental strategies teachers use in their classrooms to build meaningful and sustainable relationships with students, specifically exploring how teachers leverage student strengths (Pink, 2009), empowering them in their own learning by giving them choice and a voice to understand the issues that exist in their community (Guajardo et al., 2008). This concept embodies the essence of culturally relevant curriculum, but then makes it applicable and meaningful through specific behaviors that allow for students to take ownership of their own learning (Ladson-Billing, 2009).

The protocol continued with additional pieces that also intersect within the ethic of care in classroom culture, focusing on how the students are challenged in their learning systems by their “warm demander[s]” teachers (Ware, 2006, p. 436) and given the space to have intellectual conversations among each other (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008), promoting the importance of flexibility and providing content that is meaningful and actionable (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008).

The purpose of my questioning was to explain my research questions: 1) In what ways do teachers reflect on culturally responsive behaviors? 2) In what ways do teachers reflect on the sense or level of care in the classroom?

Teachers were asked to reflect on the decisions they make in their classrooms, assessing ways their use of cultural responsiveness & ethic of care (Gay, 2010; Warren, 2018; Roberts, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995) are beneficial to students and how. Transcriptions from these conversations were used to derive the commonality between the various teachers whom are selected, identifying common practices or behaviors that allow students to feel connected to their
learning environment, through the lens of care in the classroom and remaining culturally responsive to students’ needs.

This exploration of reflection heightens sensitivity to students’ moods, engagement, understanding and confusion (Medina, 2008), thus making them more accommodating to the students’ learning and more discerning, analytic, and insightful about their practice (Danielson, 2007). Therefore, my effort was focused on how reflective teachers care about their behaviors and decisions toward students and their intentionality with those behaviors, recognizing that there may be a clear level of intent, but perhaps the awareness may not be clearly aligned to caring behavior and cultural responsiveness, regardless of whether they are familiar with the terminology or not.

The domain ethic of care emerges from the literature and can be classified under the constructs: 1) student’s trust 2) teacher respect 3) teacher’s care.

The following behaviors coincide with each of these research domains:

**Ethic of Care**

**Student Trust**-Derived from the students’ perceived level of care from a teacher and asserts that a true ethic of care is generated from an inclination to assist and support students’ learning with positive behavior feedback (Noddings, 1984, 2013).

**Teacher Respect**- Recognizing positive academic responses from students and utilizing students’ names when asking questions and providing feedback (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell &
Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018) allows the students to feel connected with their teachers by feeling respected and listened to, particularly in how they are addressed by name.

**Teacher Care**- A focus on building meaningful relationships with students (Noddings, 2013, 2018), recognizing that teachers should use caring as a “lens through which all practices are examined” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172) and focusing on ways to challenge students to think (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008) and stay focused on learning.

The domain, culturally responsive pedagogy, can be classified under the constructs: 1) appreciative language 2) empowering students 3) student voice and 4) student ownership.

The following behaviors coincide with each of these research domains:

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

**Appreciative language**- Avoiding a deficit response to students by providing positive behavior management corrections, instead of negative (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2008).

**Empowering students**- Students being allowed to choose their assignments, groupings, or how they complete activities, giving them ownership in the learning process (Gay, 2010; Goughnour, 2013; Harris & Kiyama, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995; Roberts, 2010; Warren, 2018).

**Student voice and ownership**- Students sharing personal stories or connecting to the learning with experiences that help students understand better who they are and organizing students in successfully structured cooperative activities that allow for true student voice to be heard and
then reaffirmed and shared by their peers (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015; Roberts, 2010; Vega, Moore & Miranda, 2015; Yu, 2013).

The purpose of this questioning protocol was to explore whether the research on how to build culturally responsive and caring classrooms for all students, but specifically students of color and those on FRPL, is consistent with those teachers’ reflections and intentions, specifically because they were identified as having characteristics of a culturally responsive and caring teacher, who is also deemed “highly effective”.

Some assumptions that I am made by utilizing this prescribed questioning protocol is that these highly effective teachers selected for this study, knowingly utilize these behaviors in their classes. While the research clearly indicates that these specific teacher behaviors positively contribute to the classroom environment, there was a possibility other teacher behaviors that were not intentionally identified would emerge.

In the appendices is the questioning protocol that I created to capture the level of teacher reflectiveness and explore their level of intentionality on culturally responsive and caring behaviors.

**Data Analysis**

My data analysis consisted of reading the various interviews of the teachers who participated in the study and exploring their level of awareness, with respect to culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care. I used Creswell’s (2003, 2013) framework to qualitative data to organize my data analysis: organize and prepare the data, reflect on the data, code and organize the data, describe and summarize the data by 1) identifying relationships between teachers, 2) comparing the questioning protocol results across the various teachers, 3) identifying the differences and similarities between the teachers, and 4) forecasting outcomes and potential implications.
1) I began by organizing data, specifically making note of connections to teacher practices that coincide with culturally responsive and caring behaviors. These results were captured across all the teachers and I looked for specific practices that may have occurred more frequently or perhaps note that none of the responses coincided with culturally responsive pedagogy or the ethic of care, as well as record unexpected and/or idiosyncratic behaviors. For example, when I examined question two and looked for commonality across all the teachers, I recognized that many of the teachers wanted to empower their students through the learning process, allowing them struggle independently or even with a peer before they interject and directly give students help.

2) I then identified the relationships between the teachers’ responses in the questioning protocol and the practices that are aligned to the research. I described and summarized the data based on the responses and practices that are emphasized most frequently, looking for similarities between the teachers who are aligned to the protocol and intended behaviors. Specifically, in question five I read that many of the teachers challenged students’ thinking by asking them to explain their reasoning and support when they respond to questions, as well as consistently ask students higher order questions. These are both examples of ways teachers utilize the ethic of care and embrace culturally responsive pedagogy, regardless of whether they are using that terminology themselves or not.

3) I then identified the differences between various teachers, citing specifics about how they differ from the practices and behaviors associated with culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care. This disparity was extremely evident in question 15, where teachers cited numerous barrier to showing care, ranging from time restrictions to poor student behavior.

4) Lastly, I looked for trends across the data, associated with the teachers’ level of reflection and awareness of the various strategies they used. This level of intentionality was
generated from the questioning with the teachers, examining their reasoning in the use of such pedagogical strategies and their awareness of whether these specific actions positively impact students. I looked for examples of care and cultural responsiveness, as demonstrated by the literature and evidenced by the teacher responses, possibly providing deeper knowledge of the teacher’s perspective and gaining insight on whether the teacher is aware and cognizant of his/her practices, therefore demonstrating their level of reflectivity and introspection, possibly generating long-term trends, implications and opportunities to inform as a current school principal. For example, in question seven and eight, many of the teachers cited similar approaches to modifying student behavior, explaining that they use some type of appreciative, asset-based approach, like redirecting students, focusing on the positive behavior of others, and PBIS incentives. All of these strategies are types of culturally responsive pedagogy and informed me that there were commonalities in teacher approaches, which aligned to the research literature.

**Researcher Perspective**

Many critics argue that with the current status and restrictions of the collective bargaining unions, little effect can occur that will inspire sincere change. Duke (2015) suggests that without changes to personnel, long-term initiatives may struggle for succession and principals very often find themselves in turbulent times as a result. Therefore, I would argue that as I attempt to innovate at my school, I strongly must consider whom I need to lift this work. Having the right personnel onboard of any new idea is critical, but especially as a new principal looking to raise student achievement.

I have already begun the work of collaboration at my site, focusing on ways to have teachers develop ownership in the decisions being made at the school. I am very conscientious to
involve the subject area leaders in the hiring practices and scheduling, to ensure they feel their voice and input is heard. Additionally, I strive to utilize the effort of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) in a positive manner that will drive instruction and allow the fundamental decisions that advance student achievement to take shape. Whether we are focusing on how to make lesson planning more transparent or increase awareness of standards driven instruction, I allow the conversations to take place around the needs, attitudes, and behaviors of the teachers.

I strive to embrace the various values my staff possesses and foster their growth as Clifton (2016) suggests good managers do, instead of stifling it. Furthermore, I have spent the last year conducting on-going professional development at ABC that focuses on planning with the intention of creating collaborative lessons for students. Many teachers have expressed the importance of having their students engaged in meaningful conversations and discussions in class, but with little knowledge of how to implement these ideas, the practice of providing exemplar lessons and demo classrooms became mainstream.

With this being said, the teachers are ready for increased collaboration and while attaining an official grant for a collaboratorium would be amazing, we also have enough resources to implement these ideas on our own. I moved 6th grade back to teaming, and thus there will be a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary planning already, but with a careful, systematic and simple approach to how technology can truly increase collaboration, and the right set of teachers willing to participate, we can slowly push the boundaries of traditionally siloed curricular standards and subjects.
**Researcher Positionality**

I recognize that there is an implied bias that exists for me, as I am both a researcher and practitioner. As a result, the identified teachers whom were viable candidates were done in spite of my experiences and role as a school principal, although their performance is validated by the performance of the students and the Leadership Team, a factor that I do not have direct influence over. All data collected was done by an outside researcher, ensuring privacy for all research subjects.

**Validation Strategies**

Utilizing Creswell’s’ (2000, 2003) strategies for validation, I began my research with the notion of prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, in order to identify effective teachers from an objective source, triangulating the four sources of information described above (Creswell, 2000), thereby applying predefined criteria to select teacher effectiveness. This triangulation ensured that the criteria used to select the teachers, including the Leadership Team and overall data, match the level of performance sought after. The previous collective experiences of the Leadership Team and their knowledge of classroom walk-throughs and observations, make them an excellent source for generating the list of viable teachers and effectively rating them.

I am also applying the peer review and debriefing strategy (Creswell, 2000, 2003) by allowing the Leadership Team a role in rating and selecting the appropriate teachers to study. This group of professionals will hold me accountable for selecting teacher peers who truly embody the ascribed characteristics.
Assumptions, Limitation and Delimitations

Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. The data provided by district reports and data systems were accurate and current.
2. The consensus of the leadership team and the teachers they chose are of high pedagogical ability.
3. The perspectives shared by the teachers participating in the study are honest and represent their true perceptions of their teaching practice.

Limitations

While this study is employing commonly utilized data in order to determine highly effective teachers, some critics may suggest that those measures are not indicative of highly effective teachers, particularly to students of color. Furthermore, this study cannot be generalized to other classrooms within ABC Middle School, but more importantly to other schools within the district. Moreover, the number of participants chosen for this study is from a limited selection of criteria and thus is also not generalizable. I am also the researcher myself and have developed the protocol as the school principal, thus limiting my perspective in the application of this research.

Delimitations

This study is limited to schools within Hillsborough County, Florida, focusing specifically on one school, ABC Middle School. The study only looked at a small sampling of seven teachers, specifically selected in this one school and while the study is not generalizable because of the specific criteria selected, it is also extremely utilitarian by design, as the selection
criteria for the study is commonly used to assess the quality of instruction and thus more likely to inform instructional practice.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the specific study that occurred in order to identify whether highly effective teachers, with strong classroom culture are engaging in behaviors that reinforce this positive evidence. Furthermore, the study helped to reveal whether these teachers are aware of the behaviors that the research suggests have a positive effect on building positive relationships with students. This chapter explains the limitations and bias that exists as this study is conducted and the hope is that it will generate long term implications for teacher practice.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

Chapter four serves as a forum to discuss my findings from the various interviews that were conducted on teachers’ reflectivity on culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care in the classroom. There were a total of seven participating teachers in the study and all were kept anonymous. This chapter will explain the major findings for each participant, as well as explain any trends that were seen throughout all the interviews. Furthermore, this chapter will outline any perspectives that were not initially surveyed, as well as outlying ideas shared. While the secondary researcher who conducted the research never used the words “culturally responsive pedagogy or ethic of care” in his questioning, the questions themselves are inherent of the behaviors that the literature suggests embody culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care. However, this does not remove the possibility that new ideas and perspectives that were not originally intended to analyze will emerge.

Participants

Seven teachers were selected for this study, based on the literature generated rubric that was completed by the various leadership team members. All of the participants were contacted via zoom by the secondary researcher and only the redacted transcripts were given to me for review. Therefore, there are no descriptions of grade level or subject for the participating teachers, as this was required by IRB. All teacher subjects are referred to with a female pronoun, as this makes the description more consistent.
Teacher 1-Ms. Susan

Ethic of Care-Student Trust

This teacher spoke quite often in her interview about trust and student empowerment. She stated that she provides them latitude to be in the classroom by themselves during breakfast time, as a way to build their confidence and let them see she trusts them, even though she is only “10 feet away.” Ms. Susan also spoke about how she empowers students to struggle through questions and learning tasks on their own, before she provides assistance, promoting trust through the ethic of care. The teacher describes how students are not allowed to talk to her until she removes the “pink boa”, stating “which sounds ridiculous, but it’s a visual clue that they have to try it themselves first.” The teacher implies that student trust is granted through this process, but gives no specific responses that confirm students now have developed a deeper sense of trust because of these strategies. Incidentally, there is also little confirmation that the sense of belief in success from the teacher (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008) is existent from the teacher’s responses.

Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect

Interestingly, this teacher states that while she knows it is better to give specific praise to students, she usually defaults to very generic feedback, like “oh, good job; you got it”. Ms. Susan explains that it is likely a “part of my culture, my age” as a method of deflecting her lack of follow-through, we do see that the teacher recognizes that benefit of specific praise instead of generic feedback, thus showing at least some level of reflectivity. Moreover, despite knowing that using students’ names is critical because it lets them know that they are valued by the teacher, Ms. Susan acknowledges that she does not always use their names and sometimes “slip[s] and says “okay hon”. This teacher appears to be rather forthright in her responses, openly acknowledging that
she understands why it is best practice to refer to students with their proper name, but also confessing that this is not always utilized.

Ms. Susan also discusses student empowerment, but not in relation to the direct question that was asked. Ms. Susan explains that she recognizes students who correctly respond to academic questions by allowing those students who master concepts quicker than others to lead small group discussions and support other students. Interestingly, this response indicates a greater level of awareness to how students may feel if empowered, perhaps with even a greater impact than simply saying whether their response is correct or incorrect, or even with the language used to deliver such a response. Ms. Susan suggests that her students see value when they are endowed with the responsibility to lead their peers.

**Ethic of Care-Teacher Care**

Ms. Susan explains that how she uses challenging questioning, specifically open-ended questions where she will ask them to “explain what they’re thinking or why do you think that way”, in order to ensure students can “explain how they got their answer.” This response illustrates a level of reflectivity that the teacher has, explaining that in addition to her level of questioning being significant, the students also must demonstrate their reasoning and show their thinking process, giving the teacher even more opportunity to provide feedback and keep students engaged. This teacher also provided an interesting response when she was asked how she keeps students focused on learning. Ms. Susan responded stated that she provides students with brain breaks that allow the students to have fun. She mentions “goofy brain breaks” where students “stand up and dance”. She even says there is one called “Do the Sid” from the movie Ice Age. This response from the teacher shows that she is aware that students may lose interest in a topic or even the
process of learning, especially as middle school students, and therefore proactively gives them a chance to get their “energy out.”, showing a level of care for students, despite not using this terminology. Furthermore, the concept of fun is rarely discussed in literature on ethic of care, but generally implies that when students are enjoying the learning process, they are more likely reaping the benefits.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language*

Ms. Susan is also extremely cognizant that students may be having a “rough day” and again, being proactive she anticipates this and plans appropriately. The teacher explains how she offers interventions like “puzzles or kinesthetic sand” to allow students to calm down in a situation where they have made a poor choice. The teacher states that she never “yell[s] at a kid in front of everybody” and asks them to step outside for a minute so she can ask them privately what happened. She adds that yelling at students in front of their peers only makes them “wanna retaliate, and it just escalates.” The teacher clearly demonstrates a level of empathy and reflection by ensuring that students are always treated in a respectful manner. In fact, Ms. Susan conveys that she has previously confronted students in class and had negative results, hence why she now knows it is best to discipline privately. In addition, this teacher discusses how she empowers students with projects and jobs in her classroom, like “file[ing] papers”, so they feel successful, especially when they earn positive rewards through programs like PBIS. Both of these responses reflect a consciousness toward culturally responsive pedagogy and providing appreciative or positive opportunities, as well as respect through the ethic of care. In fact, Ms. Susan points out that she can have students in her class behave very well because she provides positive learning options for them, where in other classes the students are a constant behavior issue and the “teacher
is pulling their hair out.” Incidentally, it appears that Ms. Susan very often prevents discipline issues through her strategy of empowerment, recognizing that when students feel valued and appreciated, they often avoid negative or destructive behaviors they may use in other classrooms.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Empowerment**

While these questions were centered around academic empowerment, it seems clear that Ms. Susan already identified several ways she empowers her students through leadership opportunities and even behavior management. In this instance, Ms. Susan also points out that she offers her students choice in how they work (groups) and which assignments they can complete. She states that students have options of which online computer programs they want to select on “Brightfish” and they can have choice as well in whether they want to work in groups or individually. The teacher mentions that she limits the number of choices, using a “tic-tac-toe board” to avoid the options from becoming overwhelming. Interestingly, the teacher feels that too many choices would be detrimental to students and states that “instead of having nine activities to choose from, I only give ‘em three.” The teacher shows a level of reflection in this statement by reducing the number of options students have to limit off-task behavior or perhaps even a feeling of being overwhelmed with choice. Ms. Susan also points out that allowing students to submit homework or assignments past their deadline is another way she accommodates them and provides flexibility. She says that “most of my kids are ESE and have extended time, but often puts a zero in the gradebook to motivate them. The teacher clarifies that she never says “I’m not taking it late, I always take it late. Once I put a zero in the gradebook, and they see that, it usually motivates them pretty fast.” In addition, the teacher also says that the word “homework inspires fear”, so she will clarify that if students do not get the work done in
class, they will have to complete it later. Interestingly, this seems to motivate Ms. Susan’s students and they feel empowered to stay engaged in class, giving them options on how they complete assignments, therefore motivating them.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership**

The last part of the interview the teacher explains that she wants students to have voice in class, specifically mentioning that students get to decide if a formal observation of the teacher is permissible by them. Ms. Susan states that if students are not comfortable with this visit, it could negatively impact their performance, thus she gives them some decision-making ability. This seemingly innocuous decision to ask students their preference, seems to pay dividends for the teacher, because not only is their opinion asked for, but valued. Ms. Susan also explains that she hangs up lots of student work to showcase what they have accomplished, thereby making the classroom “a little bit more personal to them.” The teacher also explains that as students read in class, they often refer to previous life experiences that connect to the literature, giving them a point of connection for what is occurring. She explains there is a protocol to how they must share in class, but this concept of sharing personal information seems more appropriate for a reading or English class because it directly connects to the learning. The teacher also explains that she utilizes peer feedback quite often in writing and essays, giving students an opportunity to work “together as a unit, and be positive with each other.” There seems to be value placed in this process of student voice and ownership, tying directly back to the domain of culturally responsive pedagogy.
Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment

Throughout the remainder of the interview, Ms. Susan expresses her level of care and concern for the students on numerous occasions. She discusses the importance of never giving up on a challenging student and letting him see how she cares for his well-being. The teacher states that “I fall in love with 100 new students” every year, but that “time” is an element that makes getting to know them difficult. She also discusses the value of PBIS and how this helps to continue keeping students and faculty motivated on what is positive and right, even during difficult, critical times of the year. Ms. Susan seems to demonstrate a level of tenacity and grit when she talks about ways that she can help them overcome the roadblocks of testing, as these state exams can create anxiety for students. The teacher mentions how she makes friendship bracelets for all her classes before the Florida State Assessment (FSA), all in a different color, letting them know she believes in them and their ability. She also discusses how she will set up a lunch group with students to ensure that a new student feels welcomed and comfortable. Ms. Susan demonstrates a sincere level of caring for her students through all of her responses, always looking for ways to support them, stay positive and overcome challenges and limitations.

Teacher 2- Ms. Selina

Ethic of Care-Student Trust

This teacher focuses much of her conversation on trust, respect and care and how these elements are not mutually exclusive. Ms. Selina immediately mentions how she treats all her students the same way she does her own birth children, stating, “I honor them, I love them, I’m fair”. She discusses how she must support their mental and emotional needs before she can even consider teaching them content and academics. She says “I see them as three-dimensional…I
don’t see them as a test score.” These opening comments illustrate how much care the teacher has for students, despite not providing any specific examples of how she builds trust with them. In addition, Ms. Selina talks about how she scaffolds the learning for those who struggle and enriches for those who are excelling. She provides examples of how she will pull students to the round table in the back of her room when they are struggling and provide independent work when they are understanding. Again, while this teacher is very deliberate in supporting students and scaffolding the learning, she does not directly associate these behaviors with trust, yet the literature discusses how these supports help create trust with students.

**Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect**

Ms. Selina discusses how important it is to provide positive affirmations and feedback for students, building them up, even when they make a mistake. The teacher states that she will involve the rest of the class and say things like, “Let’s give that person a round of applause, or the “Michael Jackson dance”. Interestingly, while the teacher does not overtly state that this way of recognizing responses is also fun for students, we see that the teacher makes this recognition a positive part of the class environment. Ironically, she says, “I’m not so politically correct, but ok.” Ms. Selina also explains how she uses general praise and avoids specific feedback, even referring to students by terms of endearment like “honey bun, sweet pea” and not specific student names. She explains that respect is very important for her, similar to how students should respect their mother. She states that “some days you love me, some days you hate me, some days you can’t stand me…we’re family [and] gonna be together all year”, suggesting that she wants to be very genuine in her relationship with students, letting them know exactly what she expects. Ms. Selina explains that she wants to build a “family network” where she is seen as “a maternal figure
as opposed to you’re my teacher.” Interestingly, Ms. Selina discerns between a teacher role and parental role, by how she addresses her students, but she clearly sees both methods as respectful, with her style being more intimate.

Ethic of Care-Teacher Care

When Ms. Selina was asked about how she challenges student thinking, she discusses how she asks students the question, “does this make sense” and to explain their answer with “logic and reasoning”. The teacher explains that this is not to make them question whether their response is right or wrong, but rather to make sure they support their way of thinking with evidence. In addition, this teacher demonstrates how deliberate she is with having students answer in class, showing a level of reflectivity when she states that “it’s not about right or wrong…let’s look at how you thought about it, because somebody else may not have thought about it that way.” This very purposeful way of engaging students shows how much Ms. Selina values other perspectives and cares about students’ thoughts. In addition, the teacher discusses that she keeps students motivated and focused throughout her lessons by playing games and having fun. She mentions the importance of PBIS and that “silly rewards” go a long way in motivating students. Ms. Selina also expresses a sense of care when she explains how if a particular group answers the questions correctly, they get to decide who will be the group leader the next day and teach the lesson. These empowerment strategies allow students the chance to enjoy the learning process and stay focused throughout the lesson.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language

When asked about how she remains positive with regard to behavior management, Ms. Selina again mentioned that “we are a family” and we do not disrespect each other. She focused
on how they build each other up and that by being positive and applauding for one another, even when they make a mistake, it creates a safe and trusting environment where they feel safe. She gives specific examples of how the students hold each other accountable as a team and they receive a reward for earning the most points for positivity in the group. The teacher says “we are a dysfunctional family and whether you like each other or not, we are here to build each other up.” These responses suggest that the teacher expects appreciative responses from her students and that she views her students as family and “you don’t tear your family down.” Ms. Selina is very intentional about focusing on the positive aspects of students, truly fostering an environment where students are valued for their positive contributions. Ms. Selina also highlights how she provides a pizza party for students who work well together as a team, giving each group the autonomy of recording behavioral elements from the team. The teacher focuses on “building each other up” through collective accountability, where students are provided an atmosphere of success and positive recognitions for their teamwork.

_Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Empowerment_

Ms. Selina explains how she provides options to the students, allowing them to pick the next assignment by winning the challenge question in the “Do Now” at the beginning of the class. Ms. Selina empowers students to take an active role in the learning process, giving them a reason to actively complete the classwork and remain engaged in the lesson. Moreover, Ms. Selina also lets students have flexible seating and grouping options, empowering them to be responsible for their own learning. This teacher explains that she “has four groups of six desks, but if somebody’s like, I don’t wanna work in a group, they’re allowed to go to the center to work individually.” The teacher ensures that students have lots of seating flexibility, truly empowering them to learn on
their terms and thus removing the fear that they have to be partnered with a person they are not comfortable with. Ms. Selina makes it clear that her goal is student engagement, stating “As long as y’all are working, and I don’t hear sidebar, I’m good.” The teacher also mentions that students receive support in getting their assignments completed, with options for morning tutoring and lunchtime. The states that she constantly reminds students that she can support them through programs like “Remind” and students can contact Ms. Selina if they have questions about homework or struggle with an idea. Ms. Selina ensures that students feel empowered through culturally responsive pedagogy, with multiple opportunities to choose their parameters and with a reflective emphasis that their comfort is paramount to the learning process.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership**

The teacher expresses the importance of allowing students a chance to express their concerns and/or feelings with her, as long as they do it in a respectful manner. She says she wants to be “real” with her students and give them a voice. Ms. Selina states that sometimes “we need to have a come to Jesus and I want you to be 100 percent real.” This teacher even says she is comfortable with a student telling her “I think you are acting like the biggest bitch in the world, as long as you talk to me.” In addition, the teacher explains that students can also place post-it notes on a “parking lot”, which is a place they can put questions if they do not want to share with the class, allowing them an alternate way to have a voice if they are not comfortable saying it in class. It appears that Ms. Selina strives to provide students with multiple outlets to allow them to state their concerns and feel comfortable doing so. Interestingly, the teacher does not utilize personal stories much in class, unless they are dealing with an event that is traumatic or a serious situation arises. She states that this is more commonly used when students are “personally distraught”,

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allowing them a chance to talk through their concerns. Part of the reason this may be the case is because as a math class, this is less relevant. Moreover, the teacher mentions how she uses “peer assessment” in class frequently, giving students the chance to provide each other feedback on their work in class. The teacher directs them on how to give feedback, always start[ing] off with [the] positive. Ms. Selina makes it clear that this process helps with “self-discovery and appropriate peer assessment”, suggesting that the teacher thinks these elements help build a culture where student voice and ownership are valued.

**Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment**

Interestingly, when asked about additional barriers that may impact her instruction, Ms. Selina expressed how she generally ignored the politics and outside pressures of education and being a teacher, specifically citing things like how “you’re not supposed to give a kid a hug.” The teacher stated that she doesn’t “sugar coat shit” or her approach to students, stating she is “going to parent before I teach”. In fact, Ms. Selina makes it clear that she “talks to the parents like I talk to the kids in front of their kids.” She feels that nothings gets in her way of caring for students because “they are children first to me rather than a test score,” focusing on their emotional needs when that is most pressing. This teacher talks about how she gets the job done for her students and doesn’t like to be questioned on her approaches to handling student behavior. In fact, she explains that when she feels pressured to act a certain way or do things that she does not believe are essential to student learning, she changes schools. Ms. Selina gives the example that “people walk around saying your objectives should look like this…that objective is not for kids...why’m I gonna waste my time.” These responses are indicative of Ms. Selina’s level of care and tough love or “confianza” approach she has for students. This teacher asserts that with the population of students
she is working with, she has to make sure students know they are respected and cared for and these concepts have to come before any instruction is attempted.

**Teacher 3-Ms. Amora**

*Ethic of Care-Student Trust*

When this teacher was asked how she built trust with her students, she immediately mentioned calling them by their names and “building a relationship with them”, through questioning about their personal life. Ms. Amora pointed out that “getting to know them right at the beginning of the school year…having conversations with them at the door, at the end of class, when they’re working on things” is the best way to build trust with students. While she mentions that having a conversation with parents is useful, Ms. Amora emphasizes that “just accepting their personality and accepting who they are and not judging the way they are” is crucial. The teacher went on to explain that she is very conscious about treating students with respect and showing patience, especially as they ask a question. She explains that when students make mistakes, it is important to nicely support them and explain the correct response. Ms. Amora states “I’m not demeaning. I’m not belittling. I’m not making them feel like they’re wasting my time or showing frustration, that I’m willing to repeat myself, which is one of the things I say.” This teacher reaffirms that “if they’re doing something wrong, [I try] to nicely explain it to them again or putting them with somebody who can help them.” Interestingly, Ms. Amora does not focus on specific academic or pedagogical supports, but rather qualities of respect and patience.
**Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect**

Ms. Amora states that she wants students to be intrinsically motivated and thus feels “it’s hard for me to give extrinsic reward to a student for being correct.” She mentions that much of her feedback is centered on how getting the correct response makes a student feel, saying things like, “Doesn’t that feel great to know the right answer or don’t you feel good for knowing that.” Ms. Amora explains that she uses verbal recognition as well, making exclamations like “Oh, that’s great.” The teacher also talks about how using a student’s name is also a means of showing respect and she feels students like hearing their names being used in a positive manner. Ms. Amora states that when “you hear your name it makes you feel good…especially if it’s in a positive manner.” She mentions that if she is having an issue with a student and trying to work on building a relationship, she will attempt to let that student hear her talking positively about them to another teacher. While this seems somewhat contrived, Ms. Amora seems to recognize the power that using a student’s name has in motivating them.

**Ethic of Care-Teacher Care**

When discussing how the teacher challenges her students, she talks about students having to explain their answer “in detail”, in an effort to have them explain their thinking. She feels that this metacognitive approach is important, especially in a math class, and elaborating on their answers, or even “helping another student”, can help to create this, by challenging the student. Ms. Amora talks about how often times students do not want to share their work with others, so having to explain each step of their work to another student is a great way to cause them to feel challenged. The teacher also mentions the importance of having high expectations for students and calling on them throughout the class, in order to keep them focused on learning. Ms. Amora
reinforces her expectation that they stay focused by using their name in class, especially when they do not expect it. Ms. Amora says “if I feel like a kid…is zoning out, I use their name. In the middle of teaching, I’ll be like, so, then, you wanna bring this number down, and then. Oh Joe, do you remember that you do this?” Ms. Amora shows consistently from her emphasis on keeping students challenged and focused that she does care greatly for them.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language**

Ms. Amora discusses the importance of redirection when discussing how to avoid negative responses and promote positive classroom management. She focuses on phrasing things in a positive manner and avoids yelling at students, looking for an amicable resolution if a conflict arises. Ms. Amora utilizes proximity control and uses statements like “can you do me a favor… I’m not saying you’re doing anything wrong. I’m just asking if you can please move to a different location to help resolve this so we can keep moving with class.” In addition, the teacher talks about focusing on what students are doing right whenever possible and giving PBIS points to them to show her appreciation, demonstrating an awareness of being appreciative. She mentions that she often provides this praise privately, just as she asks them about their discipline issues when no one else is around because she believes students will be embarrassed if this is done in front of their peers. Ms. Amora emphasizes that private conversations are especially important “if they’re having behavior problems…I try to be respectful that they’re just having a bad day.”

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Empowerment**

This teacher talks about how she gives her students choice in where they can work in the classroom and with whom they can work with, but has not developed strong strategies for letting
students pick the work problems they can solve. Ms. Amora discusses how she will “pick the problems that I feel are the most important for them to do.” She acknowledges this is an area she needs to concentrate on for the upcoming school year. In addition, the teacher discusses how she struggles with flexibility in accepting assignments late, because she does not want to penalize those who completed then on time, but acknowledges she usually accepts late work regardless. Ms. Amora states that over the past 20 years she has “loosened up a lot on that, with [an] understanding that life throws curveballs…[therefore] letting the kids go back and make up assignments.” She admits that she still hasn’t “nailed down how I feel exactly.” With regard to whom the students can work with, Ms. Amora states, “I give them complete choice of whether they work with somebody.” She indicates that the groups are usually limited to three people “because it gets not productive after three”, but her flexible seating allows for students to “move around the room to different locations [and] sit on the floor...little stools...pillows and stuff...[and] a worktable.” These responses indicate the teacher values student empowerment and is working on her ability to exercise it in class, despite still not having worked out certain procedures.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership**

Ms. Amora points out that she gives students many ways to have a voice in class and be part of the decision-making process. She explains that she wants to involve students in as many elements as possible and feels that being transparent is crucial. Ms. Amora discusses how she polls the class when she is trying to get students to understand a concept that they are not grasping to see if they have suggestions or solutions. She also talks about how students can decide if they want to complete a project or do problems from the book to demonstrate their understanding, and while she did not feel she gave them choice in choosing assignments in the previous section, this
response suggests that she does do this. Moreover, Ms. Amora states that she asks students if they have a preference for which way the desks should be arranged, trying to ensure students are as comfortable and “most productive for learning.” Conversely, the teacher states clearly that she does not feel personal stories in her class are relevant and cited a personal experience from years ago when she was teaching in a private, parochial school where a student talked about a horror movie and used profanity. Ms. Amora said she allowed it and had a negative result, so therefore she avoids it, perhaps also because as a math teacher she feels it is difficult to connect these stories to the content of the class. Ms. Amora explains that peer feedback is only used when students are working together and never to grade other students’ papers, unless it is anonymous. She clarifies that if a grade were assigned and the process were not anonymous, it could “cause animosity…even giving feedback with a rubric or where they do gallery walks” could create hostility if not anonymous.

**Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment**

Ms. Amora discusses how the greatest constraint that she deals with in being able to exercise care in her classroom is time. She points out that it is a struggle to have enough time to respond to student needs and build a relationship with students, let alone “get information into their head, getting ‘em to learn the lesson.” Ms. Amora also mentions that students themselves may be closed off to “positive praise or care from somebody”, arguably because of their own personal situations. This teacher suggests that when students are not receptive to her, she will often “try to meet with that student one-on-one”, but the time restraint makes this challenging. Ms. Amora points out that throughout this process she also will reach out to parents to have a conference and intends to have the student present, in order to make sure they also have a voice. She also mentions that other students’ misbehavior is sometimes a factor in students not being able
to feel empowered, because she is limited in her ability at that point, as she suggests the “whole atmosphere” is impacted and teachers may not feel comfortable giving students power. Ms. Amora emphasizes that “you have whole different levels of kids in your class as far as emotional development…and their ability to handle responsibility.” In fact, she adds that perhaps a curriculum that is more flexible and adaptive to students’ needs would allow for more differentiation and more effectively empower students, because “it is driven by what they’re doing as opposed to just everybody getting the same thing every day from the district.”

**Teacher 4-Ms. Jodi**

**Ethic of Care-Student Trust**

This teacher immediately starts mentioning how important it is for her students to know that she has an “open door policy.” She discusses that students are able to come to her and speak openly and honestly and “that any time they have a question or concern they are able to come and speak to me openly.” Ms. Jodi states that her demeanor lets students know they can trust her and approach with issues or concerns, especially because she says, “I never disclose anything outside of my classroom to anyone else.” Interestingly, this teacher states, “they know that I’m a very trusting person” so she already feels that this is how she projects herself toward others. This teacher also mentions how she provides students with discreet feedback, by placing a note on their desk and with an indication of whether they got a question correct or incorrect. She says this is important to let them know how they are doing and to provide “redirection or refocus” when needed. Incidentally, Ms. Jodi does not provide any insight into how she provides assistance with academic work or instructional support and instead describes her method as an independent conversation with a student.
Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect

Ms. Jodi goes onto explain that she does not utilize just general praise, but rather a very clear indication of why the student got the question correct. She clarified that this is an imperative step to providing them effective feedback, explaining “to them how and what it is that they actually did”. This teacher also states that she asks other students to respond before she provides her answer, giving them an opportunity to provide feedback. Ms. Jodi also explains that using students’ specific name and not a term of endearment gives “them that authorization that I am looking at them and only them.” She feels like a term of endearment is not always positive and claims that their name gives the student validation that she is focused on what they have to say and that they know “she’s listening to me.”

Ethic of Care-Teacher Care

The teacher states that she challenges student thinking by requiring more than just their responses being complete and showing a total understanding of their discussion, but also “require[ing] them to go more in depth with their responses.” She also stated that she will involve the rest of the class in the discussion to validate the response and “requires the students to give a complete understanding.” Ms. Jodi also emphasizes that she “forces her gifted students to think higher and to demonstrate higher understanding.” The teacher says with science, “it becomes more in depth and more involved, but they have to show their challenge of understanding between writing, demonstrating, [and] designing.” Ms. Jodi then explains that in order to make the lessons “a little interesting” and keep them focused, she will only directly instruct for 10 min, after which time she will have students break into group sections or have small group discussions. Ms. Jodi states that the “rotations in the classroom ensure that they are not stuck on just one thing” and this
“constant changing and shifting” [keeps] 10 and 11 year olds” focused, which she argues is fundamental for the age of students she is teaching.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy - Appreciate Language**

When asked about how this teacher positively corrects students, she immediately stated that she focuses on the positive that other students are demonstrating and says, “hey, this particular student is doing very well… I appreciate those of you that are on task.” Ms. Jodi mentioned that students do help monitor the behavior of others and very often they intercede when necessary and appropriate. The teacher asserts that she never wants to embarrass the students in front of others, stating that doing so is a “faux pas”, and therefore always has conversations about the underlying issues without other students present. Ms. Jodi does clarify that she is an older teacher and tends to have a “mothering affect”, but feels it is more beneficial to “take away their attention and focus on the whole group.” Furthermore, this teacher offers positive corrections to students’ incorrect responses by asking them to “rethink what they have stated” in their answer and let them decide whether they should modify or alter it. Ms. Jodi says she does not want students “rushing through [the] answers” and instead allows them to relax before responding. The teacher clarifies that she then tells students, “I appreciate that you have come back and restructured your statement.” In addition, Ms. Jodi also discusses how she may move to another student during this process of offering positive corrections, thereby allowing that student even more time to process and rethink his answer. This teacher also states that she utilizes a lot of group collaboration and very often the students support each other and provide feedback directly to one another.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy - Student Empowerment

The teacher expressed during the question about how she allows for choice in assignments that she was very limited in her response, stating that she had very few activities that lent themselves to this. Ms. Jodi said she does allow students some choice using a tic-tac-toe board and admitted that she is working on this for the upcoming school year. Conversely, the teacher states that she does have several strategies to allow students to work with each other, giving students options for who they can rotate to throughout the school year, by asking them to write down names of other people they would like to work with. Ms. Jodi states that she has the students “do a lot of center based” work, with a consistent rotation, usually every four weeks, preventing them from getting too comfortable. The teacher also expressed that she provides scaffolding in her classroom, differentiating the lesson for students who are at a level one and level three. Interestingly, the teacher states that the students do not understand the way she changes assignments and differentiates, mentioning as well that she provides accommodations for students with disabilities. The teacher states that this is flexibility that the students have, but it does not appear that she truly providing flexibility for students themselves in how they complete assignments, but rather an adjustment that she is making herself, which provides an interesting perspective on student empowerment.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy - Student Voice & Ownership

Ms. Jodi discuss her methods for allowing students to have a voice in class, specifically stating that students have a parking lot where they can publically or privately post questions they have. She explains that students may always ask questions privately or publically as well, and if the opportunity is not appropriate, she says “they know they’re not going to be ignored.” Ms. Jodi
does however make it clear that she does not entertain personal stories in class because she does not want to violate students’ confidentiality and has to be extremely careful that personal information is not compromised. She clarifies that there are limited opportunities when the student’s lessons are connected, but she insists it should be a “private statement.” In addition, Ms. Jodi mentions that she allows for peer feedback “at all times and there should not be any time that they would not be allowed to have peer input.” She gives students an opportunity to share with each other, but asserts that it should be positive and not negative. She says that she expects students to explain where a mistake occurred and how to improve upon it, giving students voice and ownership in the learning process and feels this “is a good skill for anyone to now…how to speak directly with someone else.” Ms. Jodi also mentions that she does allow students to review and check other students’ quizzes. She states that students “are able to teach each other and to help each other to understand where that information comes from.”

**Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment**

This teacher goes on to explain that she feels students themselves impede on the ability to provide an environment of care in the classroom and that the administration could assist by providing more resources on how to work with students of various cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Ms. Jodi says sometimes the students are “very standoffish [and] do not feel open at any point.” The teacher does mention that programs like PBIS are beneficial because they provide true incentives that matter to students, but more strategies on empowering students would be helpful. The teacher also feels that nothing prevents her from providing a caring environment and thus this question is not applicable to her. Furthermore, she cannot suggest any resources
besides the PBIS already mentioned that may empower students more, but is certainly willing to try new things if proposed.

**Teacher 5-Ms. Katie**

*Ethic of Care-Student Trust*

Ms. Katie immediately begins by talking about how trust is formed by getting to know her students from the very beginning, starting with learning their name. She mentions that she tries to find out about the students’ interests, “in a more meaningful way” and states the importance of following through on what is said toward students, especially those “coming from more difficult backgrounds.” In addition, the teacher talks about supporting her students through appropriate questioning and checking in on them throughout a lesson, mentioning that a small group environment is sometimes the best way to support student learning and build trust.

*Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect*

The teacher explains that she simply acknowledges students’ responses and moves on when they respond correctly to an academic question. In addition, Ms. Katie does mention that it is very important to use student names because “it’s the most basic respectful unit of recognition we have” and people appreciate when their own name is used, creating a higher level of respect for the person. Ms. Katie even acknowledges that she would not want her boss saying “hey you.”

*Ethic of Care-Teacher Care*

The teacher also expresses that asking higher order questioning is the single most powerful way to challenge student thinking and have them get prepared, but acknowledges that this is still a new skill she is developing. Ms. Katie also mentions that providing interesting content and
having a high level of energy and enthusiasm is crucial to keeping student engaged in the lesson. She points out that if “I’m dynamic…they’re gonna be more interested”, letting students know the teacher cares about them. Ms. Katie says, “it’s the energy level you bring, the level of interest you show.”

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy—Appreciate Language**

Ms. Katie explains that she does not want to linger on a negative behavior because it is not productive. She states that it is more effective to briefly address the behavior and then more on, but also asserts that it is more effective to focus on positive behavior and not the negative, indicating her sense of how important appreciative inquiry is for students.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy—Student Empowerment**

Ms. Katie also makes it clear that she feels student choice is very important and students are happier when they have options, but also validates that this is a new concept she is learning about. Interestingly, this teacher makes the statement that she offers little choice in how students choose their working environment, as much of the lesson is prescribed, but does acknowledge that there are times when this may be more appropriate. She says students can choose assignments through choice boards and tic-tac-toe boards, but she limits the choices to three, instead of nine. Ms. Katie also allows some flexibility with how students work, but only in very limited situations, because there is structure to the class. She openly acknowledges “I don’t know that I often give a lot of choice within a given lesson in terms of how they work.”

The teacher does express that she is willing to accept assignments at any time, removing barriers to students completing work and empowering them. She says “I have a 100 percent open policy on as long as I receive an assignment at some point, and its completed.” Ms. Katie goes on
to say, “My concern is not with having rigid time frames, but with letting my students actually finish what they need to finish.”

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership*

This teacher explains that she is still learning how to improve on this, especially as a new teacher, but says she allowed the students for the first time to setup the classroom rules, which was extremely effective, giving them voice and a sense of control. She also states that personal stories for her class come into play more often when reading literature, as students make connections to their personal lives, just as the characters in the story. Interestingly, the teacher points out that her ESL course mentions how imperative this concept can be for allowing students to connect their own background to the learning they are experiencing. The teacher also states that providing opportunities for students to provide each other feedback is fundamental and should happen often, if not any time, but does reinforce that parameters still need to be in effect in order to make the process meaningful. Ms. Katie says it “useful for [students] to give feedback to each other. The teacher states that wants to be “just a facilitator and in an ideal classroom she would want to see a lot of [collaboration].

*Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment*

The teacher also explains that she will always care for her students and nothing will impede in this, stating that she would even help “a student who’s homeless. However, she does acknowledge that at times student behaviors make this difficult and she wishes she had a better relationship with some students in order to improve this. She had difficulty processing what a caring environment exactly consisted of, but eventually mentions that if the school or
administration could provide specific coaching or professional development on exactly what this caring and empowered student environment would look like, she could better implement it and successfully help more students, specifically because there is a “distinct distance, an emotional distance between me and those students.” Ms. Katie says a “greater emphasis on making these kids feel valued and welcomed and loved” would be extremely helpful. She acknowledges that at times her intention to have rigid, tight control of the class has probably impeded her ability to empower the students. Again, Ms. Katie explains that she would love some additional training from the district to help with empowerment and choice options for students, giving her more resources to help support this work.

**Teacher 6-Ms. Clara**

*Ethic of Care-Student Trust*

Ms. Clara discussed building trust with her students through getting to know them. She discusses how she wants to create a personal connection with them, starting with greeting them and finding out about their interests. The teacher points out that she even builds trust with students by interacting with them in the hallways and letting them know she is strict and will push them to be the best, but cares for them. The teacher continues to mention how she pushes students to be advocates of their own learning and to seek self-help before asking a peer, with the teacher being the last person to seek assistance from. The teacher mentions that she gives corrective feedback throughout her lessons, ensuring that student constantly feel supported, helping to build this level of trust. Ms. Clara also explains that she uses “group assessment and self-assessment” to ensure students receive support throughout a lesson.
Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect

Ms. Clara also describes how she gives verbal praise frequently to students throughout her lesson, making statements like “that’s correct” and then elaborating so other students with an incorrect response also hear the correct answer. She also explains how she provides Kagan cheers for students so they can all contribute to the positive classroom culture. Furthermore, the teacher expresses that she uses students’ names specifically because she feels it is more personable and a more definitive way to show respect toward students. She states, “when you care enough to know their name…it encourages them to do their best.”

Ethic of Care-Teacher Care

Ms. Clara reiterates again that she challenges students throughout the class, again encouraging them to figure out the answers on their own before consulting someone else. She explained that discussion with a partner is crucial to figuring out sometimes if an answer is correct and recommends that students have conversations and dialogue to challenge each other’s thinking. The teacher also talks about how she tries to keep students engaged in a lesson by making it engaging and fun and “activating prior knowledge.” She says she provides many opportunities to keep students actively engaged and reminds them constantly to stay on task and focused. She recognizes that this may be a challenge and that her eventual goal is for them to self-monitor, all demonstrating care for her students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language

Ms. Katie expresses that she works very hard to avoid using negative corrective feedback toward students and instead focuses more on “trying to get them to understand why they need to
be corrected.” She asserts that speaking in a motherly tone and being cognizant of how you say it, versus just what you say, is very important to maintaining an appreciative approach. In addition, Ms. Katie discusses the importance of building rapport with students, saying, “when I do correct them, then the negative response is not a big negative response.” She also mentions that PBIS is a very positive way to help with classroom management and mentions the importance of having private conversations with students to avoid embarrassing them. The teacher maintains that treating kids the way you want them to treat you is part of being positive. Ms. Katie also states that the “tangible rewards that I give them for positive behavior…[so] they feel like you care, positively influences their behavior.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Empowerment*

Ms. Katie discusses how she gives students opportunities to have choice in the classroom, by allowing them to select which assignment they would like to complete. In addition, the teacher mentions how she allows students choice on what they work on, depending on their learning style. Furthermore, the teacher expresses that she provides students with opportunities to work with different students throughout the year, changing their working groups frequently using “appointment clocks.” Ms. Katie also allows students to sometimes choose their assignments and writing with a “post-it note”. She explains that students can state whether they would prefer to write or talk about certain topics in their group, giving students choice in selecting their assignments. Interestingly, the teacher states there is not much flexibility in how students’ complete assignments, because most of the time they are either with partners or a group and this is decided already for them. The teacher saw this question asking about how they complete the
assignments, but not necessarily the manner in which assignments are collected. It is difficult to determine if this teacher allows for late work submissions.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership**

The teacher asserts that students have lots of voice in the classroom. She states that they can add or contribute to ideas placed on the board, help create the “rules of the classroom, [and eventually] take over and help teach the class”. The teacher says the students vote on a lot of decisions in class and help design their own Kagan cheers to celebrate each other. She empowers students to have an opinion on almost everything they do and to share feedback often. Ms. Katie clarifies, saying, “they have voices to give me opinions or suggestions on anything they think.” The teacher also expresses that students feel comfortable sharing personal stories throughout class, because of the safe environment that exists, giving an example of a student who shared a very personal story because it related to a reading assignment where they were asked “to describe who they consider a hero.” Ms. Katie says the student explained that “his aunt was the hero, because she took in him and his five siblings.” The teacher said this story gave her chills and the student made himself vulnerable by sharing, helping instill a strong sense of ownership in their learning.

**Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment**

The teacher also states that she feels very strong in the belief that she strives to always show care to her students, especially through tough love. She recognizes that her students are “just kids” and she needs to remember to not take things personally, and never “hold a personal grudge”. She makes it clear that she is not restricted in her ability to care and that PBIS is one way she is able to recognize the positive work students do. Her only struggle is to empower some kids who
do not come to school and at times feels limited by their situation at home. Ms. Katie makes it clear that she is strong with classroom management and caring for kids is easy for her. She does however, feel that the progressive discipline system at school is fair and allows her to provide support for a student who needs additional interventions, but wishes there was a better way to empower a student who has an attendance issue, acknowledging that sometimes “it’s their home life outside of school that prevents me from empowering them.”

**Teacher 7-Ms. Ashton**

*Ethic of Care-Student Trust*

This teacher begins by explaining that she builds relationship with the students from the very first day they walk into the classroom. She explains that she wants to build rapport with students by getting to know them, focusing on non-academic connections to help generate trust. She says, “I try to build up a rapport, so they don't see me necessarily as a teacher, but just as someone normal …I guess. Then I just get to know them a little bit. I actually send postcards home, maybe, just to build a rapport with them.” Ms. Ashton even feels like missing time at work may impact her relationship with students, stating, “A lot of these students, they go from home to home, and they lose a lot of trust and stability, so I try not to take off any time. In addition, Ms. Ashton continues to explain that she supports students by differentiating their needs and providing more small group instruction throughout the lesson. She explains that “I come from an elementary background before I went to middle school…[therefore] I pull their data, and then I either have centers set up, or I sit at a back table, and I pull them based upon their level, level one, level two, level three. I just have different, either, centers set up or just different, individual
sheets that they can work on with each other or with me, individually, just to differentiate their instruction.”

**Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect**

This teacher continues to explain that students may receive feedback for responses they give through whole class recognition. She specifies how sometimes students are asked to repeat their answers or actually write it, along with their name on the board, providing that recognition. Ms. Ashton provides an example of when she does this, stating, "You know what, sweetheart? Can you go ahead and repeat that to the class?" Ms. Ashton continues to explain that if a very low performing student got a question correct and it was written on the board, she may write his name next to it, so he sees it the following day also. Ms. Ashton says, “the kids like it.” This teacher also further states that she uses both student names and terms of endearment when she calls on students, claiming that both work for her to create a bond and she doesn’t really have a preference. She explains, “that's just the way I am. I can't necessarily describe why I do that. I just do that. It builds a rapport with my kids. It just works for me.”

**Ethic of Care-Teacher Care**

When the teacher discusses how she shows care through challenging thinking, she describes how students feel empowered to go further when they get the correct response. She provides the example of when a student showed she understood a specific standard and as a result Ms. Ashton asked her to then write a word problem for others to solve, thus really creating “higher-order thinking.” She elaborates, “They had to generate it, and they give it to their partner, and their partner had to try to solve the problem.” In addition, the teacher describes how she keeps students engaged by providing opportunities to highlight their comprehension,
acknowledging that “sometimes, I put them in groups…sometimes, I put them in with just one partner…sometimes, I put them individually…I just mix it up.” Moreover, this teacher explains that “each student has a specific number that's assigned to them. I pull sticks, and, if it has their number—it doesn't necessarily have their name, [just] their number. If I pull their number, they automatically know that they're going to give a response at the answer.” Ms. Ashton explains that this process keeps students “on their toes” because they never know who will be called upon. She also explains that when students are assigned to group work, they have a group leader who is entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the group on task. Ms. Ashton talks about how she then provides incentives through PBIS, which serves as a reward and motivator for students.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language**

Ms. Ashton really focuses on what students are doing correctly when it comes time to correct students’ misbehavior. She asserts that “I tend to ignore bad behavior and reward good”, because more often when students hear what others are doing correctly, they usually change their behavior. Ms. Ashton expresses the importance of never “embarrassing the student in class” and often will use proximity as a means to get the student back on track, saying things like, “hey, what's up today? What's going on?” She mentions that when students know they will get rewards for doing the right thing in class through PBIS, she very often does not have the disruptions that would normally impact a classroom and this is accompanied with students building each other up with positive support. Ms. Ashton provides the example that she has a manager at the table and this person's role is just to make sure, not that everyone's on task, but that their behavior is appropriate at the table.” Ms. Ashton asserts that empowering other
students to take ownership of this process has a “ripple effect” in the class where students build each other up.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Empowerment**

Ms. Ashton discusses that she empowers students by providing opportunities for extra credit and often various ways to earn that credit. It appears that the teacher perhaps viewed this question about having choice in choosing assignments only in regards to extra credit and not with standard assignments students are presented with. Ms. Ashton then continues to explain that she allows her students to choose their own seats and partners to work with. She clarifies that by allowing them flexible seating, students are encouraged to arrive on time, as it is first-come, first-choose. In addition, the teacher further explains that the expectation is clear and that once students abuse this privilege, they will be seated somewhere else. The teacher further explains that students have total choice in when they want to submit assignments and that they never receive a late grade. The teacher feels this gives students the latitude to complete pressing assignments in other classes if there is a conflict and avoid a negative academic grade and that if students work for mastery of a standard, it should not matter when they demonstrate they have learned the concept. Ms. Ashton states, “there is not a standard that has to be mastered by a certain time. It's the standard that has to be mastered by the end of the year.”

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Student Voice & Ownership**

Ms. Ashton does not seem to completely understand the question about providing students a voice in class, but does explain that students do have some choice in which assignments they can complete and furthermore, from her other responses, she provides them with discretion in completing assignments. She explains that personal stories are shared as ice-
breakers and students are given opportunities to share their experiences and build relationships with each other, creating a sense of ownership in the classroom learning process. In fact, this seems to connect to the teacher’s response that students should support each other through peer feedback. She clarifies that she models the process for students and often provides a rubric that allows the students to more precisely provide feedback during the learning process. This teacher does state that peer feedback is not used for formal assessments, but says, “when I have them working as a class, they're allowed to help each other, get up and walk around and help each other or either just sit beside each other and help each other and view each other's work.” However, Ms. Ashton does clarify that all students should be contributing to the work, in order to avoid what she calls, “hogs and logs”, where only one person is doing the work.

Barriers to Care and Student Empowerment

The teacher very clearly states that there is little that impedes her ability to show care for students and empower them to do their best in her class. She states that by being approachable that “nothing's gotten in the way of me for that. I still stand at the door every day and I greet them all. A lot of times, they hug me”. Ms. Ashton establishes that she cares about them and wants them to be successful, but stipulates that she is not sure they all feel empowered, but at least they do not “shutdown.” She says she continually tries to build rapport with students and clarifies that there is nothing the district or school could provide to enhance this.
Themes Across Teachers

Trust-Relationships

The majority of teacher who responded to this question frequently discussed the importance of building relationships with students and getting to know them, especially their name. These educators spoke at length about how they felt that establishing a personal and positive connection was vital to helping the student build trust in the teacher. Several of the teachers discussed how they would immediately try to get to know the students’ names, as well as learning personal details about them. One teacher states that she loves and respects students, in order to help establish this initial trust, but does not provide any specific means she uses. Furthermore, another teacher focuses more on how she provides flexibility and latitude in her supervision, thus earning students’ trust. Ironically, the teacher is really developing trust for the students through this process, as she is able to see which students can handle the responsibility of being alone during breakfast time.

Trust-Support

Another interesting element of trust emerged from the notion of how teachers provide academic support for students. Overwhelmingly, the majority of teachers all stated that they wanted students to have some level of independence and even level of struggle, before getting direct teacher intervention. While the way in which these teachers described the process of scaffolded support differed, the commonality that existed was that students should attempt to solve or resolve issues on their own or perhaps with assistance from peers before they solicit help from the teacher. One teacher focused on differentiating the learning for her students as the primary method for support, where it appeared she may be more willing to offer individualized support, but the other teachers generally felt that letting students struggle through the material first is a
positive step in building student trust. Perhaps this notion comes from the self-advocacy perspective or simply from students knowing that eventually they will receive help from the teacher, but only if they truly need it.

**Respect-Recognition**

It seemed that all of the teachers tend to embrace student response a little differently. The major commonality between them is that they acknowledge the student with some type of positive verbal response. Some of the teachers were very deliberate on providing specific feedback to students about why a response was correct, but the vast majority stated that they either were very generic and non-specific in their feedback or only acknowledged the response and moved on quickly. In addition, several of the teachers found ways to empower other students based on the answers they received, usually this involved reiterating to the rest of the class or the student himself repeating it or re-teaching it. Most of the teachers did not make a large spectacle of students correctly responding. Only one teacher mentioned peer feedback through “Kagan cheers”, in which the whole class celebrates their correct response and offers additional verbal and emotional praise.

**Respect-Names**

The teachers who were interviewed predominately stated that they preferred to call on students by their given name, instead of using terms of endearment like “hon, honey, dear, etc.” The majority of these teachers felt that by using students’ actual names, it helps create a closer bond with them, adding to the level of trust and respect, thus helping to forge the relationship quicker and with more meaning. There were two teachers who stated they use both styles interchangeably, despite saying they know a name is more personable, they felt either one works
for their style in connecting with kids. One teacher stated she only uses terms of endearment, for
ironically the same reason as the other teachers who use names, claiming that because she has pet
names for them, it allows her to more easily bond with students.

**Care-Challenge**

When the teachers were asked their thoughts on how to challenge student thinking, the
responses were almost universally in agreement that they expected students to explain their
thinking and show a higher level of understanding. Consistently, these teachers felt that
verbalizing how they discovered an answer was critical to accessing the more rigorous, challenging
work they seek. Interestingly, this trend was pervasive in all content areas, as teachers agreed that
students had to explain how to solve a math problem, explain a science concept, and articulate an
author’s perspective in English class. This higher order thinking requirement may have been
identified with slightly different vernacular from one teacher to the next, but the intentionality was
the same. Furthermore, a few teachers then continued this challenging concept by empowering
students to then share their thinking with a partner or peer and elaborate into a more complex
question.

**Care-Focusing**

The teachers responded to how to keep students engaged in the lesson with several
varieties, but all of the discussions were predicated around the notion that the lesson should be
exciting and meaningful. The terminology that was offered had some differences between them,
with three teachers using the words “fun or playing games.” In addition, several teachers
mentioned that teachers break the lesson up and insert opportunities for student discussions and
dynamic material being presented. Two teachers made reference to strategies where students
should be monitored through questioning and prompting through verbal cues. It generally appeared that these teachers recognized the need for a learning environment to allow for flexibility and lessons presented that were intriguing and meaningful. Two of the teachers also referenced PBIS in their responses of how to keep students focused, possibly suggesting that the whole school behavior incentive program may support the learning environment in the class and offer a tangible reward for positive interaction and engagement.

**Appreciative Language-Positive Corrections**

The consistent response to questions about avoiding deficit language all centered around maintaining respect for students, by not publically embarrassing them. The teachers all seemed to agree that redirecting behavior when possible to a more desired situation was preferred, but in addition, the teacher always stated that she would try to identify positive behavior in the class. The concept behind this practice is that students will benefit from the acknowledgement that other students are doing something correct, and thus this is a positive motivator, instead of a negative deterrent. Interestingly, none of the teachers stated that they in fact utilized punitive consequences, despite the obvious asset-based approach to the question. All the teachers were able to provide specific examples of how they utilized positive behavior management. Moreover, many of the teachers pointed out that they often proactively planned their lessons to prevent behavioral disruptions and empower students to take ownership of their learning and even self-assess and monitor their own behavior. In fact, five of the seven teachers mentioned that they either empower students to take an active role in the class or utilize PBIS to help motivate and incentivize the students. The two remaining teachers more generally discussed how they would facilitate collective accountability with the class and give students an opportunity to share positive feedback.
with their peers. This asset-based approach appeared consistently applied to all of the teachers who participated in the study.

**Student Empowerment-Choice & Flexibility**

The majority of the teachers discussed how they felt students’ choice was important and it seemed as though many were looking for ways to build this into their classrooms. While it was evident that not all teachers applied these concepts of choice in the same ways, there was consistently an awareness that students should have some decision-making ability in the class and if they were not already doing this, they were eager to improve in it. Five of the seven teachers felt that students should be allowed to choose some assignments and have input into what they complete. Some of the teachers were more favorable on giving more latitude than others, but this concept seemed generally consistent in teachers’ practice.

When teachers were asked about their ability to provide flexible seating and discretion with whom they work with, all of the teachers felt this was inherent in their classroom design and an area they were extremely accepting on. The degrees of flexibility varied, but consistently most teachers allowed students to work in groups with different people, select various partners throughout the year, and one teacher even stated that her flexible seating policy ensures that students arrive to class on-time, as long as behaviors do not disrupt the class and impede the learning. Overall it appeared that teachers were quite lax with allowing students this ability to choose their own working partners, as well as more often than not also allowing them to pick a modified location of the class to work in.

When teachers were asked about their ability to allow students flexibility in completing assignments, most teachers immediately assumed this was a conversation about accepting work
that was late or past the due date. Interestingly, this question rarely brought up discussions about giving students the ability to modify which assignments they could complete or whether providing alternative or project-based options might be more conducive to student learning.

**Student Voice-Ownership**

Student voice was a huge emphasis with the teachers who were interviewed. All of the teachers recognized the need to allow students the chance to have an active role in the processes of the class, with some teachers being more accommodating to how this is implemented than others. Most of the teachers discussed the idea of student voice through empowered decision-making, whether it about behavioral and management systems or actual class assignments and curricula matters. The teachers recognized the need to allow students to have input into how the classroom operates and usually discussed both a public and private option for providing feedback. One newer teacher states that she values the idea of empowered student voice, but has not quite developed the tools to effectively facilitate that process, acknowledging that she needs to improve.

The teachers who allowed students to share personal stories in class only happened in two instances. These teachers allowed for students to share personal stories when it directly related to the curriculum that was being presented. These teachers were predominantly English or reading teachers, who were able to facilitate a discussion where students could bring relevant stories into the literature that was being studied. The other main way that personal stories were entertained in the classroom by teachers is if there was something traumatic that the student was working to overcome and the teacher needed the student to explain a situation or seek out support. One of the teachers stated that she used personal stories in order to build relationships with students, allowing them to share what they did on the weekend. Several of the teachers expressed that they prefer
students do not share personal stories with the class because of sensitive information that they sometimes may give out and one teacher even expressed that a student, while sharing, used profanity and thus the whole class environment was undermined. This strategy was almost always different for the various teachers, mainly because of the unpredictability of what students will say.

When the discussion of peer feedback arose, all of the teachers stated that they use peer feedback and group collaboration to some degree. Some of the teachers were very intentional about explaining that they would never use peer feedback for quizzes and tests, unless it were anonymous, while other teachers spent more time discussing the benefits of peer critiques and how this level of discussion increases the caliber of student discussions and helps students better understand the material. Usually the teachers stated that they expected the students to use respectful interactions with each other and always find positive feedback, before providing constructive feedback.

**Teacher Reflectivity**

The collective responses from the teachers suggested there is a strong level of care that they feel for their students. Many of the responses from the interviews discuss the importance of addressing students by name in order to establish a level of respect and trust with the student, as well as explaining the importance of getting to know the student, so that he feels comfortable within the classroom environment. In addition, many of the teacher responses focused on how they felt obligated to push students academically, as a method of showing care. Interestingly, this academic care differs from a deeper personal level of care, in that educators possibly see this academic care as a safer and less intrusive way to support students. In fact, many of the responses as to why the teachers behave the way they do in their classroom focus on the importance of helping the student succeed academically, with an explanation that in order to do
so, teachers must “get to know” the students. This concept of relatability is explained as a strategy to ultimately motivate students and thus increase their participation and hopefully overall understanding.

Conversely, the teachers’ studied rarely discussed the strategies they used in class as having a basis for being culturally responsive pedagogy. In fact, only one teacher even alluded to the notion that her students might benefit from certain notions of care and empathy because of situations and circumstances they face, but the remaining teachers all omitted the use of any terminology that suggested they were aware that students of color may need to have variations of instruction in order to help them be successful in class. Candidly, the questions asked did not use any of the terminology from the literature, as it was a concern that this would sway the subjects in their responses. In addition, with the modifications made to IRB in order to have the study approved, there was little opportunity to personalize the questions or ask follow-up questions to probe deeper. In fact, the initial study was changed significantly because of concern that I as both the principal of the school and primary researcher, may coerce or influence teacher responses. Therefore, instead of my study being comprised of observations and follow-up questions that arise from what is witnessed in the classroom to be culturally responsive, the study shifted to a very strict questioning protocol instead. In fact, the independent secondary researcher, whom the teachers were not acquainted with, asked each teacher about the behaviors and strategies they used in class, being careful to not use the words “culturally responsive pedagogy”, to influence or bias the study.
The teachers replied to these questions with an array of responses. Some were very direct that nothing ever impeded on their ability to provide a caring environment and that was because they ignore the policies that exist in the district that say they should not hug a student or get too close to them. Other teachers felt that the behavior of some of their students prevent them from getting too close to them, perhaps because these students have their own barriers to avoid conflict. One teacher stated that there is limited time to develop relationships with students and thus this a limitation to her being able to show care for her students. She claimed that without the proper time to invest in getting to know students, it is often challenging to establish a caring environment.

Interestingly, many teachers then pointed to their focus on staying positive with students and finding ways to overcome obstacles as an actual solution. Some of the teachers stated that “being real” with students, meeting with them individually, and supporting and responding to their needs is a crucial way to overcome some of the obstacles that exist. In addition, these teachers pointed to additional resources the district could offer, including PBIS, as a means to further helping teachers establish positive, caring relationships and overcoming some of the inherent challenges that students bring with them. Some of the resources suggested were as simple as additional time, while others were more precise in stating that they needed additional training to better equip them to deal with the adversity so many students have in their lives.

When teachers were asked about how they overcome the barriers of empowerment, many of the responses were very similar. Much of the discussion that arose focused on politics of education and the profession, including issues like students’ absenteeism, poor behavior, and even the stress of the FSA test. Amazingly, these teachers explained in similar ways that they look to empower students through conversations and discussions they have in their classroom, giving
voice to these students and allowing them to feel valued. Other teachers mentioned more systematic responses like following the procedural channels prescribed in a school when students are a behavioral concern, but ironically, this response did not directly access the question asked. Interestingly, another teacher was very forthcoming, stating that she overcomes the politics of education or her school, by simply changing schools. Many of these teachers then commented that in order to change the lack of empowerment of some students, they need additional training resources, curriculum options, technology options, and even more means to directly motivate students. Conversely, one teacher very clearly stated in her interviews that she felt there were no limitations to providing an empowering environment for students and that these questions did not apply to her. Nonetheless, it is clear that all these teachers feel the tension in education and in their classroom with trying to motivate and empower students, while also holding them accountable in a positive and meaningful manner.

**Chapter Summary**

Many of the teachers interviewed shared similar philosophical positions with regard to how they treat their students and the level of care they show. Interestingly, these teachers seem to embrace common approaches to learning and often speak consistently about ways they show respect, develop trust and empower student voice in the classroom. Many of these practices translate into culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care, of course all without using that specific frame to ask the questions. These responses have significant implications for professional practice and begin to illuminate areas to focus upon. The chart below (table 2) captures the array of responses from the teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHART OF TEACHER RESPONSES</th>
<th>Teacher 1</th>
<th>Teacher 2</th>
<th>Teacher 3</th>
<th>Teacher 4</th>
<th>Teacher 5</th>
<th>Teacher 6</th>
<th>Teacher 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Building Trust</td>
<td>flexibility, latitude</td>
<td>honor, love them</td>
<td>learn name, build relation</td>
<td>open door, positive demeanor</td>
<td>get to know them, their name</td>
<td>personal connect, get to know them</td>
<td>personal connect, get to know them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing Assistance</td>
<td>struggle first</td>
<td>scaffold and enrich</td>
<td>patience, respect, indep. support</td>
<td>Indep. time, provide feedback</td>
<td>check in, questioning, scaffolding</td>
<td>use peers and partner first</td>
<td>differentiates the support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recognizing Responses</td>
<td>generic praise, empower</td>
<td>positive, general praise</td>
<td>verbal recognition</td>
<td>provide specific feedback</td>
<td>straightforward acknowledgement</td>
<td>straightforward resp studs</td>
<td>reiterates to whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Calling on students</td>
<td>names, terms</td>
<td>terms of endearment</td>
<td>always use name</td>
<td>always uses names</td>
<td>prefers specific names</td>
<td>prefers names, more personalable</td>
<td>uses names and terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Challenging thinking</td>
<td>explain their reasoning</td>
<td>logic and reasoning</td>
<td>explain thinking in detail, elaborate</td>
<td>higher order think, in depth resp.</td>
<td>higher order questions</td>
<td>figure out first, then partner, explain thinking</td>
<td>empowered to go further, word prob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Keeping students focused on learning</td>
<td>have fun, brain breaks</td>
<td>play games, reward PBIS</td>
<td>high expect, call on them-name</td>
<td>break lesson up, student discuss</td>
<td>keep lessons interesting, stay dynamic</td>
<td>fun, verbal warnings, self-monitor</td>
<td>empowers to stay committed, PBIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Avoiding negative responses</td>
<td>never yell, respect, redirect</td>
<td>no disrespect, focus on positive</td>
<td>direct, positive focus</td>
<td>focus on positive, never embarrass</td>
<td>don’t linger, acknowledge, move on</td>
<td>avoid negative, explain why</td>
<td>avoids negative and focuses on positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Offering positive corrections</td>
<td>PBIS, empower, provide jobs</td>
<td>collective accountability, focus on positive</td>
<td>do not yell, empower, PBIS, positive</td>
<td>rethink their answer, empower</td>
<td>focus on positive feedback</td>
<td>PBIS, never embarrass, private conv</td>
<td>PBIS, positive support from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Student opportunities for choice</td>
<td>online programs, choose assign.</td>
<td>students pick assignments</td>
<td>redo quizzes, but not much</td>
<td>chose some assign, not much</td>
<td>chose some assign</td>
<td>they may chose assign</td>
<td>extra credit assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Student choice in completing work</td>
<td>partner or alone</td>
<td>students pick groups, flexible seating</td>
<td>work with partners, move dif locations</td>
<td>work with partners but limited</td>
<td>work with partners to work with</td>
<td>can chose whomever to work with</td>
<td>flexible seating and students choose partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Flexibility in assignments</td>
<td>accepts late work</td>
<td>tutoring morning and afternoon</td>
<td>make up assign.</td>
<td>differentiates assignments</td>
<td>accepts late work and missing assign</td>
<td>not much</td>
<td>never late assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Student voice</td>
<td>empower, decision-making</td>
<td>say how they feel, suggest alternatives</td>
<td>suggest assign, prefer, decision-making</td>
<td>ask guest privately or publically</td>
<td>wants to provide more student voice</td>
<td>creates rules, decision-making, votes, open door policy</td>
<td>choice in assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Students sharing personal stories</td>
<td>connection to reading</td>
<td>to deal with serious situations</td>
<td>doesn’t prefer-gets too personal</td>
<td>doesn’t allow-too personal</td>
<td>yes, if it connects to the lit.</td>
<td>yes, if connects to lit</td>
<td>yes, to build connections and rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Peer feedback</td>
<td>peer feedback on essays</td>
<td>peer assessment, rally coach</td>
<td>anonymous grading, student feedback</td>
<td>group collab, positive peer feedback</td>
<td>group collab.</td>
<td>share work with others, positive feedback/constructive</td>
<td>student feedback essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Barriers to showing care</td>
<td>poor behavior from students</td>
<td>policies that exist</td>
<td>time restrictions</td>
<td>students behavior-standoffish</td>
<td>nothing gotten in the way</td>
<td>she shows care—nothing gotten in the way</td>
<td>nothing gets in way, provides hugs, greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Alleviating barriers to showing care</td>
<td>provide a caring environment</td>
<td>real with kids and admin</td>
<td>meet with student one on one</td>
<td>doesn’t have that issue</td>
<td>focuses on providing care</td>
<td>focus on their kids and she is support for them</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Resources for a caring environment</td>
<td>Staying positive, PBIS</td>
<td>she provides</td>
<td>time to build rapport</td>
<td>resources to support all kids</td>
<td>school-wide training and resources</td>
<td>PBIS and incentives good</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Barriers to empowering students</td>
<td>FSA, testing politics of education</td>
<td>misbehavior of other students</td>
<td>allow a voice for decision-making</td>
<td>he may impact student empowerment</td>
<td>student attendance</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Alleviating barriers to empowering students</td>
<td>caring behavior changed schools</td>
<td>having conver with those students</td>
<td>give students some control</td>
<td>hopes to provide more choice</td>
<td>follows procedures for support</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Resources for student empowerment</td>
<td>FSA resources</td>
<td>more technology and resources</td>
<td>curriculum that has more options</td>
<td>kids need more empowerment</td>
<td>more training and resources</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Chart of Teacher Responses-Questioning Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHART OF TEACHER RESPONSES</th>
<th>Teacher 1</th>
<th>Teacher 2</th>
<th>Teacher 3</th>
<th>Teacher 4</th>
<th>Teacher 5</th>
<th>Teacher 6</th>
<th>Teacher 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Building Trust</td>
<td>flexibility, latitude</td>
<td>honor, love them</td>
<td>learn name, build relation</td>
<td>open door, positive demeanor</td>
<td>get to know them, their name</td>
<td>personal connect, get to know them</td>
<td>personal connect, get to know them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing Assistance</td>
<td>struggle first</td>
<td>scaffold and enrich</td>
<td>patience, respect, indep. support</td>
<td>Indep. time, provide feedback</td>
<td>check in, questioning, scaffolding</td>
<td>use peers and partner first</td>
<td>differentiates the support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recognizing Responses</td>
<td>generic praise, empower</td>
<td>positive, general praise</td>
<td>verbal recognition</td>
<td>provide specific feedback</td>
<td>straightforward acknowledgement</td>
<td>straightforward resp studs</td>
<td>reiterates to whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Calling on students</td>
<td>names, terms</td>
<td>terms of endearment</td>
<td>always use name</td>
<td>always uses names</td>
<td>prefers specific names</td>
<td>prefers names, more personalable</td>
<td>uses names and terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Challenging thinking</td>
<td>explain their reasoning</td>
<td>logic and reasoning</td>
<td>explain thinking in detail, elaborate</td>
<td>higher order think, in depth resp.</td>
<td>higher order questions</td>
<td>figure out first, then partner, explain thinking</td>
<td>empowered to go further, word prob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Keeping students focused on learning</td>
<td>have fun, brain breaks</td>
<td>play games, reward PBIS</td>
<td>high expect, call on them-name</td>
<td>break lesson up, student discuss</td>
<td>keep lessons interesting, stay dynamic</td>
<td>fun, verbal warnings, self-monitor</td>
<td>empowers to stay committed, PBIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Avoiding negative responses</td>
<td>never yell, respect, redirect</td>
<td>no disrespect, focus on positive</td>
<td>direct, positive focus</td>
<td>focus on positive, never embarrass</td>
<td>don’t linger, acknowledge, move on</td>
<td>avoid negative, explain why</td>
<td>avoids negative and focuses on positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Offering positive corrections</td>
<td>PBIS, empower, provide jobs</td>
<td>collective accountability, focus on positive</td>
<td>do not yell, empower, PBIS, positive</td>
<td>rethink their answer, empower</td>
<td>focus on positive feedback</td>
<td>PBIS, never embarrass, private conv</td>
<td>PBIS, positive support from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Student opportunities for choice</td>
<td>online programs, choose assign.</td>
<td>students pick assignments</td>
<td>redo quizzes, but not much</td>
<td>chose some assign, not much</td>
<td>chose some assign</td>
<td>they may chose assign</td>
<td>extra credit assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Student choice in completing work</td>
<td>partner or alone</td>
<td>students pick groups, flexible seating</td>
<td>work with partners, move dif locations</td>
<td>work with partners but limited</td>
<td>work with partners to work with</td>
<td>can chose whomever to work with</td>
<td>flexible seating and students choose partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Flexibility in assignments</td>
<td>accepts late work</td>
<td>tutoring morning and afternoon</td>
<td>make up assign.</td>
<td>differentiates assignments</td>
<td>accepts late work and missing assign</td>
<td>not much</td>
<td>never late assignments</td>
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<td>12. Student voice</td>
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<td>say how they feel, suggest alternatives</td>
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Chapter Five: Interpretations and Implications

In chapter four a narrative of each participant was provided, in order to illuminate the differences each respondent had to the research questions that guided this study: 1) In what ways do teachers reflect on culturally responsive behaviors they use in their classrooms? 2) In what ways do teachers reflect on their level of care in the classroom? The teacher subjects had varying perspectives that illuminated from these discussions, yet there were also a variety of commonalities that also became apparent through the questioning, generating some significant trends and implications. In this chapter, I will review the themes in relation to the literature, emphasizing similarities, contradictions, and unforeseen explanations brought forward through the research discussions. In addition, I will highlight implications for educational leadership, as well as discuss how the research has impacted my responsibilities as a practitioner in the role of a school principal.

Relationships: Care, Trust and Respect

Much of the discussion that emerged from the participating teachers focused on the importance of developing strong student relationships, as explained by Carol Gilligan, who says, “the ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need” (Gilligan, 1982, p.62). This level of care was often manifest by these teachers, who focused very intentionally on learning students’ names at the beginning of the school year, in order to establish trust and respect, through meaningful and consistent relationships (Noddings, 1984), with an emphasis that students see visible examples of how teachers care for them in the classroom. In fact, when focusing on the domain of culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care, we see
multiple examples of how teachers embrace this notion that Ware (2006) calls “warm demanders” or teachers who blend the ability to provide an ethic of care in their classrooms, balancing the multiple aspects that teachers use to hold students accountable for their behavior and learning, while also challenging their students to learn. Interestingly, it is evident from the various teacher research responses that because they expect students to “explain their logic and reasoning” and actively demonstrate “higher order thinking”, a utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy, unbeknownst or not to the teacher, may impact both a student’s overall achievement, as well as build trust and a positive relationship (Ware, 2006). Furthermore, the teachers universally expressed a genuine level of care for students (Warren, 2018), in which they described how imperative it is to keep students focused and engaged in the lesson, albeit that many of the examples of care can be defined as “academic care” (Addison, 2012) or “teacher immediacy” (Christophel, 1990), where teachers focus on these verbal and nonverbal behaviors or cues to create a level of closeness, in order to impact the instruction of the class (Christophel, 1990). Teachers cited multiple strategies to motivate students to stay active in class lessons, with many of the responses predicated on this notion that care is expressed in expectations and academic rigor. Even the students who receive more of a traditional method of prompting and cuing with their names, still benefit from having their names called and knowing that the teacher is aware of who they are (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). Furthermore, many of these teachers used the words “fun or playing games” when describing learning options for students, inserting the importance of student discussions and dynamic material being presented into every lesson that is taught.

This inclusive concept is part of responsive caring for students and is generated on the notion that very specific, intentional behaviors are utilized for those students who lack a “source
of motivation, especially for culturally diverse students who may be at risk of failing or who may be disengaged from schooling” (Garza, 2009, p. 102) and some of this behavior was evident by how teachers specifically found ways to acknowledge student responses through positive feedback and praise, utilizing appreciative inquiry and organization that focuses on the positive qualities students demonstrate, as opposed to the deficit mindset that often plagues teachers in the classroom (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

Moreover, regardless of whether teachers utilized the specific use of students’ names or replaced their names with pseudonyms of endearment, the subjects consistently stated that these were done with the intention of better connecting with students and helping them feel successful. In fact, recognizing positive academic responses from students and utilizing students’ names when asking questions and providing feedback (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018) allows the students to feel connected with their teachers by feeling respected and listened to, particularly in how they are addressed by name, further supporting the notion that teachers utilize academic care to enhance the learning for their students (Addison, 2012).

**Appreciative Approach: Voice & Empowerment**

When students feel there is a sense of belief in their success from the teacher (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008), they experience a connection with their classroom educator, sensing a level of respect and willingness to be listened to, addressed by name, and challenged to think (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). Fundamentally, the learning environment of the classroom becomes abundantly more successful. Looking at the teachers’ responses from the interviews, it became quite clear that many teachers constantly seek out positive solutions and outcomes to concerns
that arise within their classroom, whether this be through positive redirection for behavior management or even affirmation of a correct response with the whole class when students answer questions correctly. Regardless of the manner, the teacher always affirms that they treat the students with dignity and explained how they never resort to demeaning or disparaging comments made in front of their peers, suggesting that “care” is demonstrated by a deliberate and intentional understanding of all cultures, a sincere relationship of respect and responsibility between the student and the teacher, and an authentic voice and perspective afforded to students, allowing them to have ownership in the “great work” that matters to them (Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015). The Appreciative Inquiry and Organizing theoretical approach (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008) embraces “students’ cultural strengths” into the learning environment and design (Azano, 2014, p. 62) and provides our most marginalized students, families, and communities with hope (Shuayb, 2014).

This level of ownership was apparent by the teachers who informed the researcher that they often provide opportunities for students to interact with the work in a way that is significant to them, by choosing projects or assignments they may want to complete. While there were mixed responses to its usage in class, there was a clear delineation made that teachers feel students should have choice in whom they work with and at times even the material they interact with. Students who feel engaged also sense their teachers’ flexibility with their learning style and appreciate the attention to detail in making adjustments to their daily teachings (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008).

This concept of student empowerment is displayed through the selection of material and curricula that teachers seem to allow students some discretion over, but often students express that they feel engaged by telling authentic stories and providing content that is meaningful and
relevant (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008). This opportunity for student input was generally limited to those subjects where the literature and content was directly connected, like English and reading. Often it was in these classrooms that the teachers identified ways they allow students to share their own personal voice in class, providing them with some ability to take ownership of their learning and therefore connect their own learning by feeling empowered through their own voice, around issues relating to their community (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015). Interestingly, this occurred more significantly in the language arts classrooms, but was used in a different means in several of the math teachers’ classes. Students were given an opportunity to express concerns and issues that directly impacted them, perhaps a rudimentary method of assessing themselves and building a case for “academic activism” (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015b), thus allowing them to more meaningfully connect to the learning environment and subsequently become more academically successful. The notion from teachers who use this strategy is one that suggests unless students are given this opportunity to share their voice, they will struggle to connect to the content of the class. Perhaps these teachers feel that without a strong relationship with students who are of different cultures, teachers will be unable to impact positive change (Guajardo et al., 2008). While there is little connection to the concept of “empowerment through care” (Johnson, 2014, p. 148) and that this will inspire development for the greater good of the community (Guajardo et al., 2008), perhaps this is the foundational element that allows students to truly trust and respect their teacher, as expressed through ethic of care, speaking to the flexibility students appreciate when their teacher not only challenges their learning, but also provides the space and time to let them work through personal conflicts and situations, have adjusted learning designs, and adequate time to process information and learn concepts (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008).
Reflectivity: Teacher Intentionality

It is evident that from the various teacher interviews that these educators think, strive to be mindful, try to understand their students and adapt beyond their current situation (Greene, 1986). The majority of the teachers’ responses indicate that there is a genuine sense of care that teachers have from being in this profession, and the level of teacher efficacy or ability to make an educational difference to their students, despite the limitations and barriers that exist in their homes and communities (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004), is significant. We openly see that these educators strive to identify methods to keep the class “fun” and “engaging”, as well as encompass an environment that is interactive and provides student voice and empowerment. The question that therefore remains is whether these teachers recognize the fundamental value in providing these strategies to students of color primarily, in an effort to better support the students who often are most marginalized (Azano, 2014). With teachers being forthright in their discussions about empowering students and providing choice in classroom assignments, there was virtually no evidence to suggest that there was a reflective process for how these intentional culturally responsive strategies may impact students of color disproportionately. Candidly, by design, the questions were never framed with the notion of ethnicity or culture, but with the exception of one teacher, who overtly made statements like “with the population of students I’m working with, I have to make sure students know they are respected and cared for and these concepts have to come before any instruction is attempted… because I am “a maternal figure as opposed to you’re my teacher”, none of the other educators made any reference, either directly or indirectly, to race or ethnicity.

Incidentally, despite culturally responsive pedagogy being a major domain my research study was centered around, it is quite clear that the majority of teachers are generally unaware of
these constructs whatsoever and therefore, this reflection process that Greene (1986) discusses, which must involve “emotions, passions, and as well as logical thinking processes” (Stanley, 1998, p. 584) that directly address the barriers to educational equity, specifically with regard to race, are largely nonexistent and unfounded in this research study. While there were some inherent limitations that occurred as a result of the study being modified in order to gain IRB approval, including the questions being phrased in a manner that prevented the teachers from knowing the purpose of the study, as well as the researcher who conducted the questioning having no knowledge of his subjects and therefore no established rapport or relationship, little discussion of how imperative culturally responsive pedagogy emerged from the teachers. Additionally, it is also plausible that with HCPS not placing much, if any emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, especially in the way teachers are both formally and informally observed and evaluated using the Danielson (2007) teacher rubric, it is no wonder why there is an absence of how vital this awareness is. If we are to look at Dewey’s (1910) “attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness that require teachers to examine multiple perspectives of their own and others’ beliefs and practices are essential to reflective action” (Stanley, 1998, p. 584), with the goal of ultimately impacting student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004), there must be conversation about how students of varying backgrounds learn differently and reflection must allow a teacher to be more intentional in their instruction, because they know what they are doing and why (Perry, 1998; Schon, 1983), helping them to further become more effective and efficient as professionals (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984).
Cultural Competence: Teacher and Principal Selection

Teachers need to differentiate based on their students’ cultural background and understand that students learn in different ways. Roberts (2010) proposes that providing culturally responsive pedagogy is in many ways an act of caring behavior, perhaps rarely associated with traditional definitions of teacher care and compassion. Roberts (2010) labels this as “culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC)” (p. 451). Whether intentional or not, this practice is obviously utilized throughout many of the teachers’ classrooms and thus is significant in that it impacts the classroom environment. Therefore, a major implication of this work is then how are the most appropriate faculty and staff selected to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy and caring behavior, knowing that these practices are most needed for our students of color, bridging the connection between the ethic of care and its relationship to culturally relevant pedagogy (Roberts, 2010). If we strive for a connection between students’ perspectives and their inherent culture (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995), to help them “create meaning and understanding [of] the world” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.110), we must identify those educators who are willing to embrace these strategies and notions for all individuals, but most importantly those disenfranchised black and brown students. As mentioned previously, with the intersection of caring behavior and cultural relevancy comes culturally responsive teaching or pedagogy, which may be seen as an evolution of this framework, where instead of just making things relevant, educators help make learning meaningful and implementable for all students.

The authors addressing culturally responsive pedagogy over the past 10 years often begin by asserting that without cultural competence in leadership, very little can be done to overcome the struggles students endure. Smith (2005) explains that because white students are inherently privileged through society, a culturally conscious leader utilizes professional
development and training to overcome the assumptions of “institutionalized knowledge within schools” and provide students with “academic and social success” (p. 28). Furthermore, administrators must empower teachers to build relationships with students and families so they can develop a sense of cultural importance in the academic work they are doing (Guajardo et al., 2008). Part of relationship building comes from allowing educators the opportunity to explore multi-culturally appropriate education (Blachowicz et al., 2010) and challenge student thinking in a more relevant way that is “critically engaging, inquiry-based and intellectually meaningful” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 926).

Moreover, there is also a suggestion that it is only with a more diverse and representative leadership applicant pool that districts will harness leaders who are sensitive to the needs of all student’s cultural backgrounds (Johnson, 2014). Culturally competent leaders develop “confianza” or “mutual trust” (Harris & Kiyama, 2013, p. 186), which is perpetuated in the holistic value that is placed upon previously marginalized students and by establishing meaningful and respectful relationships (Harris & Kiyama, 2013). The process of selecting the right leaders is extremely important. Culturally competent leaders need to employ the right teachers who represent the diverse group of learners they have at the school site (Ware, 2006), and school leaders must see how the ethic of care can be considered part of the curriculum (Roberts, 2010).

Many district leaders and school principals are approaching diversity and school reform at present through training to promote more diverse thinking and exploration (Johnson, 2014). It is no longer enough to just expect that a culturally responsive mindset will trickle down to teachers and students, through professional development alone. The prospect of change will only be manifested when a grassroots campaign of student academic activism seizes influence
upon the way curriculum is designed and when narratives of community leaders and other elders and collaboration with parents and community advocates ensues (Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015; Johnson, 2014). It is only through this critical student lens that a truly culturally caring environment that addresses all backgrounds and all students can be provided (Azano, 2014).

As educators, there is tremendous significance in this work, because we must become increasingly aware of how cultural differences play out in how students receive information and instructional delivery from their teacher. If students of certain ethnicities do not feel trust from their teacher, they are less likely to perform academically. Caring teachers (a) provide scaffolding during a teaching episode, (b) reflect a kind disposition through actions, (c) are always available to the student, (d) show a personal interest in the student’s well-being inside and outside the classroom, (e) and provide affective academic support in the classroom setting (Garza, 2009).

**Academic Care vs. Personal Care**

The teachers’ studied express how they strive to ensure their students are engaged in their lessons and consistently feel valued through specific behaviors that illustrate care. The subjects expressed how imperative it is to call on students by name, hold them academically accountable and provide multiple opportunities for student voice, to name a few strategies. “However, an everyday sense of caring that concentrates on the conduct or character of the teacher, not the relation [while may] help her students to succeed, [because] she seems to know what her students need, and acts faithfully on those beliefs. However, these are assumed needs, rather than expressed needs,” (Noddings, 2012). Caring may be expressed in a variety of ways; parents care for their child in an instinctive, protective way, which differs from educators in school who may
demonstrate care in how they choose literature for the students or the manner in which they present curriculum and content, perhaps even with the intention of building relationships with students to make this learning more tangible (Noddings, 1995). Interestingly, it appears that many of the teachers in the study settle on this “academic care” (Addison, 2012) that Noddings (2005) describes as more of a virtue to promote understanding and therefore positive learning outcome, as opposed to relational care that is indicative of a deeper level of connection (Noddings, 2005). There are many plausible explanations to this distinction, most notably the legislation and threat of litigation from so many parents and families who feel teachers crossed the line, either intentionally or not.

It seems that teachers build a relationship out of purpose and not necessarily for the genuine sake of getting to know a student intimately, because arguably this makes them vulnerable and even susceptible to incidents. There is an apparent level of superficiality that resonates from some of the teacher responses about why they call students the pseudonyms like “baby, honey, etc” and that these are simply strategies to get to know the students, just enough for the class to function well and not necessarily intimately (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Furthermore, with only surface level exposure to cultural relevance and equity throughout the district and an evaluation rubric (Danielson, 2007) that only minimally scratches the surface on building meaningful student relationships, it is no wonder why this very shallow level of care exists. The use of “teacher immediacy” (Christophel, 1990) by many of these teachers is indicative of how the differences in caring behavior, illustrate the disparate approach to showing care on a personal and intimate level for a loved one, as opposed to how some teachers express care in a classroom or school environment, where there may be a motivation of only academic success and not a deeper, sustainable relationship (Cooper & Miness, 2014).
Implications for Professional Practice: School Leader

There was consistent feedback throughout the barriers to empowerment and care section that teachers felt a need to have additional resources and professional development on cultural competence, specifically focusing on strategies for culturally responsive pedagogy and the ethic of care (Rodriguez, 2010). A major enlightening element was that with the exception of one teacher, none of the research subjects even alluded to how these culturally responsive teaching strategies may directly impact students of color. Therefore, it seems imperative that some type of training and staff development that focuses on letting teachers understand how students of color most directly benefit from these specific strategies (Smith, 2005), overcoming the “institutionalized knowledge within schools” (Smith, 2005, p. 28) be offered. Interestingly, a struggle that emerges from this notion is that a school leader prescribing the professional development to the faculty and staff seems a less than ideal way of influencing and motivating people to see the benefits of creating meaningful and sustainable relationships with students, beyond just immediacy. A powerful alternative would be to allow the teachers who are most astute at providing a culturally responsive and caring environment a chance to model this behavior for teachers themselves. Arguably, most school leaders have a system of identifying who in their school is already culturally competent and thus utilizing this resource is a tremendous opportunity for schools, possibly even as a mentor to other teachers in the building. Perhaps this training would be offered in a non-traditional way and may include classroom visits and observations, feedback amongst peers, and possibly even allowing students to share how they see their trusted teachers building tangible connections with them. Recognizing that the traditional professional development options which have existed within schools for long periods
of time are largely ineffective, it is up to school leaders to identify alternative means for modeling positive practice.

Another possible implication for practice in schools is to provide more discretion to empower teachers themselves to be more reflective and thoughtful in their choice for curriculum. While it seems clear to offer this possibility for those in language arts classes, many teachers pointed out that they would prefer alternatives in math class, as much as in English or reading. Providing these alternatives would increase the level of flexibility (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008) that is so often described as an essential ingredient in allowing students to feel empowered in their own learning, enabling educators the opportunity to explore multi-culturally appropriate education (Blachowicz et al, 2010) and challenge student thinking in a more relevant way that is “critically engaging, inquiry-based and intellectually meaningful” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 926).

The irony is that as school leaders, we often forget to empower those who are capable of empowering others and often ignore that teachers own insight and perspectives may help better guide and support students, because they are more intentional in their instruction (Perry, 1998; Schon, 1983).

Additionally, strong consideration must be made by the school principal when hiring new faculty and staff. Teachers who are willing to embrace diversity and are open to the discussion of how to support the learning for our neediest students are crucial; without a sense of efficacy, conviction, open-mindedness, and willingness to consider others’ perspectives (Stanley, 1998), schools will struggle with the goal of ultimately impacting student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). It is crucial that building administrators advocate for the importance of teachers building relationships with students and families, helping to convey the cultural importance of their academic work (Guajardo et al., 2008).
Implications for Further Research

Since leaving my position as school principal at ABC Middle School and beginning a new experience abroad as an Upper School Principal (middle and high school) in the Middle East, I have come to better understand how important cultural competence and awareness is. All students have a need to understand where they come from and who they are, bridging cultural relevancy to their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Furthermore, the concept of care is universal to all civilizations and primal in so many cultures, that exploring ways students feel respected, develop trust, and sense empowerment throughout the Middle East, would be a tremendous continuation of this study (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018). Interestingly, one prevailing assumption that I have already debunked is that students from this region of the world must have similar beliefs and assumptions because they are Islamic or Arabic; instead, recognizing that each sovereign nation provides its own cultural norms and expectations would be the basis for how culturally responsive teachers need to truly be.

Limitations

While conducting this study illuminated some important insights as to how teachers may view their role as a classroom teacher and identified specific ways that they demonstrate care and cultural competence, these results cannot be generalized to other classrooms within ABC Middle School, but more importantly to other schools within the district. Moreover, the number of participants chosen for this study is from a limited selection of criteria and thus is also not generalizable. Only seven teachers were selected for this study and the responses contained within this research study may not reflect perspectives beyond those individuals. While I did not conduct
the research myself, I am a researcher and have developed the literature-based protocol and questions as the school principal, thus limiting my perspective in the application of this research.

**Reflections on Role as Researcher**

As the lead researcher, I felt compelled to ask the right questions in order to generate true insight into how these teachers felt about their students. I was very intentional about not asking questions that mentioned the use of terminology specific to culturally responsive pedagogy and the ethic of care, but still initiate conversation about the practices that most closely align to what the literature says are fundamental to these domains. It appeared from the responses that were given by these teachers, that their admissions were very forthcoming and candid. Many of the teachers pointed out specific areas they would like to improve and even made mention that they do not allow certain practices in their classroom, without feeling the need to provide justification.

Incidentally, because I was compelled to modify the study for IRB approval and thus I did not know who the individual teachers who participated in the study, as a school principal, I am extremely proud of the work that these educators are doing. I initially set the study design around action research because I wanted to better inform my practice and learn how to support teachers as a result of this work, but some of this more practitioner-based insight became lost when someone else, who did not know the teachers interviewed them. While I realize these results are not generalizable to other classrooms, teachers and schools, I am honored to work with such consummate professionals, who demonstrated how deeply they do care for their students. My work as a principal and researcher is a blurred relationship and while I feel this process has been invaluable in providing insight into how to support student learning, through
research-based strategies, my work as a practitioner will never end, and I will continue to explore
methods to better inform teachers and support students.

**Personal Reflection**

One of the most initially surprising findings was how culturally responsive pedagogy overwhelmingly failed to emerge from teacher responses. While I anticipated teachers would logically not utilize that specific terminology, I did anticipate teachers being more vocal about ways they recognize the social and academic disadvantages our students of color have and suspected teachers would have made more of a connection to how their actions impact these students specifically. It was not until I reflected on the lack of emphasis the school district places on building meaningful, personal, caring relationships with students, especially through the evaluation rubric, that this outcome started to make more sense. In fact, even the training offered through the district seems to offer a cursory approach to equity and access, with little, discussion into how our marginalized students directly need to have these endearing teachers who are aware of culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, the “academic care” and “teacher immediacy” expressed from the teachers seems to largely support the notion that they recognize their behaviors in class are positive for student outcomes and learning, but not necessarily specific to helping black and LatinX students.

My role as a school leader is to model the behavior I expect others to follow. Much of the PD or training offered within schools does not motivate or excite teachers, in the same way that outdated curriculum or practice does not motivate students. Therefore, I will strive to model the caring behaviors and awareness of others’ cultures as I lead in schools. Placing emphasis on that which is different and sometimes foreign to us, gives other individuals a sense that these
things matter. Therefore, when we are discussing students’ perceptions, attitudes, and relationships, these intentional decisions matter.

**Chapter Summary**

It is relatively safe to make an assumption that most teachers care about their students. In fact, it is a relatively accurate statement to make that educators in general are compelled to do what is best for students, particularly after conducting this research study. The major question then becomes; why do we not act on it? With all the discussion on how imperative positive culturally responsive pedagogy and ethic of care is, the next step is supporting the work that teachers do to understand how to implement strategies to build relationships and empower students, especially those students of color. Without effective leadership in schools and an overall awareness of the magnitude of the situation, schools will not change and we are destined to repeat what already is. Our intentional focus makes the difference and ultimately will help all our students succeed.
References


Goughnour, M. (2013). *Increasing students’ perceptions of being valued through the study of multicultural literature and analysis of diversity related issues in a regular level sophomore English class*. Master of Arts Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH.


McCollum, B. D. (2014). *The caring beliefs and practices of effective teachers*. Doctoral dissertation, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA.


Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Title: AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHERS’ USE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY, ETHIC OF CARE, AND REFLECTIVITY

Pro # 00038698

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study and will be asked for your verbal consent at the end of the document. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being conducted by Johan von Ancken who is a doctoral student at USF and the principal of Eisenhower Middle School. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, there is a USF Doctoral student, named Adam Rea, who will lead all interviews in lieu of Johan von Anken, to ensure full confidentiality of participating teachers.

Study Details: This study is being conducted with teachers from Eisenhower Middle School and is approved by Hillsborough County Public Schools. The purpose of the study is to explore how highly effective middle school teachers reflect on culturally responsive pedagogical practices and exercise an ethic of care; explore the teachers’ level of reflection in regards to these practices.

Ethic of Care in the classroom refers to the intentional and deliberate actions of trust, care and respect so that teachers can create a positive, caring learning classroom for students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy refers to a teacher’s ability to utilize certain practices that help students connect with their classroom and the learning experience, focusing on Appreciative Language, Empowerment of Students, and Student Voice and Ownership, usually specific to students of color.

This will be done through a brief explanation of the study and one 45 min question session.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because the leadership team selected you, based on a rubric created around the Ethic of Care and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, which
demonstrated your ability to create positive and meaningful relationships with students and overall evaluation rating of highly effective.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

**Benefits, Compensation, and Risk:** Teachers will have the opportunity to be part of a research study that will directly impact their students and school. We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Great caution will be exercised in this research study to ensure all audio recordings will be transcribed and pseudonyms will be used for each participating teacher. All recordings will be destroyed once transcribed and the Principal Investigator will not be made aware of who is participating in the study, as he will only receive transcripts, with no specific teacher’s name identified.

**Confidentiality:** Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

---

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to

Meet with the USF Doctoral student, Adam Rea, to discuss the study and obtain verbal consent to participate, via zoom video conferencing (10 min.).

Meet with USF Doctoral student, Adam Rea, to discuss your use of caring and culturally responsive pedagogy in class, via Zoom video conferencing, during non-working hours, that is convenient to you (45 min).

Allow audio recording at all interview sessions.

Acknowledge that the principal investigator will only receive transcripts of the interviews and will not know who has participated.

**Total Number of Participants**

About 8-12 teachers from Eisenhower Middle School will take part in this study.

**Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You do not have to participate in this research study. You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw.
at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits
The potential benefits of participating in this research study include:
Teachers will have the opportunity to be part of a research study that will directly impact their students and school.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

In fact, great caution will be exercised in this research study to ensure all audio recordings will be transcribed and pseudonyms will be used for each participating teacher. All recordings will be destroyed once transcribed and the Principal Investigator will not be made aware of who is participating in the study, as he will only receive transcripts, with no specific teacher’s name identified.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records; however, all names will be removed. These individuals include:
The Principal Investigator, USF Doctoral student, Adam Rea, and all other research staff.
Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.) These include:
The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, please respect the privacy of your conversation and do not repeat what is said in the interview to others.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Johan von Ancken at 813-376-6968. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research
I freely give my verbal consent to take part in this study, indicating that I am agreeing to take part in the research study.

*Figure A1. IRB Informed Consent*
Appendix B

### Figure B1. Previous observation protocols.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description of Teacher Behavior</th>
<th># of Tallies</th>
<th># of Students of Color</th>
<th># of Students Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher B - Reading 6th Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>A</strong> Trust, Respect, &amp; Care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Recognizing positive behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Recognizing positive/correct responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Calling on students by name</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Avoiding a deficit response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Positive corrections for classroom management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in choosing assignments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in groupings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in completing assignments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Having students share personal stories</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Creating structured cooperative organization</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Facilitating peer feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This teacher had heard the terms culturally relevant curriculum before, but was unaware that teaching students differently may increase equity. We spoke about her intentionality and she stated it was intentional, but because she wanted all her students to feel connected to the classroom and learning. She stated that she realizes many of her students are students of color who may lose interest in other classrooms that are not as student-centered and tries to make them find a love for learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description of Teacher Behavior</th>
<th># of Tallies</th>
<th># of Students of Color</th>
<th># of Students Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher A - Language Arts 6th Grade ESE Self-Contained</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>A</strong> Trust, Respect, &amp; Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Recognizing positive behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Recognizing positive/correct responses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Calling on students by name</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Avoiding a deficit response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Positive corrections for classroom management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in choosing assignments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in groupings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Allowing student choice in completing assignments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Having students share personal stories</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Creating structured cooperative organization</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Facilitating peer feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The teacher explained that she provided many of the teacher strategies to her students because they were an ESE self-contained class and knew that these would provide the most meaningful and engaging learning environment. She stated that her students are part of the classroom rules and procedures process because she feels it valuable to have them feel empowered and connected. She did not seem to see her practices as culturally relevant pedagogy, but did recognize how they were connected to the ethic of care. She appreciated the insight that these are considered best practices to help students learn, especially students of color.
Appendix C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name:</th>
<th>Domain: Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Teacher Behavior</th>
<th>Teacher Rating (5-1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Usually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Construct: Student Trust

(Noddings, 1984, 2013)  
- Providing assistance to students
- Ability to recognize positive behavior

### Construct: Teacher Respect

(Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018)  
- Ability to recognize correct academic responses
- Calling on students by name

### Construct: Teacher Care

(Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 2013, 2018)  
- Challenging students to think
- Keeping students focused on learning

### Domain: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

#### Construct: Appreciate Language

(Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2008).  
- Emphasis of avoiding a deficit (negative) response
- Use of positive corrections for classroom management

#### Construct: Empowerment of students

- Allowing student choice in choosing assignments
- Allowing student choice in groupings
- Allowing student choice in completing assignments

#### Construct: Student voice/ownership

(Guajardo, M., Guajardo F., 2015; Roberts, 2010; Vega, Moore & Miranda, 2015; Yu, 2013).  
- Having students share personal stories
- Creating structured cooperative organization
- Utilizing peer feedback and/or review

### Figure C1. Selection Rubric
Appendix D

Ethic of Care-Student Trust (Noddings, 1984, 2013)

1) Can you describe some ways you build trust with your students?
2) Can you describe some ways you provide assistance to students throughout your lesson?

Ethic of Care-Teacher Respect (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 1984, 2013, 2018)

3) Can you describe how you recognize students for correctly responding to an academic question?
4) Can you describe why you use students’ names when you call on them or do you use another term of endearment?

Ethic of Care-Teacher Care (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008; Noddings, 2013, 2018)

5) Can you describe ways you challenge students in their thinking throughout class?
6) Can you describe some ways you keep students focused on learning throughout the class?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy-Appreciate Language (Barrett & Fry, 2008; Burello, Beitz, & Mann, 2015; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2008).

7) Can you describe how you avoid a negative response and still provide corrective action when students are misbehaving in class?
8) Can you describe some specific ways you offer positive corrections for classroom management?


9) Can you describe how you allow students opportunities to have choice in choosing assignments?
10) Can you describe how you allow students to have choice in how they work, whether individual, partner or group?
11) Can you describe how you provide students with flexibility in completing assignments

12) Can you describe ways that you allow students to have a voice in the classroom?
13) Can you describe a time when you allowed students to share personal stories in class?
14) Can you describe when it is appropriate to allow students to provide peer feedback and/or review each other’s work?

General Questions:

15) What are some of the elements that have gotten in the way of allowing you to show care toward your students?
16) When things have impacted your ability to provide a caring environment, what steps have you taken to alleviate them?
17) Can you describe some resources that the school district or school administration could provide you to help you create a caring environment?
18) What are some of the elements that have gotten in the way of empowering students?
19) When things have impacted your ability to empower students, what steps have you taken to alleviate them?
20) Can you describe some resources that the school district or school administration could provide you to further empower students?

Figure D1. Questioning Protocol