

Student Teachers Learning Together to Enact Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English  
Learners

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## **Dedication**

For Eva, Isabel and Sofia – May you seek justice and serve as advocates for others.

For the immigrant newcomers who arrive in Minnesota every day – Welcome. We are so thankful that you are here. What can we learn from you?

## **Abstract**

As Minnesota's schools currently educate 65,000 English learners (ELs), a 300% increase over the past two decades, teachers and school administrators are called to consider how best to meet the needs of this changing demographic. Given the firmly entrenched opportunity gap between ELs and their English-proficient peers, meeting the needs of this growing population of students is particularly urgent. Researchers assert that culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is essential in closing the opportunity gap, as it recognizes the central role of students' cultures in all aspects of teaching and learning and it acknowledges and responds to the current schooling climate that places students from diverse cultural backgrounds in learning environments that do not mirror their home cultures and values. Unfortunately, CRP is a commonly misunderstood framework and little is known about how teachers can be prepared to enact it.

This collective case study examined four student teachers as they participated in a community of practice focused on CRP for ELs in an urban elementary school. The researcher sought to understand how the participants' understanding and enactment of CRP for ELs evolved and how they overcame perceived obstacles to CRP enactment. Prior to the onset of data collection, the elementary school adopted a new literacy curriculum that required teachers to deliver lessons by reading from scripts. The participants identified the standardized curriculum as the most significant obstacle to CRP enactment; however, findings from this study reveal that the participants developed a system (that the researcher and participants coined "weaving") in which they attended to the "non-negotiables" of the curriculum while incorporating themes that reflected their diverse students' lived experiences. Additional findings indicate that participant

examination of their own evolving sociocultural identity was a critical aspect in their cultural competency development and that learning to enact CRP for ELs took place within and between community of practice meetings.



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## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background and Rationale**

In the United States, ten percent of our nation's students are English learners (ELs). This amounts to 4.7 million students, and the number increases every year (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In the past two decades, the state of Minnesota has seen a 300% increase in the number of ELs that its schools serve, which makes ELs the fastest growing student population in the state (Zittlow, 2012). Currently, as Minnesota schools educate 67,000 English learners, teachers and school administrators are called to consider how to best meet the needs of this changing demographic. Given the longstanding opportunity<sup>1</sup> gap between white students and students of color in the state, this challenge is particularly urgent (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2013), black<sup>2</sup> students graduate from high school at a rate of 56%, Hispanic<sup>3</sup> students at a rate of 58% and students labeled "Limited English Proficient" at a rate of 59%. These abysmal graduation rates reflect our schools' failure to tap into our diverse learners' linguistic and cultural capacities by offering schooling that is not relevant to

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<sup>1</sup> The "opportunity gap" is a term that replaces the "achievement gap" by positioning society as the subject of the problem, rather than learners (Carter & Welner [Eds.] 2013). In the context of African American students, Ladson Billings (2006) refers to this as the "education debt".

<sup>2</sup> The Minnesota Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics use the term "black" as a racial category that refers to learners from a variety of local and immigrant backgrounds (with varying linguistic backgrounds) who self-identify as "black".

<sup>3</sup> The Minnesota Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics use the term "Hispanic" as a racial category that refers to learners from a variety of local and immigrant backgrounds (with varying linguistic backgrounds) who self-identify as "Hispanic".

their home lives and that doesn't sufficiently meet their academic needs. More importantly, they shed light on a human rights crisis in our state as we perpetuate educational and subsequent economic opportunity gaps that serve as a pipeline to poverty for marginalized learners.

Given the evident opportunity gap, educators are called to consider ways in which schooling can better serve ELs. As students are more motivated to learn when curricula are relevant to their lived experiences (Howard, 2003), it is incumbent upon teachers to consider ways in which to tailor their pedagogy to their unique student populations. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson Billings, 1995) is a theoretical construct that calls educators to enact pedagogies that affirm the cultural identities of students. This dissertation study seeks to explore a gap in understanding about how teachers learn to enact CRP with ELs. In addition to CRP, a second theoretical framework undergirding this investigation is Communities of Practice, which asserts that practitioners learn to improve their practice through participation in an intentional community of peers.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is a predominant framework that has the potential to contribute to closing educational opportunity gaps. CRP was conceived of in response to a need for schooling to be more relevant to the lives of African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) defines CRP as:

A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions)

perpetuate (1995, p. 469).

The three central tenets of CRP are: social critique, academic success, and cultural competence (Ladson Billings, 1995). That is, in order to enact CRP, a teacher must demonstrate pedagogies that: engage students in critical examination of content, provide students with rigorous academic tasks, and take into account students' home cultures.

Researchers assert that CRP is an essential element in closing the opportunity gap, as it recognizes the central role of students' cultures in all aspects of teaching and learning and it acknowledges and responds to the current schooling climate that places students from diverse cultural backgrounds in learning environments that do not mirror their home cultures and values (Langer, 1987; Petchauer, 2011; Price-Dennis & Souto-Mannin, 2011). CRP calls teachers to become aware that students' identities, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped by their cultures (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998), and it presents a unique challenge to teachers in that they cannot use relevant pedagogies without first knowing their students. Phuntsog (2001) considers that the true test of CRP "may lie in its ability to create classrooms where race, culture, and ethnicity are not seen as barriers to overcome but are sources of enrichment for all" (p. 63).

Unfortunately, CRP is a commonly misunderstood framework and little is known about how teachers can be prepared to enact it. Goodwin (2002) writes that this problem "must galvanize teacher preparation programs to rethink how their curriculum prepares pre-service teachers to work effectively with diverse students" (p. 157). A review of the literature (which is further extrapolated in chapter 2) reveals that the following facets are present in teacher preparation programs that actively seek to produce culturally relevant pedagogues: developing a self-social-cultural consciousness (Evans & Gunn, 2011;

Fuller, Miller & Domingues, 2006; Schussler & Stooksberry, 2010; Shepel & Elina, 1995; Villegas, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007), promoting cultural competency (Huang, 2002; Keengwe, 2010; Morton & Bennett, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2008), engaging in critical conversations about equity (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Evans & Gunn, 2011; Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007), incorporating CRP across coursework (Fitchett, Starker and Salyers, 2012; Frye, Button & Kelly, 2010; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993; Zeichner, Grant, Gay, Gillette, Valli, & Villegas, 1998), and providing opportunities for CRP praxis (Hill, 2012; Petchauer, 2011; Price-Dennis & Souto-Mannin, 2011).

Advocating for the preparation of culturally relevant teachers is crucial yet precarious, because teacher preparation programs graduate teachers into schools that often do not honor their commitment to culturally relevant teaching. Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) assert that there is a “need to invite pre-service teachers to engage in fostering pedagogical third spaces which syncretically bring together mentor teacher academic expectations and student interests and cultural repertoires” (p. 236). As such, it is essential that teacher educators establish a strong and sustaining bridge to the K-12 classroom.

Studies such as those of Price-Dennis and Souto-Mannin (2011) (an investigation that examines how a white teacher candidate tailored pedagogy to her African-American middle school students) and that of Hill (2012) (a study that demonstrated how the inclusion of texts that were culturally relevant to African American students’ lived experiences generated critical dialogue about race and injustice) are recent examples of research that examines how teachers respond to apparent opportunity gaps by tailoring

instruction to reflect African American students' lived experiences. There is a wide range of studies that investigate how CRP can be enacted for African American students. However, there is a dearth of literature that examines how CRP can be enacted for ELs. The limited studies that examine the role of CRP for ELs (Orosco & O'Connor, 2013; Salazar, 2010; Wortham & Contreras, 2002) support increased professional development for teachers in the area of CRP and call for additional research.

### **Communities of Practice**

**Communities of practice** (CoPs) (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a framework that examines how practitioners learn to improve their practice through participation in an intentional gathering of peers, stems from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) posits that learning is the result of observing and modeling the attitudes, displays of emotion and behaviors of others. He explains that "Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling; from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). Social learning theory considers learning to be an entirely social phenomenon and the result of one's lived experience in social environments.

While the phenomenon of communities learning together is as old as humanity itself, the use of CoPs as a learning theory and a framework for research was relatively recently conceived of by Lave and Wenger in their seminal 1991 book, *Situated Learning*. In this book, the authors employ social learning theory to challenge traditional theories of experiential and internalized learning as they explain and illustrate how people learn in social groups, or CoPs. In the forward to the text, Hanks (1991) explains that "rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are

involved, they [Lave and Wenger] ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place” (p. 14). Wenger-Trayner<sup>4</sup> (2006) defines CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3). In another definition, he focuses on the *process* rather than the *product* when he writes that learning is a process that is the result of participation in a social community. He names four components that characterize CoPs: meaning, practice, community and identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

Given the reality that practicing teachers often learn through conversation and collaboration with their colleagues, the framework of CoPs lends itself well to this research. Teachers often gather together in intentional communities (regionally such communities are known as professional learning communities [PLCs]) and seek to learn how to improve their practice. This research brings the nature of social learning among teachers together with the need to critically examine CRP enactment within the sociopolitical environment of a school. It serves as an intentional model for what is organically happening in hallways and staff lounges around the world – teachers gathering together to discuss how to best teach their students. This study employed the CoP model because of the participants’ shared repertoire and commitment to improving their practice through social learning.

### **Research Questions**

The data generated from this research are aimed at answering the following questions:

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<sup>4</sup> In 2014, Etienne Wenger changed his last name to Wenger-Trayner. All references to his work that is either post-2014 or on his website will be referenced as Wenger-Trayner. Other work will be referenced as Wenger.

1. How do CoP activities mediate teachers' understanding of CRP for ELs?
2. In what ways is pedagogy for ELs shaped by teacher candidate participation in a CRP-based CoP?
3. What do student teachers identify as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs and how do they overcome them?

Research Question 1 links both of the theoretical frameworks that undergird this study (CRP and CoPs). It seeks to examine how teachers' conceptualization of CRP for ELs is affected by their participation in a CoP. Like Research Question 1, Research Question 2 also relies on both of the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research. However, while the first question addresses teacher understanding of CRP, the focus of the second question is how teachers' pedagogy for ELs and their attempts to enact CRP are affected by participation in a CoP. Research Question 3 situates this study in the context in which teachers work. As this research does not take place in a vacuum, this question considers sociopolitical variables that may affect the participants' experience learning to enact CRP for ELs in a CoP.

### **Overview of the Study**

This dissertation study intends to fill a gap in the literature as it focuses on how teachers learn to enact CRP for ELs. CRP is one recommended approach that is intended to contribute to closing the opportunity gap for students of immigrant backgrounds.

In Chapter 2, I present a more thorough analysis of the theoretical frameworks that undergird this research. In addition, I provide a detailed review of the extant literature about teacher learning, CRP and CoPs. Studies that are framed by CoP or CRP are examined and their findings are used to inform the design of this research.

Chapter 3 explores a variety of themes. First, I present my positionality in this dissertation research. Second, I provide an overview of the data collection tools used in this study. Third, I explain how I use the four CoP components of meaning, practice, community and identity as well as mediated discourse analysis to frame and inform my analysis of data. Fourth, I give a detailed description of the participants and the research setting. Lastly, I attend to the sociopolitical context in which this research takes place.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide an analysis of the findings for the three questions under investigation in this study. By making connections to the extant literature, I share how teacher understanding and pedagogy is affected by participation in the CoP. In addition, I present my analysis of how the teacher learning experience is influenced by the sociopolitical context of the study. Excerpts from interviews, digital journals and PLC meetings are examined and analyzed to answer the research questions.

In Chapter 7, I summarize key findings and draw further connections to what is already established in the literature. I offer suggestions for how teachers (pre-service and in-service) can form intentional CoPs in order to improve their practice for ELs. Lastly, I recommend areas in which further research is needed in this area.



## **Chapter 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

*Although immigrant learners are a growing presence in schools and educational programs throughout the United States, there is a lack of sustained inquiry about their education.*

(Harvard Educational Review “Call for Papers”, 2000)

Chapter two examines both of the theoretical frameworks that undergird this dissertation research in addition to studies in which they intersect. The first framework, Communities of Practice (CoP), is presented in its early and modern iterations. Then, CoP studies that informed this research are analyzed. The second framework, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is introduced alongside a complementary framework called Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Defense of the use of CRP over CRT is provided. Following an explanation of both frameworks, studies that explore the nexus of teacher learning and CRP are presented and facets of teacher education programs that seek to prepare culturally relevant teachers are delineated. This chapter concludes with a presentation of gaps in the knowledge base and suggestions for how this dissertation study can respond to these gaps.

### **Social Learning: Communities of Practice as a Theoretical Framework**

*Most great learning happens in groups. Collaboration is the stuff of growth.*

(Robinson, Sir K., 2010)

Scholars have long questioned how people learn. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky developed a theory that presents an answer to this age-old question.

Sociocultural theory<sup>5</sup> considers the contributions that society makes to individual development. Vygotsky wrote “Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function” (1978, p. 90). Sociocultural theory considers learning to be a social phenomenon and the result of one’s lived experience in social environments (societies).

While the phenomenon of communities learning together is as old as humanity itself, the use of Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a learning theory and a framework for research was originally conceptualized by Lave and Wenger in their seminal 1991 book, *Situated Learning*. In this book, the authors employ learning theories such as sociocultural theory to challenge traditional theories of experiential and internalized learning as they explain and illustrate how people learn in social groups, or CoPs. In the introduction of the text, Hanks (1991) explains that “rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they [Lave and Wenger] ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place” (p. 14).

CoPs is a fitting theoretical framework for research about teacher learning in general because teachers often learn socially, as members of intentional or unintentional groups. Teachers often gather together in intentional communities (regionally such communities are known as professional learning communities [PLCs]) and seek to learn how to improve their practice.

### **Original Conceptualization of Communities of Practice**

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<sup>5</sup> Vygotsky developed sociocultural theory in the 1930s, however his work was not published in the West until 1978, 44 years after his death.

Lave and Wenger (1991) first conceived of CoPs as the acquisition of knowledge through apprenticeship. Tennant (1997) asserted that Lave and Wenger's concept of situated learning considers individuals acting as full participants in the world and generating meaning from their interconnectedness in contrast to traditional notions of learning that focus on an individual's independent acquisition of knowledge. While Lave and Wenger offered anecdotal examples that illustrate that 'learning by doing' is part of participation in a CoP, they argued that "doing" within the context of membership in a community of learners is more influential than "doing" alone because social learning can take place. Another notable difference between learning as internalization and learning in a CoP is "an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 50) that inevitably shape changing social constructs. As such, CoPs are made up of a community of learners and practitioners, newcomers and experts who are focused on improving their practice. Mastery of the CoP practice moves the newcomer toward full participation in the CoP.

*Legitimate peripheral participation* refers to the relations between newcomers and experts in addition to the activities and work that connect them to each other, thus impacting all of their roles. What it means to learn in a CoP is to grow toward becoming a full participant (master), as legitimate peripheral participation is considered to be a temporary aspect of learning in a CoP. In addition, the purpose of a newcomer's learning in a CoP "is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 108-9). As participants move toward full participation, their behaviors and roles in the CoP are transformed. Lave and Wenger acknowledged that their theory of situated

learning has great ramifications when considering how societies operate and evolve.

They shared that “the concept of legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework for bringing together theories of situated activity and theories about the production and reproduction of the social order” (Lave & Wenger, p. 47).

In this early conceptualization of CoPs in *Situated Learning*, Lave and Wenger provided a variety of examples of learning environments. Schools were not included. The authors posited a very intentional rationale for leaving schools out of the text. They asserted that schooling is based on the foundational assumption that teachers are able to transfer decontextualized knowledge to students. This claim comes in direct conflict with situated learning, as it attests that all learning is the result of participation in a community of practitioners. As such, Lave and Wenger reported that the apprenticeship model of learning, as it relates to legitimate peripheral participation, wasn't applicable in a schooling context and was rather oppositional to formal schooling. Further problematizing the relationship between schooling and learning is legitimate peripheral participation; an analytical viewpoint on learning that seeks to explain authentic learning and comes in direct conflict with the concept of knowledge transfer.

### **Current Conceptualization of Communities of Practice**

Following Lave and Wenger's seminal text, *Situated Learning*, Wenger continued to develop the theory of CoP without Lave. He found that the learning that takes place in apprenticeship CoPs is often the result of more complex social relationships amongst peers. Wenger–Trayner writes that:

The term community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice. Once the concept was articulated, we

started to see these communities everywhere, even when no formal apprenticeship system existed. And of course, learning in a community of practice is not limited to novices. (n.d.)

The above acknowledgement radically changed the definition of CoPs. Wenger's finding that CoPs exist outside of the apprenticeship construct expanded the possibilities of the framework exponentially. This crucial turning point in understanding how CoPs operate brought this framework to the field of education as a means to study how students and teachers learn in community.

Wenger abandoned the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in his book, *Communities of Practice* (1998). He redefined CoPs as a group of people who intentionally gather together and have mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998), thus broadening the environments that qualify as CoPs. Given this new definition, apprenticeship (newcomers learning from masters) is no longer a required element in a CoP, and the framework can be applied to schooling environments. This is an important distinction, the notion of legitimate peripheral participation doesn't easily apply to educational CoPs. For example, in a classroom CoP, students aren't working toward becoming teachers and in a CoP of teachers (such as professional development or professional learning communities), colleagues participate as equals rather than members of a hierarchical structure in which they seek to move up the ranks.

Given Wenger's evolved understanding of CoPs, he redefined the term in 1998. In this conceptualization, he focused on *process* rather than *product* in that learning is a process that is the result of participation in a social community. He named four

components that characterize CoPs: meaning, practice, community and identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Figure 2.1 illustrates the interconnectedness of the four realms of CoPs and demonstrates how learning takes place within them.



*Figure 2.1* The Four Realms of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998)

**Community: Learning as Belonging.** The first of the four realms – *Community: Learning as Belonging* places emphasis on the CoP members’ relationship to the group. Sfard (1998) refers to this learning experience as “a process of becoming a member of a certain community” (p. 6). Wenger further breaks down the modes of belonging into engagement, alignment and imagination (Wenger, 2002). Engagement is when members actively negotiate meaning through the evolving histories of practice. In doing so, there results a shared reality in which members learn to act and construct identities. Alignment refers to connecting the practice of the community to broader structures. When members align with the group they do so in order to become part of something greater than they are as individuals. Imagination is a creative process that guides members toward exploring possibilities. Through imagination, members can create identity relations anywhere throughout history.

**Identity: Learning as Becoming.** When individuals participate in a CoP, their identities are developed through their social participation. Wenger asserts that “Learning is not just acquiring skills and information, it is becoming a certain person – a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of a community” (Wenger, 2002). Wenger refers to identity as “learning citizenship”, as members learn to manage and negotiate their roles and contributions to CoPs.

**Meaning: Learning as Experience.** Wenger (2002) posits that meaning is made through experience in social groups and that meaning is made through complex experiences.

[The] meaning-making person is not just a cognitive entity. It is a whole person, with a body, a heart, a brain, relationships, aspirations, all the aspects of human experience, all involved in the negotiation of meaning. The experience of the person in all these aspects is actively constituted, shaped, and interpreted through learning. (Wenger, 2002)

Given this understanding, meaning is made and learning takes place through the experiences of CoP members.

**Practice: Learning as Doing.** A practice<sup>6</sup> is what practitioners develop in order to do their jobs well. Wenger notes that his reference to “doing” does not refer to doing alone, but rather “doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In that sense, doing is always a social practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 47).

“Doing” is a social practice through which learning takes place.

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<sup>6</sup> The term “practice” is used to refer to participant pedagogy in general while the term “praxis” is used to refer to theory-informed practice (e.g.: CRP praxis).

Wenger (1998) posits that participation in CoPs “refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities” (p. 4). As Wenger understands learning to be a social cognitive function, he concludes that the identities of the participants in the CoP are shaped by their learning to act, talk and improvised in ways that are congruent with the CoP. This work calls attention to a need to understand how people learn across multiple social contexts.

Wenger’s current definition of CoPs varies slightly from his 1998 definition. He now defines them as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, p. 1). This conceptualization is most instructive for research on teacher learning, as teachers often learn in community but not in an apprenticeship environment.

### **Lessons Learned from the Literature:**

#### **Communities of Practice, Culture and English Learners**

To date, CoP has been used as a theoretical framework in many empirical studies in a variety of social sciences. Very few of them take up the apprenticeship model, as the majority of them view CoPs in alignment with Wenger’s modern conceptualization. Recent studies seek to examine how parallel (as opposed to hierarchical) relationships and exploration in a CoP result in learning. This section examines research that is similar to that of this dissertation study that informed its design.

The following study by Chinn (2006) sought to respond to the achievement gap that is present among native Hawaiian students. This gap is believed to be in part the



result of schooling that is representative of a culture (white culture) that doesn't match that of the students. This longitudinal study examined a method of preparing science teachers to teach native Hawaiian learners in cultural relevant ways. The researcher followed three cohorts of pre-service science teachers, each consisting of approximately 20 teacher candidates in a year-long CoP. The CoP was made up of a cohort of teacher candidates who were registered for a science methods course. They participated in a five-day cultural immersion experience in which they learned to restore taro ponds near the top of a volcano from native Hawaiian educators. Following the cultural immersion experience, participant science teachers met frequently throughout the academic year to discuss applications for culturally relevant topics and to continue building knowledge of native Hawaiian culture. Data sources over the three years of data collection included participant observation, photographic records, e-mails, lesson plans, evaluations, participant journals, photographs and field notes.

Findings indicated that participants in this CoP gained a new understanding and respect for native Hawaiian culture, and they returned to the classroom committed to infusing their curriculum with culturally relevant topics and ways of learning as a community. For example, two middle school teams at different Honolulu schools developed units that related to sustainability issues facing Pacific Islands cultures and at a third school, students planted a native garden and won two county watershed contests. This study provides an example of teacher professional development centered on a culturally relevant topic that aims to solve a local problem. While this research presents itself as a CoP study, the findings do not reflect how learning takes place amongst the teacher candidate peers. Rather, the cultural expert is positioned as the leader of the

group and when teacher learning is reported, it is the result of learning from the expert. While this research presents itself as a strong example of learning about CRP in a local context, its limited connections to the theoretical underpinnings of CoP result in findings that fail to reveal how learning can be facilitated via social interaction through participation in a CoP.

A study by Jimenez-Silva and Olson (2012) shares the aim of Chin's (2006) research, which is to better understand how teachers can explore best practices for marginalized learners through participation in a CoP. The context of this research (ELs in a K-12 school) is very similar to my dissertation research context. This investigation illustrates how CoP as a theoretical framework can be applied in teacher education research. In their study of two sections of a cultural diversity course for mainstream teachers in the Southwest, teacher candidate participation in a CoP focused on best practices for ELs was examined in order to determine whether or not they were able to apply theories related to ELs to practice.

In the study, the authors refer to the CoP as a Teacher-Learner Community (TLC). The TLC is a course designed to help teacher candidates understand the needs of ELs. TLC meetings began with a brief (15 minute) opportunity for participants to share their experiences trying to enact culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) for ELs. Critical incidents took place over the course of the TLC in the teacher candidate participants' classrooms that they brought into the TLC. For example, after an EL fainted on the playground, she came to the teacher candidate's arms and immediately begged her not to call an ambulance for fear that her family might be deported. The participants reported that having the opportunity to discuss challenging occurrences was a feature that resulted

in improved practice. Following the time allocated for participant reflection, the professors presented content (topics such as second language acquisition and CRP), and the class proceeded with an open dialogue with the professors and teacher candidates discussing theory and its application in the participants' classrooms. Participant writing, course evaluations and semi-structured interviews of the 33 participants yielded the data that were analyzed.

Findings from this research are based on quantitative and qualitative data derived from course evaluations. The researchers report that participants enjoyed their experience in the TLC and they learned a lot about the needs of ELs and how they could best meet them from the experience. A salient quote from one course evaluation is, "This class was taught in a totally different way than I have ever seen. I want to teach that way in my class . . . I learned a lot of information even though we didn't feel like we were learning" (p. 343). In response to comments such as these, the authors suggest that community-building be a part of the beginning of every class in teacher preparation so that teacher candidates can feel that they are in a trusted community in which they can discuss challenging topics related to best practices for ELs.

There are three problems with the design and findings of this study. First, although the researchers note that the first 15 minutes of class was allocated for dialogue amongst participants, it is unclear whether the teacher candidates had an opportunity to thoroughly reflect on their practice during the latter part of the class meeting. Secondly, although the researchers stated that participation in the study had no bearing on the participants' academic success in the course, academic vulnerability is a clear limitation to the study. Participants may have felt obligated to participate and display behaviors to

please the researchers (who were also the course professors), rather than participating entirely of his/her volition. This vulnerability is particularly evident in the presentation of findings, as students are apt to want to please their professors, which has the potential to influence data. Lastly, while community-building should be a worthwhile component of any course, the finding related to community building that researchers reported was inadequately supported, as the only reference to community building was the brief check-in at the beginning of class. In reducing the open-ended discussion to fifteen minutes, the researchers likely failed to deliver the message that participation in CoPs was good pedagogy. CoPs should be transformative, inquiry-based and driven by the needs of the participants.

While the following study doesn't examine cultural relevancy, it employs CoP in a way that informed the design of this dissertation research. Vinogradov (2012) analyzed the topic of best practice for culturally diverse students in a different way. Her study was focused on the use of study circles in the professional development of educators of adult ELs with limited formal schooling. The group of four educator-participants met regularly in a "study circle", which is a term taken up in adult education that refers to a CoP of educators centered on improving practice. She analyzed written reflections, data generated from an anonymous questionnaire, in addition to field notes taken during study circle meetings. Findings indicated that the study circle (CoP) encouraged meaningful reflection, increased participants' repertoire of ideas and resources and resulted in participants feeling supported in their struggles and practice. Participants reported that the most valuable aspect of taking part in the CoP was interaction with other participants.

Vinogradov's study is unique in that the members of the CoP participated of their own volition, as the CoP was not part of a required course or mandatory professional development. In support of her use of the current conceptualization of CoPs, she wrote that "CoPs provide a way of thinking about collegial social interaction as a critical element to professional learning" (p. 36). As such, the researcher allowed the participants to steer the CoP in the direction that they found the most helpful. This study comes in stark contrast to the examples provided in *Situated Learning*, where all experiences were led by experts and participants sought to emulate experts by performing as they did. Vinogradov's role in CoP meetings was that of facilitator and peer.

### **Cultural Relevancy**

Because the CoP in this study involves the exploration of EL's culture in school settings, the second theoretical framework that I draw upon is culturally relevant pedagogy. In this section, I will define the terms *culture* as it relates to this study, *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (CRT) and *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (CRP). I will lastly defend my use of CRP to frame my research.

### **Definition of Culture**

Many people are troubled by the term "culture" because of a pervasive misunderstanding of what it means. I recognize that in some cases, teaching "culture" can be damaging to students. For example, Duesterberg (1998) posits that limited, essentialist understandings of culture can be used to frame and limit students. She writes that "conceptions of culture can be limited to celebrations of holidays, heroes, ethnic festivals and food fairs which obscure the controversies and complexities about how cultural knowledge is formed and to what end it is used" (p. 497). Doubly concerning is

how the concept of “culture” is taken up in educational research. Anderson and Stillman’s (2012) extensive review of empirical research over the last two decades on the preparation of teachers for urban schools examines how the student teaching experience contributes to the preparation of teacher candidates to work with high-need student populations. They suggest that the majority of the research in this area reflects “reductive views of culture and context” (p. 3).

Gay (2010) shares Duesterberg’s and Anderson and Stillman’s concern as she seeks to better define the term “culture”. She writes, “Even without being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave” (p. 23). While this understanding of culture is a needed departure from traditional notions, it is still a weak definition in that it does not present tangible ways to identify specific aspects of culture. In my quest to find an operational definition of culture for this research that facilitates the identification of its aspects, while combating essentialist conceptualizations such as the one above, I settled on the definition of culture as “lived experience” (Cruz, Jordan, Melendez, Ostrowski, & Purves, 1997; Esteban & Moll, 2014; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hopler & Hopler, 1993; Maturana & Varela, 1992; Munslow, 2005).

The predominant scholar who utilizes this definition of culture and who has influenced this dissertation study is Luis Moll, in his research on student funds of knowledge. This definition is well-suited for CRP because it guides teachers toward tangible experiences that their learners have, rather than features of their membership to sociopolitical groups, which can lead to cultural essentialism. In more recent research, Moll (2014) expands this definition by identifying macro and micro ways of examining culture, noting that macro influences include sociopolitical grouping such as social class,

gender and religion, while micro influences include lived experiences. This distinction acknowledges two varied ways in which the term “culture” is conceptualized and gives credence to both. Moll further articulates what he means by lived experience when he writes that he and fellow researcher Esteban-Guitart employ the term “lived experience” to emphasize ... “that learning and experience are intrinsically situated in a matrix of life trajectories and ecological-transactional aspects throughout one’s life” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 74). Moll’s application of the term “lived experience” reflects the central role of personal experience in an individual’s culture. As such, it averts stereotypical ideas about culture that focus on superficial topics such as those that Duesterberg noted. With a funds of knowledge<sup>7</sup> and windows and mirrors<sup>8</sup> approach to CRP, the student teacher participants in this dissertation study are tasked with getting to know their learners and integrating what they know about their students’ lived experience into their pedagogy. This operational definition of culture does not refute other definitions that emphasize macro influences on culture; rather it focuses on micro influences in order to provide a workable frame for the study participants as they consider how to enact CRP for ELs.

### Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995) first presented the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in her study that illustrated how eight teachers responded to a need for pedagogy to be more relevant to the lives of African American students in US schools.

This research spurred an extended and ongoing conversation about how the framework of

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<sup>7</sup> Funds of Knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) approach is presented later in Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> The windows and mirrors (Style, 1998) paradigm is presented in Chapter 4.

CRP might be applied to a variety of educational settings that serve diverse students who learn in environments that have historically presented pedagogies that serve and privilege white, dominant cultures. Through her research, Ladson-Billings developed the following definition for CRP:

A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. (1995, p. 469)

The three central tenets of CRP are: social critique, academic success and cultural competence (Ladson Billings, 1995). That is, in order to enact CRP, a teacher must demonstrate pedagogies that: engage students in critical examination of content, provide students with rigorous academic tasks and take into account students' home cultures.

Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework of CRP has been employed in countless studies since its inception. Researchers have used this framework to assert that CRP is essential in closing the opportunity gap as it recognizes the central role of students' cultures in all aspects of teaching and learning and it acknowledges and responds to the current schooling climate that places students from diverse cultural backgrounds in learning environments that do not mirror their home cultures and values (Langer, 1987). CRP calls teachers to be made aware that students' identities, beliefs and behaviors are shaped by their culture (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998) and it presents a unique challenge to teachers in that they cannot present relevant pedagogies without first knowing their students. Ladson-Billings [1992] calls CRP "a pedagogy of opposition" (p. 313) as it pushes back against traditional schooling paradigms that privilege white ways of thinking



and being. CRP is a pedagogical ideology that actively deconstructs and re-defines whom schooling seeks to serve. Phuntsog (2001) considers that the true test of CRP “may lie in its ability to create classrooms where race, culture, and ethnicity are not seen as barriers to overcome but are sources of enrichment for all” (p. 63).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Seven years after Ladson-Billings developed the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, Gay (2002) conceived of the theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Also in response to clear educational disparity for African American students, she defines CRT as: “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (2002, p. 106). She identifies the following five elements of culturally responsive teaching:

1. developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity
2. including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum
3. demonstrating caring and building learning communities
4. communicating with ethnically diverse students
5. responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (p. 106)

The above framework is helpful as teachers and teacher educators struggle to understand the elements of CRT.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy versus Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Although CRP and CRT are very similar and complementary frameworks, there is one distinguishing factor that sets them apart. If teachers truly seek to bring students into the center of the curriculum, the development of a critical consciousness is an essential aspect of culturally relevant education. While Gay’s (2002) definition of CRT

is a needed improvement from traditional ways of attending to culture in the classroom, her definition is missing any reference to criticality. CRT does not address the active marginalization of certain groups of learners, as it fails to engage students in critical conversations about power and privilege. Therefore, CRP is used as a framework for this dissertation research. However, given that both frameworks are similar, the review of extant literature includes scholarly work that is underpinned by CRP and CRT.

### **Teacher Learning and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners**

*It is not surprising. . . given the paucity of information on immigrants and schooling, coupled with general and nonspecific conceptualizations of immigrant children, that the literature on teacher education is vague about what teachers should know to effectively support the education of new arrivals to this country. U.S.-born children of color who may also speak home languages other than English may share similar experiences with immigrant children, such as discrimination, racism, inequity, and exoticization, yet immigrants and their offspring bring experiences and issues to schools that are unique and deserve close analysis and understanding. These issues must become part of the teacher education curriculum and dialogue if teachers are to be adequately prepared to teach students who are immigrants. (Goodwin, 2002, pp. 161-162)*

This section of the literature review combines what is known about the social learning of teachers with the enactment of CRP. I will first present studies that explore the intersection of teacher learning and CRP for ELs. In addition, I will delineate facets of teacher preparation programs that actively seek to produce culturally relevant pedagogues, based on extant literature in the field.

## **Lessons Learned from the Literature: Cultural Competency and Teacher Learning**

In order to enact CRP, a teacher must first become culturally competent. The following researchers present research on teacher learning and cultural competency, however they disagree on the role of teacher identity in the development of cultural consciousness. While De Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013) and Moll, Amanti, Neff,, & González (1992) assert that teacher cultural competency is achieved through learning more about diverse student populations, Powell (1997) and Li (2013) assert that the examination of teacher identity is a critical component in the teacher learning process.

Powell's (1997) longitudinal single-instrument case study of a teacher's experience developing and integrating a culturally relevant teaching practice suggests that CRP enactment is a learned process. Over the five-year data collection, which included data sources such as field notes, interview transcripts, and classroom teaching materials, the researcher examined how this second-career teacher pedagogically responded to students of diverse backgrounds. Throughout data collection, Powell observed the development of the teacher's values, beliefs and dispositions regarding how she sought to meet the needs of her diverse student body. Powell corroborated findings with those of Ladson-Billings' theory of CRP through the analysis of the following themes that emerged from this research: the participant teacher acquired cultural sensitivity, reshaped the classroom curriculum, and invited students to learn. Lastly, it became apparent throughout the study that the background of the teacher participant heavily influenced her pedagogical decision-making. Consequently, Powell suggested an addition to CRP – teacher cognizance of personal biography – which is a missing from the CRP literature. Li (2013) notes that teachers cannot become “skilled cultural workers” until they have

experienced “1) cultural reconciliation: knowing self and others, 2) cultural translations: developing skills and competencies to bridge differences in instruction, [and] 3) cultural transformation: becoming change agents and skilled cultural workers” (p. 139). Given this understanding, an integral aspect to the development of culturally relevant pedagogues is focus on teacher cultural identity as well as student cultural identity.

Before a teacher can be culturally relevant, she must first be interculturally competent (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The following study provides a broader picture about how a large group of teachers worked toward intercultural competency. DeJaeghere and Cao’s research examined the effects of the implementation of a district-wide intercultural initiative that was based on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) used the “Intercultural Development Inventory” (IDI) to assess cross-cultural competence among K-12 teachers in this study aimed at understanding the extent of change in educators’ intercultural competence in an urban district. Participant pre-study and post-study results from the IDI served as data for this study. Analysis of data reveals a significant effect in development as a result of the implementation of the intercultural initiative. The researchers shared the following implication for future similar initiatives, “Intercultural competence can be developed through district and school-based professional development programs, in which the DMIS and IDI serve as a process model to guide intercultural development”. (p. 444). They furthered that “Not only can intercultural development positively change among educators who participate in guided professional development, but it can change considerably” (p. 444).

Increased teacher attention to developing teacher candidate intercultural competency is direly needed. Unfortunately, the researchers presented “intercultural development” as a process that can take place *away from* diverse learners, and the tools used to measure such development were intended for an entirely different purpose and demographic. Given that CRP is grounded in a pedagogical response to individual students’ cultures, and that culture has been defined as “lived experience” (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p. 40), DeJaeghere and Cao’s perspective that teachers can become better acquainted with their student populations while participating in professional development that is consistently separate from students appears to be misguided. Further problematizing this model is the focus on *intercultural* competence, rather than *cross-cultural* competence. This focus is in direct conflict with the arguments of Powell (1997) and Li (2013) who both understand teacher sociocultural identity (Powell calls this “biography”) to be a central component to the development of teacher cultural competency.

Perhaps the most influential research about teachers taking an active role in learning to improve their own cultural competency for the purposes of CRP is that of Moll, L. et al. (1992). The researchers conducted an extensive study that demonstrated how teachers could use home visits to engage in learning about their students’ cultures. Through collaboration with university anthropologists and practicing teachers, the benefits of teacher home visits with Mexican families in Tucson, Arizona were examined (Moll, et al., 1992). Through this investigation, the researchers developed the concept of “funds of knowledge”, which is defines as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual

functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez, et al., p. 133). The teachers in this study were able to take note of their students’ unique strengths and incorporate them into their pedagogy.

The *funds of knowledge* research was pivotal in understanding the ways in which teachers can learn what they need to know about students in order to become effective practitioners of CRP. Home visits helped the practicing teacher participants see cultural lived experiences that would have otherwise been nuanced or obscured. While summer home visits are required by some school districts as a way for practicing teachers to get to know their future students, they continue to be an anomaly as they require more time on the part of the teacher, a willingness of families to open their homes to them, and the ability of the teacher to be able to communicate in the home language of his/her students or enlist the help of an interpreter. Findings from the *funds of knowledge* research suggest that when teachers position themselves as the learners of home cultures, their relationships with their students’ families are strengthened and they are better prepared to bring students’ strengths into the classroom in ways that they would not have been able to otherwise. While the *funds of knowledge* research has been highly influential in the area of teacher learning and CRP, similar to the research of DeJaeghere and Cao (2009), it falls short as it fails to consider the role of teacher cultural identity. The focus of Moll et al.’s (1992) research is on students as the *other*, which stands to benefit teacher learning, however it is insufficient as it does not recognize the cross-cultural dynamic of teaching and learning, in which teacher identity is also a contributing factor (Moll, et al., 1992; De Jong et al., (2013); Ladson-Billings, 2001; Schussler & Stooksberry, 2010; Shepel & Elina, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Teachers who strive to enact CRP acknowledge the value of understanding their students' cultures. However, another critical aspect of teacher cultural competency is a teacher's understanding of his or her own cultural identity and how it affects their pedagogical choices. In De Jong et al. (2013) and Moll, et al.'s (1992) research on teacher learning, they consider how teachers can develop cultural competency to move towards cultural relevancy with ELs. De Jong et al. (2013) assert that, "Teachers must learn about ELLs' cultural experiences both within and beyond schools. Since ELs frequently come from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that are not familiar to teachers, it falls upon the teacher to get to know students" (p. 89). While the researchers posit that teachers need to learn about their students' home lives, prior schooling and community affiliations so that they can identify what their students bring to a given classroom environment, they do not reference the role of teacher identity or cross-cultural competency. In order to fully understand student culture and the ways in which culture impacts teaching and learning, the teacher must also consider his or her cultural identity (Powell, 1997; Li, 2013).

### **Lessons Learned from the Literature: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Teacher Education**

Great strides have been made as institutions of teacher preparation seek to understand how they can foster CRP praxis in teacher candidates. Davidman and Davidman (1997) write that CRP is "much more than simply teaching a culturally/ethnically diverse class. It is an active process of thinking, a state of mind, a way of seeing and learning that is shaped and influenced by the beliefs about the value of cultural relationships and cultural competency" (Davidman & Davidman, 1997, pp. 24-

25). Teacher preparation programs that are committed to preparing teacher candidates to meet the needs of diverse students do much more than provide their candidates with teaching strategies. They seek to ensure that future teachers are aware of the race-based inequities that are perpetuated by schools, and they respond by preparing them to enact pedagogies that promote academic success and cultural relevancy for all learners.

Departments of teacher preparation that intend to develop culturally relevant pedagogues consider the tenets of CRP in their program design. While there is a wealth of literature about the importance of CRP, there is not as much known about how teachers should be prepared to enact it. Goodwin (2002) writes that this problem “must galvanize teacher preparation programs to rethink how their curriculum prepares pre-service teachers to work effectively with diverse students” (p. 157). Although this study focuses on culture, there is a growing body of research in the area of linguistically relevant pedagogy that compliments the objectives of this dissertation research (Lucas, Villegas, Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). This section of the literature review illustrates ways in which institutions of teacher preparation seek to promote teacher candidates’ learning to become culturally relevant pedagogues. The following five components of programs that seek to produce culturally relevant teachers will be presented: developing a sociocultural consciousness, promoting cultural competency, engaging in critical conversations about equity, providing opportunities for CRP praxis and incorporating CRP across coursework. Each of these areas considers one or more of the three tenets of CRP, which are social critique, academic success and cultural competency. All of the aforementioned parts of this literature review will highlight empirical studies, program initiatives and anecdotes that illuminate specific practices aimed at preparing teacher



candidates to meet the needs of culturally diverse student populations.

**Developing sociocultural consciousness.** Although many teacher candidates enter programs of teacher preparation unaware of it, all teachers have a cultural identity (Villegas, 2007) and most need to examine their sociocultural identity early in teacher preparation coursework (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). I define the examination of sociocultural identity as an introspective look at how one's lived experience through membership in social groups shapes his or her identity. The value of developing an individual sociocultural consciousness is based on the belief that teacher candidates must first acknowledge and examine their own cultures before being able to begin to understand other cultures (Evans & Gunn, 2011). This section will defend teacher candidate examination of sociocultural identity prior to acceptance in a teacher education program and within programs through reading and reflection.

Long before coursework begins, a demonstration of an awareness of one's self social-cultural identity can contribute to a potential candidate's acceptance into a program of teacher preparation that seeks to prepare culturally relevant pedagogues. Schussler and Stooksberry (2010) studied teacher candidate entrance exams in an attempt to understand their dispositions upon beginning a teacher education program. One category in which potential teacher candidate entrance essays were scored was demonstration of "awareness of their own culture and its effect on their teaching" (p. 352). Many admissions programs consider awareness of self social-cultural identity to be a needed foundation in potential teacher candidates.

Once students are admitted into a teacher preparation program, they are often encouraged to begin to explore their own self social-cultural identity through reflection

and reading. An example of a text that is commonly used in early teacher preparation coursework and that has been particularly influential in its effect on local perceptions of US cultural practices is “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema” (Miner, 1956). Through this anthropologist’s account, the reader learns about the seemingly bizarre practices of the Nacirema tribe only to learn that Nacirema is American spelled backwards and the account is that of an outsider perspective on rituals that would appear commonplace to most people in the United States. Both of the aforementioned experiences compel teacher candidates to critically examine their cultures and how they shape their experiences.

Activities such as those named above are essential, as many teacher candidates perceive that they do not have a particular culture. Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Clark’s (2007) study of teacher candidates illuminates this odd reality as they found that a large majority of white female teacher candidates viewed culture as a “component of membership to a minority group, where culture is the holding place for perceived differences from the white mainstream” (p. 25). This misguided conceptualization of culture as a deviation from a static white norm is not only incorrect, but it is a dangerous lens for a future teacher to have. As such, intentional opportunities for teacher candidates to develop sociocultural consciousness brings teacher candidates closer to seeing their own beliefs and values as part of their cultural identity.

Fuller, Miller and Domingues’ 2006 Cultural Self-Analysis (CSA) Project is an intentional approach to an exploration of self social-cultural consciousness in early childhood teacher preparation. Two of the components of the CSA were that teacher candidates were required to write an autobiography and a cultural self-analysis reflection.

Through participating in study data collection processes such as these, participants reported heightened awareness of their own cultures and feelings of an increased level of comfort in teaching students from diverse backgrounds as a result.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) spell out why and how teacher candidates should conduct such self-investigation when they write,

[Teacher candidates] need to explore the various social and cultural groups to which they belong, including those identified with race, ethnicity, social class, language and gender. They also need to inspect the nature and extent of their attachments to those groups and how membership in them has shaped their personal and family histories (p. 22).

Shepel and Elina (1995) agree with Villegas and Lucas in that while the concept of identity often refers to a sense of individuality, it is also shaped by membership to groups. Villegas and Lucas' framing of cultural identity around group membership provides an exterior scaffolding that helps us understand aspects of social-cultural identity that are outwardly visible. Schussler and Stooksberry (2010) flesh out the interior of this frame by asserting that the "identity comprises one's cultural dispositions, reflecting an understanding of the self through shaping a teacher's beliefs, values, and understanding of cultural norms" (Schussler & Stooksberry, 2010, p. 353). As such, beliefs and dispositions are shaped by membership to groups. Assignments that seek to develop teacher candidates' self social-cultural consciousness ask teacher candidates to consider their group affiliations and how such affiliations have affected their individual culture.

Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Clark and Fuller et al.'s studies, in addition to the other

scholars cited in the section, support continued self-reflection and analysis of the culture of individual teacher candidates. It is through this, that self social-cultural consciousness can be attained. Before teacher candidates can learn to enact CRP, they must examine their own cultures, which will help them to better understand other cultures and to consider the role of power and privilege in schooling. This brings teacher candidates closer to considering the CRP tenet of social critique in their pedagogy. It also helps teacher candidates as they work toward becoming more competent about the cultures that are present in their school communities, which brings teacher candidates closer to the CRP tenet of cultural competency. It is evident that programs of teacher education that are invested in the preparation of culturally relevant pedagogues value the development of a self social-cultural consciousness prior to beginning and early in teacher preparation as it lays the needed framework for future discussions about multiculturalism and attempts to build cultural competency. Such a foundation yields teacher candidates more apt to understand that they experience life in ways that may not be shared by their students and to consider how they might shape their pedagogies to be congruent with the cultures of their students.

**Promoting cultural competency.** The previous section about the development of a self social-cultural consciousness provided a needed framework for teacher candidates to move toward understanding cultures that are different from their own. Gaining knowledge about the lived experiences of individual students is a fundamental first step toward learning to enact CRP by teaching to students' frames of reference and strengths. This section will illustrate the how cultural competency can be promoted in teacher education. I will begin by presenting a needed sequence for cultural learning, followed

by model and supportive texts that promote teacher candidate learning to become culturally competent.

Unfortunately, when teacher candidates seek to be culturally relevant without becoming culturally competent first, students suffer. In Huang's (2002) study of seventy multicultural lesson plans written by teacher candidates, he found that more than half of the required lesson plans used teaching approaches that focused on heroes, holidays, and food. This essentialist approach to multiculturalism in schools falls drastically short of what CRP seeks to do and it has great potential to hurt learners by boxing them into prescriptivist ideas about culture. It is a common result of teacher preparation that fails to sufficiently delve into self social-cultural consciousness prior to working toward cultural competency, and ultimately cultural relevancy. The continuous process of learning to enact CRP requires the self-initiative to attain cultural competency at a level that is deeper than knowledge of heroes and holidays.

Keengwe (2010) offers a solution to the disturbing findings presented by Huang in recommending that all teacher candidates experience early cultural diversity training to prepare them to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. He conducted a study of 28 white female teacher candidate participants who were required to take a field trip to a culturally diverse school setting and observe classroom interaction as part of a multicultural education course that included diversity training, which was taught by the researcher. The field trip consisted of working one-on-one with an English learner from the university language center. The study and findings illuminate the dire need in teacher preparation and beyond for ongoing efforts to support cultural competency development in teacher preparation. One predominant theme that emerged from participant responses

was that teacher candidates initially had limited knowledge about other cultures and this caused them concern. One participant used words like “nervous” and “scary” to describe her feelings prior to meeting her EL partner. The researcher further asserts that teacher candidates who subscribe to the belief that all students can succeed in academics will ultimately be compelled to take up the practice of CRP as a remedy to the opportunity gap. Nieto and Bode (2008) assert that cultural relevancy training is crucial for teacher candidates as it is a mechanism that can expose racism and insensitivities early in teacher development and seek to change them. While such conversations can be difficult, it is essential not only for development of the teacher, but for the well being of her future students as well.

Morton and Bennett’s (2010) study is similar to that of Keengwe in many aspects. The researchers studied 39 teacher candidates who served as tutors for diverse children of low socioeconomic status. In the context of this study, the term *cross-cultural analysis* is used to describe how teacher candidates compare their own cultures with those who are different. The researchers write, “Cross cultural analysis and reflections of self identity can contribute to mutual understanding and appreciation. In addition, they can lead to a celebration of differences” (p. 148). Their findings illustrate how teacher candidate participants who had a foundation of sociocultural consciousness, were able to work through fears and negative perceptions of different student populations, which led to cultural competency and ultimately contributed to their ability to teach in culturally relevant ways.

The above methods of bringing teacher candidates in contact with diverse people, modeling how to seek information and providing critical texts about cultural groups

encourage cultural competency in teacher preparation which bring teacher candidates closer to the CRP tenet of cultural competency. The following section of this paper will delve deeper into ways in which teacher preparation programs help teacher candidates to attain another tenet of CRP (social critique), by providing them opportunities to engage in critical discourses centered on topics such as power, privilege and marginalization.

**Engaging in critical conversations about equity.** Teacher preparation programs that promote CRP support teacher candidates in their quest to think critically about the structures in which they live, can foster intentional learning opportunities that examine the affects of power and privilege. In doing so, and through more extensive CRP methods courses, such programs can better equip teacher candidates to become culturally relevant pedagogues. This section will examine the necessary components of providing critical texts, facilitating opportunities for reflection, and through both methods, guiding teacher candidates through examining their own raced consciousness. Programs of teacher preparation that embed such methods in their curriculum encourage teacher candidates to view their communities through a critical lens, thus providing them with content and context to bring them closer to the CRP tenet of social critique.

In their article, Evans and Gunn (2011) open with the following is an quote from a teacher candidate that illuminates the learning experience that can take place as a result of participating in a teacher preparation course that unveils marginalization and encourages candidates to examine their own roles in the marginalization of newcomers to the United States,

We're not even two weeks into this course, and already I feel that the readings are speaking directly to me: to my prejudice, my (unadmitted) racism, my unresolved

feelings about foreigners in my country, and all of the sentiments I hold dear about what it means to be American and what those who are not native to this country “should” be doing to fit in. I am one of those people who have thought, if not actually said, that once they are in the United States, they need to speak English. So, now, I am ashamed that I have been so closed to the real experiences and fears that families confront when in a strange land where [knowledge of] the language, customs, traditions, and social expectations are so different, yet so necessary” (Evans & Gunn, 2011, p. 1).

This excerpt reveals the great potential that programs of teacher education have to impact the ways in which incoming teacher candidates consider topics related to power and marginalization. This teacher candidate attributes her evolving thinking to the assigned readings in the course stating that they are “speaking directly to [her]”. Reading of texts about issues related to social justice that humanize the victims of marginalization is an important step in any teacher preparation program that seeks to prepare culturally relevant pedagogues.

Although reading is an excellent pedagogical tool, simply adding culturally relevant content to teacher preparation curriculum is not sufficient (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Another important way in which teacher candidates can become cognizant of marginalization and its effects on learners is through reflection. Teacher candidates need to critically examine their own assumptions, perceptions and resulting expectations of diverse students (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Lynn and Smith-Maddox (2007) report that such initiatives present a unique opportunity for teacher educators to “work hand in hand with [teacher candidates] to help them ‘think through’ the problems” (p. 99). Such



opportunities help teacher candidates to consider how oppressive systems such as institutional racism may have impacted them and/or their students.

All teacher candidates enter teacher preparation with a raced consciousness. Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, and Haviland's (2009) case study examined the role of the raced consciousness of teacher candidates learning to take up CRP in an urban teaching program. The researchers report that efforts in teacher preparation such as critically examining multicultural texts, continuous investigation of teacher candidates' experiences with race and racism and direct analysis of the reality that all people have a raced consciousness, bring teacher candidates toward beginning to enact CRP. Unfortunately, despite the researchers best efforts to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to critique white savior narratives, a white participant who initially identified himself as a savior for marginalized students, continued to hold this perspective throughout and following participating in the study and the course. In closing, even in ideal circumstances, when a teacher educator carefully designs curriculum that includes critical text and opportunities for reflection, some teacher candidates' perceptions about power and marginalization remain unchanged. This may be attributed to the short-term nature of the experience and the study, or other outside factors that influenced the participant's perspective.

By providing engaging, critical texts and opportunities for reflection, teacher preparation programs seek to humanize the experience of marginalized student populations. Such programs foster intentional and continuous opportunities for teacher candidates to engage in dialogue about the effects of marginalization and other social justice issues that affect diverse students. These two components are essential in the

development of culturally relevant pedagogues as they prepare teacher candidates to enter teaching with a social justice lens, thus meeting the CRP tenet of social critique.

**Providing opportunities for culturally relevant pedagogy praxis.**

Compounding existing structural challenges, as pre-service and in-service teachers struggle to learn to enact CRP, is the problem that most of the existing components of a culturally relevant teacher preparation program take place in a university classroom and not within the sociopolitical environment of schools. I argue that this is highly problematic. In this section, I will present a study that successfully addresses the enactment of CRP. In addition, I will posit that of all of the above components of the preparation of culturally relevant teachers, CRP praxis is the most in need of further research. This is the gap in understanding that my proposed dissertation topic seeks to begin to fill.

The following is an example of a case study that demonstrates how a teacher candidate engages in praxis by bringing content and theory from coursework into a middle school classroom. Price-Dennis and Souto-Mannin's (2011) study examines how one teacher candidate learned to enact CRP. The researchers deemed the participant teacher candidate successful in creating third spaces that facilitated student conversations about equity, social change and diversity with middle school learners. They attributed her success, in part, to the ongoing critical dialogues that were part of her teacher preparation coursework. Based on findings from this study, the researchers advise that teacher programs engage in sustained conversations with their teacher candidates about equity, diversity and empowering pedagogies.

While the previous study focused on the role of the university, the following study focuses on another facet of the praxis relationship: the cooperating teacher. Hill's (2012) single case study examines a teacher candidate's learning to enact CRP in a diverse urban elementary reading class. The participant's lesson is a part of a practicum assignment for a reading methods course. This candidate had the benefit of working with a cooperating teacher who successfully enacted CRP and was therefore able to model effective CRP praxis. The value of such an apprenticeship is an oft-overlooked variable in teacher preparation. While teacher educators are able to model examples of CRP in a university setting, there are two necessary, yet missing elements in this environment: K-12 students and the sociopolitical environment of schools. Hill writes that there is a "need for teacher educators to disseminate relatable teaching experiences or relay innovative strategies among exemplars in the field" (p. 63). An ideal, supportive frame in which teacher candidates can learn to enact CRP is one in which the institution of teacher preparation fosters the tenets of CRP in coursework (Evans & Gunn, 2011; , and is able to connect teacher candidates with cooperating teachers who are knowledgeable about CRP praxis and successful in its enactment (Hill, 2012).

One example of teacher candidates' successful design of curriculum that is rooted in the lived experiences of students is illustrated in Petchauer's (2011) study of two teacher candidates' use of hip-hop aesthetics in social justice teaching. The researcher defends the use of hip-hop aesthetics as a medium when he suggests that one consider "hip-hop not simply as a musical genre but as a culture with a worldview and related sensibilities (p. 1429)". The researcher's integration of hip-hop as an aesthetic is a direct response to student cultures. Efforts such as this breathe life into social justice teaching

as they serve as reminders that even strong, salient content isn't sufficient if the methods of instruction aren't relevant to the lives of the students in class. This study presents a sustainable and validating method of teaching historically marginalized students while wedding the tenets of social critique, cultural competency and academic success.

Advocating for the preparation of culturally relevant teachers is crucial yet precarious; as teacher preparation programs graduate teachers into workplaces that often do not honor their commitment to culturally relevant teaching. For this reason, it is essential that teacher educators establish a strong and sustaining bridge from the ivory tower to the classroom. Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) assert that there is a “need to invite pre-service teachers to engage in fostering pedagogical third spaces which syncretically bring together mentor teacher academic expectations and student interests and cultural repertoires” (p. 236). Such a nexus of educational theory, cultural competency and thorough support of teacher candidates is the recipe for successful CRP praxis.

**Incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy across coursework.** A holistic and intentional approach to the preparation of culturally relevant pedagogues provides continuous context for teacher candidates to consider approaches to CRP. Such an approach advocates for discussions about CRP to take place across content and methods classes as well as in practicum and student teaching, rather than encasing CRP in the context of a multicultural education course alone, which flattens its nature and its purpose. This section will present issues related to delaying or siloing conversations about equity and diversity in teacher preparation coursework, research-based suggestions

for the integration of such topics and examples of explicit attention to equity and diversity in methods courses.

Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1993) call attention to the timing problems related to program design as they assert that “teacher education programs need to engage their students in sustained conversations about diversity, equity and pedagogies of hope by integrating these topics into every facet of their program”. The practice of siloing cultural topics in a foundational multicultural education course inhibits attempts to help teacher candidates explore cultural relevancy across the disciplines. Zeichner, Grant, Gay, Gillette, Valli, and Villegas (1998) make a similar suggestion as they consider how teacher candidates should be prepared to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of ELs. They suggest that teacher preparation programs “infuse multicultural and linguistic knowledge throughout the teacher education core courses—e.g. curriculum, methods, assessment, and classroom management” (1998, p. X).

The following is an example of how teacher candidates are prepared to consider cultural relevancy in a social studies methods course. Fitchett, et al.’s (2012) study of teacher candidate dispositions focuses on the “relationship between an innovative culturally responsive teaching model in a social studies methods course and teacher candidates’ culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy” (p. 585). The researchers asked teacher candidates to examine existing curriculum for “Eurocentric sociocultural hegemony” (p. 593) and consider how they could modify curriculum to present a more just and relevant discourse. They attribute successful CRP enactment of teacher candidates to “an in-depth culturally responsive teaching epistemology” (p. 585) in coursework. They also attribute the level of confidence and skill of teacher candidates to

the program design. Following participation in the study, participants noted increased willingness to work in diverse communities.

Frye, et al.'s (2010) study is an example of an interdisciplinary approach to CRP methods. Data was collected from a culturally relevant literacy methods course that integrated history, literacy and art. In order to assess the efficacy of this interdisciplinary redesign, the faculty researchers administered an adapted version of "The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self Efficacy" and the "Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcome Expectancies Scales" (Siwatu, 2007) to 55 teacher candidates and asked them to evaluate themselves at the beginning and end of the term. Teacher candidate participants reported that they gained knowledge and felt increased confidence in their ability to teach in culturally responsive ways.

The integration of CRP content across teacher education coursework is essential in order to cultivate generations of teachers who are knowledgeable about and committed to the tenets of CRP. Such programs create a bridge between critical dialogue about diversity and content-specific teaching methods, thus guiding teacher candidates toward CRP praxis. The following section will present why such initiatives are problematic given the sometimes-conflicting ideologies of teacher educators and school administrators. Lastly, I explore examples from the literature that illustrate sociopolitical variables in public schools have the potential to serve as obstacles in the development of culturally relevancy pedagogues. I will close by advocating for increased attention to praxis in the preparation of culturally relevant pedagogues as it is essential that in the development of culturally responsive teachers, we do not lose sight of the situated nature of CRP enactment, which takes place in schools.

## **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the Sociopolitical Climate of Schools**

A critical examination of the teaching context is necessary in order to fully understand the challenges relating to CRP enactment for ELs in a given school. In order to be aware of and to respond to obstacles to CRP enactment, discourse around CRP for ELs must always take into consideration the sociopolitical climate of schools. Barriers to CRP for ELs that are present in the literature are: administrator and teacher buy-in, inadequate professional development for practicing teachers and school policies that are in conflict with the tenets of CRP.

The oft-disparate ideas of teacher educators and school administrators translate into a vexed nexus of ideologies about how the opportunity gap can best be closed. Unfortunately, little is known about the role of school administrators in the development of culturally relevant pedagogues as “The role of administrators typically is not explored in the literature on culturally responsive teaching” (Riehl, 2000, p. 64). In order for initiatives such as the one under investigation by DeJaeghere and Cao to take place, administrator buy-in is essential.

In addition, CRP enactment is impossible in a classroom in which the teacher fails to appreciate its value. Powell (1997) agrees with Young in that the successful enactment of CRP enactment requires a change in perspective. Powell asserts that:

If teachers who hold strong objectivist world views are to create classroom curricula that are constructivist and culturally sensitive, they must be helped to understand the value of providing students with classroom opportunities to draw on their own experiences and to express their personal understandings and misconceptions of the content. This requires a shift in teaching perspectives. One

shift could be from a teacher-as-authority to teacher-as-facilitator of meaning and to teacher-as negotiator of curriculum. (p. 382)

Powell's request of an ideological shift is challenging. It requires that institutions and administrators be cognizant of the value of CRP and supportive of the professional development of teachers to become more culturally relevant.

The following action research case study illustrates how CRP can fail as a method if teachers do not buy-in to its underpinning values. In Young's (2010) study on her experience working with urban school teachers and administrators "to define, implement and assess culturally relevant pedagogy as a viable pedagogical tool" (p. 248), she found that there were "deep structural issues related to teachers' cultural bias, the nature of racism in school settings, and the lack of support to adequately implement theories into practice" (p. 248). As such, she called for teacher education to be "more hands-on, more praxis-oriented, and more collaborative. . .that calls for inquiry-based discourse and iterative action and reflection" (p. 258). This study presents a disturbing reality that many teachers will not take up CRP because of their personal biases about particular student populations.

Most of the research in teacher education and CRP is focused on teacher candidates, rather than practicing teachers. The findings from Young's (2010) research not only implore teacher education programs to consider how to prepare culturally relevant pedagogues, they also demand that schools provide ongoing professional development for teachers in cultural sensitivity, cultural relevancy and CRP. (Lee, 2005) remarks that while the recent interest in consideration of how mainstream teachers can better attend to the needs of ELs has been an improvement, unfortunately, the focus is



consistently on the linguistic needs of ELs, rather than their cultural needs/differences. As such, most professional development opportunities for in-service teachers to learn more about how to best meet the needs of ELs have been largely focused on language (Lee, 2005). Gay and Kirkland (2003) advocate for continuous self-reflection of teachers beyond teacher preparation “so that they can monitor their personal beliefs and instructional behaviors to make their teaching more relevant to diverse students” (p. 181). There exists an ongoing need for in-service teachers to have a space in which they can learn and reflect on culture and equity in teaching.

A commonly noted obstacle to CRP enactment for ELs is school or district policy. Parhar (2011) argues that CRP enactment is largely impeded by existing school structures in his qualitative study of teachers in a Canadian school who practice CRP. The researcher noted that the teachers had limited control in determining their pedagogies as he reported, “deep cracks that add complexity to participant ‘s agency to enact culturally responsive pedagogies” (p. 214). He furthered that the majority of the challenges that teacher participants faced were the result of structural or institutional constraints. Examples of such constraints are: the hierarchical design of school decision-making, mandatory standardized testing that hinders student creativity and critical thinking, limited resources to guide teachers in best practices for working with culturally diverse students and families, limited time and a lack of administrator support for continuous opportunities for professional development. The researcher posits that, “Teaching practice is structured fundamentally by the institutional structures that support or interfere with at least some of the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 215). Given this bleak perspective, the school policy needs to evolve in order for CRP to be fully

incorporated into mainstream teaching. Knowledge of this potential disconnect is essential as teacher educators may prepare teacher candidates with methodologies that are not be supported in their future school environment.

I argue that all of the stakeholders named above (teachers, administrators, policy makers and teacher educators) need to contribute to closing the opportunity gap by supporting and implementing the tenets of CRP. All teaching is situated in sociopolitical spaces and in-service teachers need not only understand how to enact CRP, but also how to maneuver and mitigate such structures while doing so. Cochran-Smith (1995) writes that, “To alter a system that is deeply dysfunctional, the system needs teachers who regard teaching as a political activity and embrace social change as part of their job—teachers who enter the profession not expecting to carry on business as usual but prepared to join other educators and parents in major reform” (p 494). There is much more work to be done in order to fully understand how CRP praxis is learned because of its situated nature.

Research that seeks to examine how teachers and teacher candidates learn to enact CRP must take place in schools, so that teacher candidates (and teachers as well) can learn to mitigate sociopolitical barriers that make CRP praxis more complicated than it appears in education coursework. Anderson and Stillman (2012) note that there is a “need for more longitudinal analyses that address the situated and mediated nature of preservice teachers’ learning in the field [as it relates to culture]” (p. 3). My dissertation research seeks to do exactly this; delve into how teacher candidates learn about their students’ cultures and how they modify their pedagogy to be relevant to their lives within in the context of a culturally diverse public elementary school. The following chapter in

this dissertation describes the methodology used in this study to examine how teachers learn to enact CRP for ELs within a CoP.

### **Gaps in the Knowledge Base**

Through the above synthesis and analysis of teacher learning and culturally relevant pedagogy, themes emerged that illuminate gaps in the existing knowledge base. A salient theme that links the two evident gaps in the knowledge base is that they occur both in pre-service and in-service as teachers learn to enact CRP for ELs. In the area of teacher learning and culturally relevant pedagogy for ELs, there is a need for further research in the role of the examination of teacher identity. While teacher examination of identity is in ongoing process, it is particularly important in teacher formation, while they are coming to develop cross-cultural competency (Moll, et al., 1992; De Jong et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Schussler & Stooksberry, 2010; Shepel & Elina, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This is particularly important in teacher education as practicing teachers who are invested in CRP need to notice cultural differences in their student populations and consider how they will respond to them pedagogically. There is a need to better understand how teacher examination of identity affects how teachers notice cultural differences and enact CRP. In addition, while there is a substantive body of research in the area of teacher education and culturally relevant pedagogy for ELs, there is an apparent gap in the knowledge base regarding CRP praxis, which is the end product of successful teacher learning to enact CRP. Further research in the areas of teacher sociocultural identity and CRP praxis are needed in order to fill these gaps in the knowledge base.

This dissertation study will respond to the gaps in the knowledge base by investigating how teacher candidates learn to enact CRP for ELs in a CoP. Critical to this analysis will be the teacher candidate participants' examination of their sociocultural identities. Given the nature of the CoP as an ongoing process, teacher candidate participants will have the opportunity to learn from each others' attempts at CRP praxis for ELs. Analysis of teacher learning will be framed by the realms of communities of practice represented in Figure 2.1. The outer bubbles (learning as doing, learning as belonging, learning as becoming, and learning as experience) serve as codes for analysis that respond to each of the three research questions that will guide this investigation. Outside of this study, use of the realms of CoPs as a theoretical frame for the design and analysis of research on teacher learning and CRP for ELs does not currently exist in the literature.

## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

This methodology used for this dissertation is a collective case study of student teachers learning to enact CRP is framed by Communities of Practice (CoP), which does not have prescriptive techniques for data collection or analysis. This qualitative case study was designed to examine data gathered from participants of the CoP and cross-case thematic analysis was used to analyze this data.

Three research questions guide the study:

- 1. How do CoP activities mediate teachers' understanding of CRP for ELs?*
- 2. In what ways is pedagogy for ELs shaped by teacher candidate participation in a CRP-based CoP?*
- 3. What do student teachers identify as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs, and how do they overcome them?*

Chapter 3 will introduce the rationale for this study's methodology by presenting varied definitions and types of case study research, followed by an explanation of the definition and type that was utilized in this investigation. In addition, the design of this study is delineated with a thorough description of data collection and analytical tools

### **Case Study Research**

#### **Defining Case Study Research**

The hallmark of case study research is the bounded unit of analysis, otherwise known as the case. Hamel, Dufour and Fortin (1993) assert that the goal of case study research is the reconstruction and analysis of a case from a sociological perspective. Similarly, Johnson and Christensen (2008) maintain that case study research is "research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases" (p. 406). In case

study research, the case is determined based on the questions that the researcher seeks to answer. Yin (2014) explains that a case is a unit of analysis, which may be an individual, an event or entity. Stake (2006) furthers that each case can be a “bounded system” in that it is made up of interrelated components or characteristics that have identifiable boundaries. Although researchers such as Stake place more emphasis on the bounded unit in research design than Yin does, there is general agreement that the bounded unit is the focus of the investigation in case study research.

While the above scholars agree that the purpose of case study research is to investigate a case, there is disaccord regarding whether such studies should focus on methodology or the case itself. This disagreement results in varied definitions of case study research. The following are three predominant definitions of case study research that illuminate the aforementioned differing foci.

**Stake.** Stake (2011) asserts that the most important element in case study research is the case, not the methods of investigation; “As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 86). He later adds that “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. We could study it analytically or holistically ... but we concentrate, at least for the time being on the case” (2005, p. 443). In his definition of case study, not only does Stake insist that its focus be on the case, he also refutes the notion that case study research is a methodological choice. In doing so, he appears to respond to researchers such as Yin, who have an opposing viewpoint.

**Yin.** Yin’s (1994) definition of case study places more emphasis on the methodology employed in the investigation rather than the case. He defines case study

research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident...[and that] relies on multiple sources of evidence” (p. 13). Yin’s methodology-focused definition reflects a differing focus in case study research and illuminates further disaccord amongst scholars.

**Patton.** Patton (2002) offers an understanding of case study research that combines Stake and Yin’s foci in one definition. He asserts that the case study approach constitutes

a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; in that sense it represents an analysis *process*. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systemic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. The analysis process results in a *product*: a case study. Thus, the term case study can refer to either the process of analysis or the product of analysis, or both. (p. 447)

Patton’s perspective falls between Yin’s and Stake’s in that he posits that the term *case study* can be used to describe a process (methodology) and to describe a product (bounded unit of analysis).

While there are conflicting foci in the above conceptualizations, there is a shared objective in investigating a case. Although all three perspectives are valid, my research is best suited for Stake’s definition, as my study was designed around identified units of analysis (four members of a Community of Practice) rather than a prescribed set of methods that seek to investigate this case. The following sections of Chapter 3 extrapolate the concept of a case as a bounded unit of analysis and present varied conceptualizations of the case study methodology.

## **Collective Case Study and this Dissertation Research**

Collective case study research is similar to the single instrument case study in that it is based on one identified issue. However, in a collective case study, the researcher brings together multiple cases that, together, illuminate the issue. Such studies aggregate information that may be from a variety of sites and/or collected at different times. This dissertation study is categorized under Stake's (1995) type- collective case study, as it lends itself well to my theoretical framework of CoPs (Wenger, 1998), which understands all learning to be socially situated. The following sections of chapter three present the research design of this collective case study of teacher candidates learning to enact CRP for ELs.

### **Study Design**

#### **Dissertation Research Design**

Collective case study lends itself well to this study of teacher learning and CRP. In this study, each of the four participants serves as a bounded unit. Given that the undergirding theoretical framework of CoP assumes all learning to be socially situated, collective case study is an appropriate methodology to examine how teachers learn in community. This perspective is particularly relevant to this research because of how the greater sociopolitical climate, in addition to the local hierarchy of student teacher- teacher- administrator mediate teacher candidates' abilities to enact CRP for ELs.

Data were collected with a range of methods including digital journaling, field observations, recorded CoP meetings and interviews, and cases were brought into conversation through cross-case thematic analysis to facilitate examination of how participants learn socially in CoPs. These data collection methods were used to respond



to the research questions that framed this study. Table 3.1 shows the three research questions and the corresponding data sources.

Table 3.1

*Data Collection Methods and Data Sources by Research Question*

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Sources
1, 2, 3	Digital Journaling	Audio recordings and transcripts
2, 3	Field Observation	Video recordings and field notes
1, 2, 3	CoP Meetings	Video recording and transcripts
1, 2, 3	Interviews	Reflective pre, mid and post interviews with participants, transcripts

A more detailed description of the above data sources is presented in the data collection section of this chapter.

### **Human Subjects Approval**

In December of 2012 the university Internal Review Board (IRB) reviewed all materials submitted for an earlier pilot study, including a thorough description of the study, copies of recruitment templates for potential participants and cooperating teachers, interview questions, consent forms, CoP<sup>9</sup> meeting protocols, and digital journal prompts.. Prior to beginning the present dissertation study, the IRB was contacted and a change in protocol request was submitted and approved on March 27, 2014 (See Appendix A for

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<sup>9</sup> Study participants referred to the CoP as a PLC (professional learning community), as it is a commonly used term in the school and surrounding region.

copies of the IRB approval and change of protocol email messages.) The university IRB committee deemed the current research exempt from IRB review. Permission from the Chapman Hills<sup>10</sup> school principal and district superintendent were obtained in order to conduct research there. As the district in which this study was conducted is small, there is not a formal research evaluation process in place; therefore, I met with the principal and sent a letter of intent to the principal and superintendent. Both parties accepted the request to conduct research of student teacher learning at Chapman Hills Elementary School.

### **Research Site**

**The district.** The Chapman Hills school district is located in a first ring suburb of a large metropolitan city in the Midwestern United States. The city of Chapman Hills has an approximate population of 30,000. Despite its proximity to a large city, the district is relatively small, with one elementary school, one secondary school and one alternative school. The district has an International Baccalaureate program in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

The State Department of Education website notes that as of October 2014, the district enrolled 2,158 students. The district is quite ethnically and racially diverse, enrolling 26% white students, 39% black students, 20% Hispanic students, 14% Asian students, and 1% American Indian students. The district has a sizeable immigrant population, as 21% of the student body is made up of English learners. District-wide, 77% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch, which is a common indicator of

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<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the city, district, school, curriculum, as well as for the study participants.

poverty. This is 39% higher than the average of 38% for the state (Siple, 2013; Minnesota Department of Education, 2015).

In addition to community partnerships, the district has a long-standing partnership with a teacher preparation program at a nearby university (where the participants of this study are enrolled). In response to recent state legislation calling school districts to ensure their graduates are prepared for post-secondary aspirations, the district drafted a plan that focuses on student readiness, third grade reading proficiency, closing racial and economic achievement gaps, college and career readiness, and graduation of all students from high school.

**The school.** Chapman Hills Elementary School is located in an ethnically and linguistically diverse working-class neighborhood. Although it is technically located in a suburb, given its proximity to a large city, many teachers consider it to be an urban school. Its ethnic makeup is similar to that of the district presented above: 31% of the student population receives ESL services and 82% of the student body receives free or reduced-price lunch (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015). The Title 1 classified school enrolls approximately 1000 students, with forty-one mainstream teachers and four ESL teachers. At the time of data collection, all special education, reading specialist and ESL services were provided using a pull-out model (A. Casas, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

At the start of the 2013-2014 academic year, the school hired a new principal who was outwardly committed to meeting the diverse needs of the student body. In January 2014, after learning of a substantial grant that had been offered to the school, the principal asked the faculty to vote on whether they wanted to adopt the new Milestone

literacy curriculum, complete with books, manipulatives, posters, and lesson planning suggestions. The faculty voted to adopt the new curriculum. However, when Milestone was implemented shortly thereafter, many teachers were surprised by the rigidity of the curriculum. Teachers reported that they were required to read from scripts to ensure standardization of their lessons. Some expressed fear that the administrator walking down the hall might catch them failing to hold to the “non-negotiables” or the timing on the script provided by the curriculum company. Student teacher participants in this study reported in CoP meetings that faculty meetings were emotional and heated. Three weeks into the ten-week data collection period, the participants learned that the teachers had succeeded in ousting the principal. The participants surmised that the implementation of the standardized curriculum implementation was one of a series of issues that the faculty had with their new principal. After she left the school, teachers cautiously continued to use the Milestone materials at their own discretion; however, the use of the curriculum was not policed, as it had been prior to the principal’s departure.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling of participants was conducted due to my interest in teacher learning about the enactment of CRP for ELs. Potential study participants had the following qualities:

- An educational background in the cultural and linguistic needs of ELs in the mainstream classroom
- Interest in learning more about pedagogy for ELs
- Experience teaching in the classroom but still in a teacher preparation program

I surveyed my students in a fall 2013 graduate elementary initial licensure methods course that I was teaching called *Teaching English Learners in the Elementary Classroom* at the university where the participants were enrolled. While the population of the city surrounding the university is very ethnically diverse, the student body at the university (particularly in the graduate-level teacher education program) does not reflect the population that surrounds it. During the 2014-2015 academic year, in which the participants took part in the study, the university's graduate-level initial licensure program in elementary education enrolled approximately one hundred students of the following demographic backgrounds: 2% Hispanic, >1% Pacific Islander, 4% Asian, >1% American Indian, >1% black and 92% white (J. Gearhart, personal communication, December 19, 2014). The majority of the students in the program completed undergraduate coursework in the same department at the university.

The study participants took three undergraduate courses that presented content related to CRP. In *School and Society*, they learned about cultural relativism and cultural universalism. One of the assigned course readings was *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (1995) by Gloria Ladson Billings. In addition, they read *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (McIntosh, 1988), a foundational and renowned text on whiteness and white privilege. They engaged in class discussions about how culture shapes perception and experience as well as race and educational inequity. In a subsequent course called *Human Relations*, students were assigned to read *Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 1994) before the first class meeting. *Dreamkeepers* is a text that highlights Ladson-Billings' early research on teachers who effectively enact CRP for African American students. They were required to take notes and write guided

reflections based on the reading about what CRP means and what it looks like in practice. Following reading the book, the students developed culturally relevant pedagogy lesson plans, presented them to the class and wrote reflections about them. Lastly, in *Introduction to Elementary School Teaching*, students read *The Culturally Responsive Teacher* (Villegas, & Lucas, 2007) and discussed the role of cultural relevancy in elementary school teaching of diverse student populations.

When participants were asked what they remembered about CRP from their undergraduate coursework, they reported that they remembered readings and class discussions about CRP, but they struggled to make connections to what CRP looked like in practice because they had yet to enter the classroom at the time. Much later in their teacher education, in the graduate level licensure program, the participants took a methods course titled *Teaching English Learners in the Elementary Classroom*. I was the instructor of this course for the four study participants. In this course, students learned how to incorporate academic language objectives into mainstream content lessons. In addition, students read immigration stories from members of some of the local refugee communities in an assigned course text called *This Much I Can Tell You* (Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services, 2011). The immigration stories were used as a foundation to generate class discussions about the local immigrant communities and how teachers can better meet their educational needs. This was a condensed course that focused primarily on academic language and cultural competency. Students in the class re-read *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995), but little time was spent on CRP enactment. Given this educational background, the student

teacher participants in this study were predisposed to working with immigrant students and expressed interested in learning more about CRP for ELs.

In the graduate licensure program, students spend the first semester in a continuous rotation of two weeks on the university campus taking methods courses followed by two weeks of full days in a practicum setting. During the entirety of the second semester of their program, candidates student teach full-time in the same classroom as their practicum. As such, they spend an entire academic year in the same classroom.

Data collection took place from April 7- June 13, 2014, which were the last ten weeks of the participants' student teaching experience. Because I had already identified the site in which I would conduct the study, I recruited study participants from the methods class who were student teaching at Chapman Hills Elementary School. Of the eight potential participants in this class, four individuals showed interest in participating in the study. See Appendix B for the Participant Consent Form.

**Primary participants. *Adriana.*** Adriana is bilingual/biliterate in English and Spanish. She is a teacher candidate of Mexican descent who moved to the United States at the age of five. She recalled a significant adjustment after leaving a one-room schoolhouse in Mexico, with one teacher for kindergarten through twelfth grade students, and coming into a large school building with separate grades and new amenities like a gymnasium. She recalled being overwhelmed and frustrated because of the language barrier and shared that there was significant miscommunication as a result of her limited English. She shared,

I would go where I wasn't supposed to because I didn't know. I would take things literally . . . I got sick one time and I went to the nurse and she's like 'Go back to your class' so I went back to my class but my class was in recess at that time. So I was sitting at my desk waiting and the teacher comes in and she's like 'What are you doing? Why are you sitting here?' . . . So those little things, I still remember them. I can laugh at them now but they were so hard. (Pre-Study Interview, 4/7/14)

In fifth grade, Adriana's family moved from a predominantly white community to Chapman Hills and she recounted her shock after seeing other immigrant children at school and hearing their immigration stories. She remembered enjoying that she wasn't the only immigrant student, as she had classmates from Laos, Nigeria, Liberia and Mexico.

Adriana graduated from Chapman Hills Elementary School and she reflected on her time there fondly. She recounted that there was one teacher who believed in her when she had little faith in her own abilities. She attributes her success, in part, to the influence of this teacher who is still on the faculty at Chapman Hills. Adriana expressed that she felt tremendous empathy for immigrant students and that she wants to help them to have positive schooling experiences in their new home. At the time of the study, she was looking for a job in an urban school district with a large Hispanic population.

*Ann.* Ann is a monolingual white teacher candidate from a middle class suburb about 10 miles away from Chapman Hills. She recalls very little exposure to ethnic and linguistic diversity in her upbringing and she shared that after her freshman year of college in a small town, she transferred to the large metropolitan university in part



because she was disappointed in the lack of diversity at the small college. Upon relocating to the city, she moved into a working-class community that is largely made up of African Americans and immigrants from Latin America and East Africa. In one of her practicum placements, she recalled teaching in a high-poverty urban school with only one white student. She shared,

... I'd leave and get in my car and start crying because ... I don't want to be angry at these kids for their situation that they're in and that's why they're acting this way because they're kids. But at the same time I'm really angry because I want to be able to matter. So that was really frustrating and that's when I realized that I need to get better at this. (Pre-Study Interview, 4/17/14)

Ann considers herself to be a lifelong learner and she is committed to learning more about the needs of immigrant learners in public schools. At the time of data collection, Ann was actively seeking a job in an urban school due to her interest and investment in working with ethnically and linguistically diverse students. Ann's mother is a teacher and was a source of support for her as she succeeded and struggled through the lessons of working with students from backgrounds that were very different from her own.

*Alex.* Alex is a monolingual white, female teacher candidate from an affluent suburb of a large metropolitan city. She recalled little exposure to diversity in her upbringing and shared that one of the reasons that she chose to attend the large metropolitan university is because she was interested in meeting people from diverse backgrounds. She shared that one of her first experiences with immigrant families was when she volunteered to build houses for a non-profit organization and got to know East

African families. She was energized to meet other newcomer families and she became interested in the newcomer experience and their struggle to recreate home far from their homeland. She started to become aware of bigotry in her home community toward immigrants and at the time of data collection, she was actively seeking a job in a school with immigrant learners.

*Amina.* Amina is bilingual/biliterate in English and Arabic. She is a teacher candidate of Tunisian descent. She was born in the United States after her parents met and married in Tunisia. She is proficient in Arabic and a practicing Muslim. Prior to beginning kindergarten, her education was very home-based. She didn't attend daycare or preschool and her only language was Arabic. She recalled that her first exposure to different cultures was when she entered a public school for kindergarten. She shared that there was "a huge gap between home and school life" and that

The whole representation of the American culture was so overwhelming in the class that it made me just feel so different ... Every book that I read was about these white families or these white people who had pets or had these jokes that I didn't understand - just the whole image of white culture was very prominent. I think it was a lot easier for me to communicate with the teachers because they were just so welcoming and nice to us. (Pre-Study Interview, 4/17/14)

The following year, Amina's parents decided to move across the country so that their children could attend an Islamic school. She mentioned that the townhome community that her family moved into was like "a mini Muslim village" as her neighbors were Muslims from Pakistan, Jordan and Syria. She remembers that her community felt like a tight-knit family. She shared, "a huge part of Islam is that we're all united, no

matter where we're from, no matter what we look like ... I remember we used to sing songs about us being united (Pre-Study Interview, 4/7/14). Because Amina's education from first grade on took place in an Islamic school, she noted that she didn't experience a cultural mismatch between home and school.

**Secondary participants.** In addition to the four study participants, other individuals indirectly contributed to this study. School administrators, such as the superintendent and the principal allowed this research to take place. In addition, the superintendent and principal were responsible for the implementation of the standardized literacy curriculum. At the insistence of the faculty, the superintendent was ultimately responsible for removing the principal from her position following its unsuccessful integration.

As student teachers always work alongside a seasoned educator, cooperating teachers graciously allowed the study participants to become involved in this research. They also contributed by serving as model pedagogues for the student teacher participants and they allowed me to observe in their classrooms during the ten-week study. Lastly, the students in the four observed classrooms served as secondary participants in this research. They contributed to the experience of the student teachers as they tried new pedagogies in their learning environments.

**Positionality.** I am white woman, the child of university professors and a graduate of racially homogenous religious private schools, which I attended from preschool through college. My first teaching job was in an urban, all-immigrant high school in 1999. Coming from a background of privilege and whiteness, my initial reaction to the diverse student body before me was fear. Fear soon transitioned to

insecurity as I became acutely aware of how ill-equipped I was to meet my students' needs, as my teacher education had prepared me to teach students who had similar backgrounds to my own. At the age of twenty-two, my whiteness became apparent to me for the first time in my life. Not only was I unable to teach my students in ways that were relevant to their lives, I also embarrassed myself, hurt already vulnerable people and provided a mediocre education for classes of newcomers who knew my course as their first experience in an American school. I found myself troubled by the question, "How teachers can be better prepared to work with immigrant and refugee students?" This investigation of teacher learning and culturally relevant pedagogy for ELs is an attempt to begin to answer that question.

As is increasingly common in qualitative research, in this study the researcher's role was reflexive. In the process of conducting this collective case study, I facilitated designing and bringing together participant experiences as we focused on one issue: CRP for ELs. Given the undergirding assumption in a CoP study that all learning is socially situated, my reflexivity was particularly important. My role in the CoP was to facilitate discussion. I provided prompts for conversation that were based on what I learned about the participants' practice and experience with ELs and CRP from their digital journal entries, interviews and classroom observations. If discussions moved in a direction that was not relevant to the study, I guided participants toward topics related to social learning and CRP praxis for English learners.

### **Data Collection**

Four data collection methods were employed in this study: (a) classroom observations; (b) digital journals; (c) CoP meetings; and (d) interviews.

## **Classroom Observations**

Initial classroom observations took place in early April 2014. I spent approximately one hour observing in each of the participants' classrooms once per week for the duration of the ten-week study, for a total of ten hours of classroom observation per study participant. Extensive field notes were taken during classroom observations. See Appendix C for the Field Notes Template.

## **Interviews**

Three separate interviews were conducted with each participant, each varying from 30- to 60-minutes in length. The pre-study interviews took place in early April. The focus of this interview was to learn about the cultural backgrounds of the student teacher participants. In addition, information was solicited about the participants' experience with language learning, ELs, understanding of CRP and perceived obstacles to CRP enactment. The mid-study interviews took place in late April. The focus of the second interview was on the participants' understanding of CRP for ELs, their feelings of success in enacting CRP for ELs and any perceived obstacles to CRP enactment. The post-study interview took place in mid-June. It repeated questions from the mid-study interview about CRP understanding and enactment as well as comparative questions about participants' early and evolving perspectives about CRP. Lastly, participants were asked to compare perceived obstacles to CRP enactment that they initially noted to the actual obstacles to CRP enactment that they experienced. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. See Appendix D for Interview Questions.

## **CoP Meetings**

CoP meetings<sup>11</sup> took place every Thursday after school over the last ten weeks of the academic school year (mid-April through mid-June); see Appendix E for the PLC Meeting Schedule. CoP meetings were video-recorded and later transcribed. I brought dinner to each 90-minute meeting, which took place in a staff meeting room at Chapman Hills Elementary School. Over dinner, I facilitated group discussion.

At the first CoP meeting, I presented the three tenets of CRP (which were on the meeting table in frames for the duration of the study) and the participants read Gloria Ladson-Billings' *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. This is the only time that outside content was used in a meeting. Content for subsequent meetings came from the participants' digital journal entries and my field observations. In addition, as we began every meeting with a check-in, participants often brought topics related to CRP and ELs to share with the group. This part of the meeting often took a lot of time, as many of them gathered ideas for discussion over the week and looked forward to sharing them. In general, CoP meeting discussions were largely driven by the participants. On the occasion that the conversation moved toward a topic that was not relevant to CRP for ELs (in most of these cases they were discussing a non-EL), I reminded the group that our focus was on ELs, specifically. At times, this felt awkward but the participants seemed to understand and they graciously moved on to pertinent topics.

Whiteness played an evident role in the dynamics of the group as the two white participants often spoke of increased understanding of white privilege and the marginalization of students of color. At times, they positioned the two participants of

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<sup>11</sup> CoP meetings were referred to as "PLC meetings" among participants. Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006) are commonplace in the Chapman Hills school and the surrounding region.

color as “cultural experts”, at which point the participants of color gently reminded them that they aren’t able to speak for groups of people, prior to sharing their own perspectives. In addition, I am certain that my positionality as a white woman in a position of power (former course instructor) also contributed to the dynamics of the group. While I tried to maintain a position of observer and facilitator, at times they sought answers from me as if I were their teacher. In these cases, I presented their questions to the group for discussion.

At times, the participants arrived to the meetings tired or overwhelmed with work. Over time, we fell into a rhythm of having each participant share updates or questions, followed by a group discussion that was framed around items that I became aware of in the week preceding the meeting. Participants came to the group usually seeking advice from their colleagues, so my role was largely to move the conversation along and keep it on topic. In general, the meetings were casual, intimate and engaging. I often asked follow up questions such as “Can you tell us more about that?”. See Appendix F for the PLC Meeting Protocol.

### **Digital Journal Entries**

I elected digital journal entries rather than traditional journal entries for the following two reasons: 1) As the study participants were in their final ten weeks of the graduate program, they were under significant pressure to write papers and lesson plans and to prepare for their licensure exam. Requesting a written response would have added to their already overwhelming workload, 2) Digital journaling offers the researcher the unique opportunity to hear participant reflections that are unedited and candid, often recently following a critical event. Study participants were given a template to use when

considering what to record. See Appendix G for the Digital Journal Prompts. The prompts were:

- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I noticed a time in my classroom when CRP for ELs was lacking.
  - I decided to. . .
  - It made me consider. . .
- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I noticed an example of CRP for ELs. It was. . .
- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I enacted CRP for ELs. This is what happened. . .

The participants were asked to submit digital journal entries at least once per week, and some complied with this request better than others. Adriana submitted nine entries, Amina submitted six entries, Ann three and Alex two. Three of the four participants used the voice memo function on their smart phones to record and email messages. The fourth participant used a video recording tool and emailed the video files.

### **Transcription**

Video and audio files were sent to a transcription company, Transcription Live, as they were produced. Microsoft Word transcripts were generated from all interviews, CoP meetings and digital journal entries. All transcription was complete by August 2014.

### **Data Analysis**

Following transcription, data from field notes, digital journal entries, interviews and CoP meetings were coded with the aid of Dedoose (<http://www.dedoose.com>), a software application designed for the coding and analysis of qualitative and mixed



methods data. All data were entered into the application and organized into parent and child codes. The parent codes were the four realms of communities of practice: Identity: Learning as Becoming; Community: Learning as Belonging; Practice: Learning as Doing; and Meaning: Learning as Experience. Child codes were created for data that illustrated the intersections of the above realms and the three research questions that framed this investigation. After coding of data, cross-case thematic analysis was conducted in light of the extant literature. In the following sections, thematic and cross-case analysis are defined and an explanation of how these analytical tools were used in data analysis is presented.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible tool in qualitative data analysis in which researchers categorize data according to themes, which assists them in discovering patterns. Boyatzis (1998) writes that thematic analysis is a manner of “encoding qualitative information” (p. vii), while Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a “method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis lends itself well to answering the three research questions that frame this research.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Cross-case analysis is an analytical tool used in collective case study research that allows for an examination of a collection of cases in order to learn something about a concept, theory or social process (Schwandt, 2007). Miles and Huberman (1994) define cross-case study as “... the [ability] to see processes and outcomes across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus to develop more

sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (p. 172). Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) note that a case study’s external validity can be achieved via cross-case analysis. Eisenhardt (1989) argues that cross-case analysis involving four to ten case studies can provide a reasonable basis for analytical generalization, or transferability. Given the nature of this investigation as a collective case study, with each of the four participants serving as bounded units and research questions aimed at examining teacher understanding and practice, cross-case analysis is highly conducive and adds rigor to the objectives of this research. For the purpose of demonstrating credibility in this research, member checks were conducted and the data collection methods were triangulated (CoP meetings, classroom observations, digital journal entries). In addition to explicit and transparent documentation of researcher reflexivity, triangulation also served to demonstrate confirmability. While generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research, thick description and purposive sampling were utilized in order to achieve transferability (Anfara, Brown, Mangione, 2002).

### **How Cross-Case Thematic Analysis Was Utilized for This Study**

Dedoose facilitated the organization of parent and child codes into themes. Under each of the themes that were identified, all four participants in this study were represented in the data. Given that this study had four focal participants, the data reflected commonalities and differences amongst their experiences. Both were analyzed in light of participants’ lived experience, the context in which they student taught, and the extant literature. Patterns in the data were analyzed in order to answer the research questions and to contribute to the existing theory through the study’s findings. Findings were ascertained following analysis of the patterns identified in the process of coding.

**Chapter 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS:**  
**HOW PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SHAPES**  
**UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

**Research Question #1: How do CoP activities mediate student teachers’  
understanding of CRP for ELs?**

Chapter 4 answer responds to the first of three research questions and is framed by two of the four realms of Communities of Practice: Identity: Learning as Becoming and Community: Learning as Belonging (Wenger, 1998). In this section, teacher understanding is examined through the lenses of evolving identity and belonging to a group.

**Identity: Learning as Becoming**

In the first of the four realms of CoPs Identity: Learning as Becoming, Wenger asserts that through individual participation in a CoP, identities are changed. As referenced in Chapter 2, Wenger refers to identity as “learning citizenship”, which is how members of a CoP learn to come to understand and carry out their roles in and contributions to the CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain, “Learning implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by [activities, tasks and functions of social communities]. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities” (p. 53).

Through participation in the CoP, the student teacher participants in this study developed a greater understanding of their own cultural identities while gaining competency in the cultures of the ELs in their classes. Throughout this process, the participants noticed an evolution of their own personal and teacher identities. Li (2013)

suggests a “cultural approach to professional learning” (p. 139) which requires that teachers become aware of their own cultural identities and how their practices are mediated by their lived experiences before they can respond to existing hegemonic schooling practices by enacting pedagogies that are relevant to students of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Findings from this study corroborate Li’s assertion that teachers must first understand their own cultured<sup>12</sup> identities before attempting to teach in others in culturally relevant ways. Findings include: Student teacher participant awareness of cultured identity and participant evolving identity and subsequent evolving understanding of CRP for ELs.

**Student teacher participant awareness of cultured identity.** Villegas (2007) notes that teacher candidates often enter teacher education programs unaware of the impact that their culture has on their identities. Evans and Gunn (2011) further state that in order for teachers to begin to understand others, they must first examine their own identities, and Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that teacher candidates should be provided with opportunities to explore their social-cultural identities throughout their teacher education. It was evident throughout the CoP discussions about student and teacher cultural identity that culture is much more than a feature or an influence on one’s identity. It is the frame on which identity is built. Philosopher of communication theory, Marshall McLuhan, once said “Fish did not discover water. In fact, because they are completely immersed in it, they live unaware of its existence. Similarly, when a conduct is normalized by a dominant cultural environment, it becomes invisible” (n.d.). Throughout data collection, it became increasingly apparent that the existing schooling

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<sup>12</sup> See the next section for a definition of the term “cultured”.

paradigm in which the study participants were learning to teach was teeming with whiteness. It was also apparent that the lived experiences of the ELs outside of school, were not. Their home cultures were equally threaded into the fabric of their identities, but they were not privileged by the system.

As such, I found that the common qualifier “cultural” was insufficient to describe the identities and perspectives of my participants and their students. “Cultural” is a passive term, which in use focuses on a *feature of* or an *influence on* a noun, rather than a frame, or the “water” in which one swims. For this reason, I have coined the qualifier “cultured”, as it is a more active term that positions culture at the center and the noun being modified (in this case perception or identity) as the end-product, or result of that culture. Throughout the presentation of findings, I use the term “cultured” in order to demonstrate how culture frames teacher and student identities and perspectives.

The experience of coming to understand their cultured identities was significant for the white teacher candidates and anticlimactic for the teacher candidates of color, as they appeared to enter the study with clearer understandings of their cultured identities and the role of white privilege. Teacher candidates need time and support in order to consider and how their own cultured identities play a role in their educational decisions in the classroom (Moll et al., 1992; De Jong et al., (2013); Ladson-Billings, 2001; Schussler & Stooksberry, 2010; Shepel & Elina, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Identity is a central theme both in CoP and CRP. As cultural competency is one of the four tenets of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1998), it is critical that teacher candidates first develop awareness of their own lived experiences and cultured perspectives. Nieto (1999) suggests that when teacher candidates have the opportunity to “reconnect with their own backgrounds,

and with the sufferings as well as the triumphs of their own families, [it lays] the groundwork for students to reclaim their histories and voices” (p. 3).

Although the student teacher participants in this study took undergraduate and graduate coursework that required them to examine their social-cultural identities, all of them noted that participation in this study caused them to further understand how their cultures (lived experiences) affected their perspectives and their actions. They often reported being surprised by the stark contrasts between their lived experiences and perspectives and those of the ELs in their classes. For example, Alex (a white female) shared the challenge of coming into her own identity (learning as becoming) while learning about the identities of her learners: “I just feel like I’m still so young. I’m 23. I hardly know who I am ... all these kids – there’s just so much that you can learn from them. I think that’s a challenge just knowing all the different ways of life and cultures and styles that are in your classroom” (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). In this case, Alex accounted for her age and lack of experience/sense of self as mediating factors in her self-awareness and her teaching experience. Alex’s statement is in accordance with Schussler and Stooksberry’s (2010) assertion that teacher identity is comprised not only of one’s beliefs and values, but also of one’s understanding of cross-cultural norms. Alex recognizes the importance and the challenge of examining her own cultural identity, as well as those of her students.

In order for teacher candidates to deepen their social-cultural consciousness, some argue that they must experience environments that are dramatically different from their home environments (Fuller et al., 2006; Keengwe, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Alex’s

remarks illustrate why Wenger categorizes *identity* within learning as becoming, so as to convey that the examination of one's identity is an ongoing process.

Alex's following comment also reiterates the notion that members of a CoP experience *becoming* through their active participation and connections made to practice: "Once something's in front of me, I think I'm very open-minded. But just starting, I think there was a lot of things I just didn't realize, maybe, that I was doing or my own viewpoints or opinions or just thoughts on things" (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). Her use of the phrase "once something's in front of me" suggests that her experience student teaching in a highly diverse class of learners led her to recognize cultural differences and injustices that she might not have recognized had she student taught in an environment that mirrored her home and prior schooling environments. In addition, this is a representation of "learning citizenship"; as Alex learns to interact with ELs in culturally relevant ways, her perspectives change and she better understands her role in the classroom.

While all of the four participants expressed increased cultural competency and understanding of CRP, there was a notable difference in the data from the two white teacher candidates and the two teacher candidates of color. The former frequently took note of how their identities were shaped by whiteness and socioeconomic status. While they noted that they had discussed white privilege in teacher education coursework, coming to notice inequities in schooling through participation in the CRP-focused CoP forced them to situate themselves within a greater societal context and acknowledge their white privilege. As previously noted in Chapter 3, the content for CoP discussions came directly from the participants. As such, the topic of white privilege is one that came from

the white participants and was discussed amongst all of the members of the CoP. I asked probing questions to stimulate conversation during CoP meetings, but did not interject my perceptions or opinions about the role of whiteness in this work. This noticing of the role of white privilege in the school impacted the white student teacher participants' sense of cultured identity in ways that the student teacher participants of color did not report to experience through participation in the study. While the white participants commonly expressed shock and surprise over the ways in which the curriculum and school policies privileged white ways of thinking and being, the participants of color did not demonstrate that this knowledge was new to them.

**Participant evolving identity and subsequent evolving understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy for English learners.** Alex's sentiment (above) about experiencing an evolving personal and teacher identity through participation in the CoP was echoed by her participant colleagues. When considering the cultural dynamics in her classroom and her commitment to culturally relevant teaching, Adriana said "...I think as a person, you either believe in [CRP] or you don't" (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). Her words suggest that she sees CRP to be a pedagogical philosophical stance that is as equally entrenched in teacher identity as it is in personal identity. This perspective aligns with Davidman and Davidman's (1997) assertion that CRP is an "active process of thinking, a state of mind, a way of seeing and learning that is shaped and influenced by the beliefs about the value of cultural relationships and cultural competency" (pp. 24-25).

As the teacher candidate participants grew in their understanding of culture and CRP, they often called into question their own cultured perceptions. The following are three incidents that Ann recalled in which she questioned her own perception of a turn of



events. In each example, Ann shared her initial perception first before exploring cultural aspects of the exchange that she hadn't previously noticed.

In the first excerpt, after Alex shared in the CoP that one of her ELs (who was a recent refugee from Liberia and had experienced significant trauma) slammed a basketball into another child's head, Ann responded that she initially thought that he was being "naughty" but then asked herself:

Where does that come from? I'm jumping to the conclusion that he's being naughty . . . to me that seems outrageous because most people I know agree with me and have the same beliefs and views as I do . . . I think that's kind of where it hit me. Just because I think something doesn't mean it's true. That's my lived experience . . . You need to live it to know it. I haven't lived any of my kids' lives. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

After this exchange, Ann became very interested in examining her cultured perspective (she refers to this as her "truth") and that of her students. She found that they were often incongruent. She also found that she was quick to judge, despite her limited knowledge about student backgrounds, and she owned responsibility for being so.

In the following CoP conversation, Adriana shares concerns about her student Vincent, a recent immigrant from Liberia who experienced significant trauma and who is struggling socially and academically in school.

Adriana: Because of his [background] – he's so low reading-wise.

Ann: He's not being served?

Adriana: No.

Ann: That's not legal, is it?

Alex: It's supposed to be that he's being served in another manner, but not really ... Like he's supposed to meet one-to-one.

Ann: [He speaks] English – he has a different dialect. [He has] a reading teacher. That's only when she shows up. She's not here more than half the time.

Alex: Apparently the gap is big enough between him and the other EL learners.

Adriana: They don't have a group [for him].

Ann: That's the reasoning that he's going to need one-to-one.

Alex: I'm saying one-to-one in quotes because I feel like it's hit or miss.

Adriana: That's a whole other issue, too.

Megan: It's going to keep getting worse if we just keep pushing ... pushing it under the rug like "It'll be better next year." Who knows what's going to happen?

Michelle: Do you know where he's going next year?

Ann: He's changing schools. (CoP Meeting #8, 5/1/14)

This interaction is indicative of the participants growing awareness of educational equity issues for ELs in their school, which is a fundamental first step toward CRP enactment.

Adriana continues to bring her concerns about Vincent to the group and they collectively discuss how to best meet his needs. My role in this conversation was to seek more information about the learner.

After learning about Vincent's troublesome behavior at school and his history of violence, Ann considered her own cultural lens first as she sought to understand his behavior:

No wonder he feels guarded. No wonder he has a hard time opening up to people.

And he's teasing because it's all he knows – it seems like it's violence – the

means to an end is violence. So that really hit me 'cause it's like wow! – there's [sic] not just kids who go home and ... [don't] have enough to eat all the time – like that's hard enough. But that's something I can kind of understand.

Something like a bullet wound is something that I never would've even thought about when I was his age (crying). I didn't even know that was a thing that happened to people. I think that was just a stark comparison and juxtaposition to my life and my experiences. And how I look at the world is so different than the way that he looks at the world. So the huge spectrum between that and my experience – I mean, of all the kids and what they've been through, it just kinda hit me all at once. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

Ann was moved to tears when she heard of this child's bullet wound, and she verbally grappled with his experience for some time after learning about it. While lack of food was a topic that was within her knowledge base, gun violence was not. Her lack of knowledge and resulting shock mediated her evolving understanding of Vincent's behavior. This incident is particularly salient because it is an example of social learning as it reveals how Ann learned from Adriana's experience. She listened to Adriana processing her experience with this learner at a CoP meeting and reflected on how it challenged her thinking about the challenges that her students might bring to the classroom.

In this third incident, the participants engaged in a conversation that began with Ann and Amina discussing their kindergarten units on water. Amina shared with her class that in her family's home country of Tunisia, people get water from a well and carry it back to their homes on their heads. Megan asked for a picture so that she could share

the story with her class as well. Adriana noted that in Mexico they had water basins outside to collect rainwater and when there wasn't enough for her family, a truck would come into town to deliver clean water, which was expensive. Because of this experience, her mother still won't allow her to take a shower longer than 10 minutes. Adriana's story elicited a critical connection in Ann. She shared,

Ann: I wonder if that's why – my one kid, Leonard. He's come in a few times just so ripe, so ripe. Of course people just assume that it's neglect, that they aren't getting [the kids] bathed and telling them to do things. Maybe it *is* that.

Adriana: What you mean by that?

Ann: Like smelling.

Amina: ... Peter<sup>13</sup> is the same way.

Ann: There were two days in a row where we had to send them to the nurse's office to shower and get clothes because it was that bad.

Amina: He reeks of cologne now.

Ann: Yeah, sometimes he will spray cologne on him (Leonard). I don't know if they don't have time. I never even thought about the fact that they're really from there [Liberia]. Dad is an immigrant.

Alex: They don't see it as an absolute need. That's just how...

Ann: That's how [it is] in desert places. You don't waste water on showering. You just spray yourself with more cologne and more perfume. I never really thought about it that way before. I know that sounds really ignorant, but I never did. (CoP #4, 4/1/14)

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<sup>13</sup> Peter and Leonard are cousins who live together.

Following this discussion, Ann took note of her white cultured perceptions in an interview. She called into question her cultured perspective that linked child body odor to parental neglect as she considered that her students' body odor could be the result of a difference in bathing practices. In doing so, she made an essentialist assumption that all people in arid climates have the same bathing practices, however this is still evidence of evolving thinking about cultural relativism. She recalled:

I just assumed ... I don't know why I never thought about it...but dad doesn't care...They aren't taking care of their kids that well. That sort of thing. It never occurred to me that they were consciously making the decision or maybe just culturally it's happening – not consciously – that you just don't shower as often as we do. I think that's gross and I think that's neglect because of where I'm from, and people don't smell unless they are poor or neglected. But that's a cultural thing. I literally never thought about that until Amina said it. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

After Ann shared these anecdotes, she revealed how these experiences impacted her identity: “I just felt like it's an epiphany in my head for everything, not just for that. Like ‘Okay, Ann, you don't know it all’” (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14). She noted that it would be easier to understand truth only through her own white cultural lens and she perceived that other white teachers do the same. She attributed her evolved understanding of cultural lenses to her participation in the CoP.

Through acting upon commitments to continually examine student teacher sociocultural identity (Morton & Bennett, 2010; Powell, 1997) and those of students, the participants intentionally and haphazardly developed strategies that strengthened their

cultural competence and capitalized on opportunities for CRP enactment in the classroom. Upon reflecting on what she considered a childhood surrounded by homogeneity, Ann shared, “I want to learn about culture, so I want to surround myself in culture, but I think [my background] has shaped me a little bit because I'm kind of hungry for it because I've never had it” (Pre-Study Interview, 4/7/14). She joked about her limited knowledge about some immigrant communities and her strategy to adapt when she lacked critical cultural knowledge:

Now I'm just willing to look stupid. Like I don't care anymore. I have to look stupid if I wanna be smart someday. Like I'll go up to Amina. I'll be, like, I don't know who can eat ham. Like help me. I don't know. I know that I'm stupid. I know that we've talked about it. But I need to know who to ask who can eat ham. . .Be willing to look stupid. (1<sup>st</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/10/14)

Ann's willingness to be transparent about the holes in her cultural knowledge show that while her practice was mediated through her privileged lived experience, she humbly and actively sought to improve her knowledge-base and her practice. Given teachers' raced consciousness (Gere et al., 2009), teacher reflection, such as Ann's, is a critical component in the development of culturally relevant pedagogues (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007).

While all of the teacher candidate participants grew in their understanding of CRP for ELs, the two US born white teacher candidates (Ann and Alex) appeared to experience the most significant evolution in identity. Ladson-Billings writes that “[CRP] first requires that teachers themselves be aware of their own culture and its role in their lives” (2001, p. 81). Immediately thereafter, when considering a teacher group that is

more apt than any other to have limited sociocultural knowledge of their own identities, she posits “Typically, white middle-class prospective teachers have little or no understanding of their own culture” (2001, p. 81). Fitchett, et al. (2012) refer to this experience as teacher awareness of “Eurocentric sociocultural hegemony” (p. 593). Although all four participants were able to see Eurocentric hegemony in school policies and curriculum, the two US born white participants questioned the role of their whiteness in their understanding of CRP and their evolving identities. This corroborates with one of the four tenets of CRP, social critique (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In order for teachers to enact CRP, they must first recognize social inequality, based on race and class, among other things.

In early CoP meetings, the study participants still struggled to understand what CRP was. It took a considerable amount of time for the participants to begin to see how EL cultures were already present in the classroom and how they could respond to them pedagogically. Not until the last few weeks of data collection did explicit examples of CRP enactment appear in field observations. A critical factor that likely contributed to improved participant understanding of CRP was the time spent examining teacher cultural identity in the CoP. A salient finding from this research is that teacher examination of sociocultural identity is an essential component in the preparation of a culturally relevant pedagogue. Further attention to teacher identity in teacher education has the potential to disrupt the potential for teachers to learn about students’ cultures as an “other” and encourage a more holistic discourse in which teachers cross-examine their own lived experiences and those of their learners.

### **Community: Learning as Belonging**

The second of the four realms – Community: Learning as Belonging – is focused on the participants’ relationship with the members of the CoP. Wenger considers the three modes of belonging to be engagement, alignment and imagination (Wenger, 2002). Through engagement, members of a CoP work together to negotiate meaning, thus co-constructing identities through collaboration. Alignment is the act of linking the practice of the community to greater systems. As participants align themselves with the group, they do so in the interest of being a part of something larger than themselves. Lastly, Wenger considers imagination as a creative process through which participants learn to explore a variety of possibilities. These three modes of belonging will serve to frame the following findings as they relate to Community: Learning as Belonging.

Researchers in the field of teacher education agree that social engagement in a community of peers is a necessary element in teacher learning (Wenger, 1998; Hanks, 1991; Vinogradov, 2012). Wenger (1998) considers CoP participants’ *engagement* and *alignment* when he writes “Such participation [in a community of peers] shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (p. 4). The student teacher participants overwhelmingly responded that their understanding of CRP enactment was heavily mediated by their experience as members of a CoP. DeJaeghere and Cao’s (2009) findings that professional development opportunities can have a considerable impact on teachers’ sociocultural understanding and their attention to culture in pedagogy corroborates the participants’ experience. The analysis of data that branched the intersection of social learning and teacher understanding of CRP for ELs resulted in the following findings: 1) Connectedness is a critical element in learning in a community of practice and 2) Coming to understand the concepts of culture and



culturally relevant pedagogy is a process that takes place within and in between CoP meetings.

**Connectedness is a critical element to learning in a community of practice.**

*The value of camaraderie.* Not only did the student teacher participants experience greater focus on CRP in between meetings due to their responsibility to the group, they also felt camaraderie with the co-participants that they referred to as “connectedness”. Wenger (2002) refers to this experience as *engagement*, as participants co-construct identities through collaboration. The study participants agreed that interaction in CoP meetings was meaningful and uplifting, as the work of educating high poverty students and survivors of trauma can often be taxing. In Price-Dennis and Souto-Mannin’s (2011) research on teacher learning, they referred to a similar gathering of reflexive student teacher practitioners in a diverse urban school as a “third space,” which was grounded in the daily experiences of the teacher candidates and had a particular pedagogical focus on best practice for ELs. When teachers gather together in intentional communities that are focused on best practices for ELs, there is increased attention to culture and equity for ELs (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012).

Alex noted that the *connectedness* (engagement) of the group left her feeling energized after each CoP meeting: “What other people share is so moving sometimes...it just kinda gets you ready for another week and excites you about teaching...You’re like okay, here we go again...I can make it through the day” (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). She added, “Last week when it was a crappy week just ’cause of behaviors and it was so stressful, I was looking forward to going to Thursday [the CoP meeting]. That’s like the bright spot. I can be excited about CRP”. This statement corroborates with

Vinogradov's (2012) findings based on her research on teacher learning using the CoP framework for adult education in which participants noted that interaction with other participants was the most valuable aspect of their learning experience.

As well as an emotional connection, the CoP offered participants the opportunity to examine themes of mutual interest. Ann noted that the topics that we discussed were immediately relevant and meaningful to the group members: "I feel like when we talk real like down and dirty pedagogy and the stuff that really matters, that's the stuff that I take home... That's what I care about and that's what I worry about when I go home and think about how can I work on that. How can I work with them? That all derives from culture for the most part" (2<sup>nd</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/17/14). Ann's position that the CoP topics were "stuff that really matters" and that what really matters is culture, illuminates her position that knowledge of culture and CoP are critical components in her development as an educator.

The participants pointed out that the sense of mutual trust and shared repertoire aided in their learning process. Alex noted that it was valuable to have like-minded students teachers who shared a common experience close: "It's super nice to have someone right next door that's just kinda on the same page in thinking" (Mid-study Interview, 4/28/14). Amina agreed as she noted,

We had that one thing (the CoP) in common. It's always nice 'cause if I stop Ann in the hall or something, we'd [say] yeah, let's bring it up in [CoP]. It really was a good community both within our meetings and outside of it. We felt connected. We felt like we had things to share with each other. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

Similarly, Ann commented, “I think for all of us, like Alex said last time, she was looking forward to it all day. I don’t think it’s just the food either. It’s the company and the people...I love being there and being with cool friends and chatting in talking about things that are really important to us” (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14). The amiability amongst the study participants was a critical component to the group’s success as well as the participants’ success in learning to enact CRP for ELs. This finding supports Wenger’s (1998) assertion that a fundamental aspect in a CoP, aside from group discussion and joint activities, is building relationships that enable members to learn from each other.

The group provided an invaluable space for participants to hear and be heard, as they reported that they didn’t have similar outlets for reflection in their personal lives. Alex referred to the benefit of a community that uniquely understood her experience:

Teaching is one of those things that if you’re not a teacher you just don’t understand...I cannot go home and talk to my roommates. I can’t go home and talk to my family. I can’t talk to my boyfriend or contact anyone ’cause they just don’t understand. And as much as you try and tell them and you could describe every single one of your students and every situation that happened, and they still wouldn’t get it. I think you definitely need your teacher groups to really understand. (Pre-Study Interview, 4/7/14)

The importance of “connectedness” is a reoccurring theme across the four study participants in the data, all of whom reported valuing their time in the CoP, changing their foci in between CoP meetings, and feeling connected to a small group of educators who intentionally gather to listen and offer support when needed. Wenger (1998) writes

“... Participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions and practices...[they] become part of something big because [they] do what it takes to play [their] part” (p. 179). Alex noted that the group’s solidarity was essential to their feelings of connectedness. She shared, “We feel loyal to the group...Not everyone is fighting for CRP. We’re kind of the people that are. So we owe it to ourselves and the group...to hold that up. So I think that’s definitely huge. And that was key” (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). This excerpt is an example of what Wenger (2002) calls *alignment*, as the participants perceive that their unique commitment to CRP positions them as proponents of a philosophical approach to teaching and learning that is larger than themselves and the school in which they student teach.

In the following excerpt from a CoP discussion, one of the study participants asks her colleagues for advice about working with Hmong students.

1. Adriana: Can I ask you guys a question?
2. Amina: Sure.
3. Adriana: Can you tell me – are there specific things about the Hmong culture that you incorporate or need to know about ... your Hmong students or your kindergarteners?
4. Ann: Do you want to know why they’re acting a certain way? Is that what you’re saying?
5. Adriana: Or anything really. Just about your Hmong kindergarteners.
6. Ann: They’re usually really picky eaters.

7. Amina: I notice they love to hang out with each other. They're always together, which of course is pretty common with all kids from different cultures.
8. Ann: Mm-hm. They're really helpful. Mai – whenever I turn around, she's standing there. I've hit her several times on accident. Every time I turn around, she's standing right behind me. It's hard because I can't get her to play with the other kids though. It's not because they don't accept her. They are nice to her, and she's nice to them. Mom said ... at conferences "That's how she is at home. She's just standing around watching me do things all the time."
9. Alex: My two Hmong students ... always list out their chores they have ahead of them ... One was literally like "I don't let one of [my] younger brothers ... cry because then mom and dad will get mad." You can tell he's in charge of taking care of the babies, watching them, or rocking them, or whatever is needed ...
10. Ann: Oh, the other thing is we just got a baby doll in the classroom. Our Hmong students are the ones who are the best with it. (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14)

On one hand, this conversation was evidence that the members of the group felt comfortable seeking advice from each other and discussing challenging topics together. It was also evidence that they were getting to know their Hmong learners (turns 8 and 9). On the other hand, the conversation had cultural essentialist leanings. The question Adriana asks (turn 3) implies that there was a "Hmong type" and some responses seemed

to provide cover-all descriptions of Hmong people in general (turns 6, 7, 10). This approach to cultural competency can lead to stereotyping, which has great potential to further marginalize already marginalized learners. There was certainly a missed opportunity on my part, following this interaction, to question the participants about how such generalizations can be problematic and are counter to the tenets of CRP. I didn't interject in this discourse. The conversation moved onto another topic and I continued to listen.

***When connectedness is critical: Teacher understanding and student trauma.***

When teachers have the opportunity to collaboratively examine how to enact CRP for ELs, they cooperatively learn how to respond to critical incidents such as student trauma (Goodwin, 2002; Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012). Two weeks prior to the start of the study, Adriana's class welcomed Vincent, a newcomer student from Liberia. She expressed concern for him and his trouble connecting with other students and noted that at times his anxiety was so high that "...some days he's so sick to his stomach where he's throwing up. He's so anxious. He's crying sometimes" (Digital Journal Entry, 4/23/14). Shortly after mentioning Vincent to the CoP members, Adriana and her teacher colleagues became concerned about Vincent's history of trauma. Adriana shared that one of her students approached her and said "Victor showed me a gun wound where he was shot" (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14). Indeed, he had a bullet hole in his arm that he showed to a group of students. In addition, the literacy specialist reported that when Vincent spent time on the computer "a lot of things that he looks up are guns, children that are dead on the floor, things like that" (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14). Adriana frequently expressed concern for Vincent as she noticed that the other children in the class were teasing him.

She brought her concerns to the CoP for suggestions and support and every week, her colleagues checked in with her to see how Vincent was doing and to offer support and suggestions to Adriana.

Adriana: [In gym class] no one wants to be part of Vincent's team. The gym teacher pointed out that everyone was being really mean to him.

Alex: That's not nice.

Adriana: I talked to my cooperating teacher ... I talked to Vincent. We have to have a discussion with everyone ... It's frustrating. I understand that she's [the teacher] trying to protect the girls, too ... I talked to two of [the girls] today.

They just say that he'll follow them around and mock them.

Ann: It's about him.

Amina: It's about how he feels in the situation personally. Whichever context you put him in.

Alex: What was the EL teacher's wording? I found that really interesting. She said that the girls are feeling uncomfortable around him. I'm wondering – did she prompt them with that? (CoP Meeting #8, 5/1/14)

In the above exchange, Adriana shares how she and other teachers are approach some social issues that Vincent has with a group of girls. The group seeks to learn more about the situation in order to offer Adriana advice. They question who is at fault and ultimately decide that neither party is innocent. My role in this interaction was that of listener. However, it is likely that my presence as a white authority figure, has an influence on the conversation. Alex questions the EL teachers' methods and motives by asking if her questions to the girls were leading, which is a critical perspective that helps

the group as they seek to understand Vincent and how to best meet his needs. In the process of engaging with and supporting Adriana, the other three participants learned from her experience with Vincent.

Ann was particularly taken by Vincent's story, and it served as a learning experience for her, as her lived experience mediated her understanding of Vincent's story, which is radically different from her lived experience. She shared:

I still tear up when I think about that. He's in fifth grade. And he's already been shot. That whole lived experience that we talked about – how like I could not possibly understand how he's feeling about that. But that would taint and change how he looks at so many different things. I think some people don't quite understand...I mean, myself included... it takes so much to finally realize that people do not have the life that I have. It's so hard to think about. It kind of explains why he's so distant. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

Although Ann didn't directly experience having a student discuss his gunshot wound with the class, she learned about the intersection of trauma and CRP through talking with Adriana in the CoP. Examples of social learning, such as this, illustrate the value of a close-knit, connected community of colleagues to lesson the secondary trauma that the teacher experiences and to encourage the other CoP participants to consider how they would respond to a similar situation. When teachers learn lessons in practice that are contextualized in actual issues that affect ELs, they experience significant development as culturally relevant pedagogues (Jimenez-Silva & Olson (2012).

***Connectedness and the end of the CoP.*** A notable by-product of participation in the CoP is that Adriana and Ann expressed anxiety moving into new teaching positions



the following year, as they would not have the CoP for support and collaborative learning. They regarded the CoP to be so essential in their evolving understanding of CRP for ELs that they were unsure of how they would learn following completion of the study. When Adriana was asked in the final interview to reflect on her experience learning in a CoP, she repositioned the question:

Can I talk about a challenge that I might have? I know it's because I don't know too many people yet. But at the new school that I'm gonna be working at, having someone to... 'cause right now, I have Amina, Alex and Ann... I feel comfortable sharing with them. And they have their own backgrounds and ideas. The challenge will be to find someone that I feel comfortable sharing all those things... What am I gonna do? (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

Adriana's concern unveils a reality that extends beyond the idea that teachers can learn to improve their pedagogy by participating in social groups; it also reveals that when early-career teachers are conditioned to learn in community, they are apt to seek out social learning in their place of employment. Adriana considers social reflexive praxis to be an essential element of her efficacy as a teacher. Adriana's sentiment is reflected in Vinogradov's (2012) argument that social interaction through CoPs is a "critical element to professional learning" (p. 36). Her concern reflects her value of *engagement* (Wenger, 2002); however it also illuminates her use of *imagination*, as she considers her future teacher position and she explores how her development as a culturally relevant pedagogue will be facilitated.

The data generated from the study reveal that the teacher candidate participants learned to better understand CRP for ELs through experience and through belonging to a

CoP. Through the participant experience of belonging in a CoP, Wenger's (2002) modes of belonging: engagement, alignment and imagination were represented in these data. The following section moves the discussion about teacher learning from understanding CRP for ELs to learning to enact CRP for ELs in a CoP.

**Coming to understand the concepts of culture and culturally relevant pedagogy is a process that takes place within and between CoP meetings.** In early CoP meetings, participants expressed anxiety about CRP because of confusion about the meaning of the word "culture". For instance, Adriana said that culture is a "big, huge term...What is culture? It's everything. It's not just traditions in countries. It's what they do at home, it's who they live with...not just necessarily focusing on traditions and clothes and things like that" (Mid-study Interview, 4/29/14). For the study participants, coming to an understanding of what culture means was a foundational element in the process of learning to enact CRP through engagement in the CoP.

In another example, Alex considered culture in a broader context when her perspective collided with that of a Nigerian immigrant student. During a small group discussion in a guiding reading group about solutions to poverty, Alex talked with the group about the value of charity. A Nigerian learner interjected (in Alex's words): "Well, sometimes if you come from a family or place maybe where you had nothing and you've worked to get...a stable life, you might be fearful to give up anything 'cause you...don't wanna end up back there" (Mid-study Interview, 4/29/14). Alex was surprised by his response:

He goes on for like a minute or two. I'm like 'Oh my gosh, he's talking about his family'. His parents are both extremely hardworking. One's a doctor. One's in

like politics. I'm just like "Duh, why did I not see that coming?". I really didn't know where to go with it...So it's kinda just one of those moments where I wasn't even expecting that. That was never on my radar 'cause I don't have that background knowledge. And I've always been of a family that has provided for me and never needed. And my family does give and give of themselves in resources. I just never would have thought of that.

In the above interaction, Alex learned that her perspective was mediated by her lived experience, which did not include poverty or fear of instability. Upon hearing her student's perspective about why one should be careful about giving, Alex was reminded of how her culture mediates her understanding of the world.

Once the teacher candidate participants had a clearer idea of what "culture" meant, they were able to delve into how they might approach culturally relevant teaching. One week into the study, Amina posed a question in her digital journal that framed the rest of the CoP discussions about CRP enactment. She said: "I guess my real question then is because there are so many different cultures that are present in my classroom, how do I know which culture to make sure that I'm including within my teaching?" (Digital Journal Entry, 4/21/14). The group discussed this question at length and considered teaching to the majority or teaching norms that they perceive everyone shares. It was at this point that I introduced Emily Style's (1998) concept of windows and mirrors, a curricular approach to cultural relevancy for all learners. Style asserts that effective teachers provide students with windows (opportunities to learn about others' lived experiences) and mirrors (opportunities to learn through their own lived experiences).

The participants reported that the window and mirrors frame greatly improved their understanding of CRP enactment. Ann noted, “That really was the best for me, that analogy...windows and mirrors” (4<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/1/14). Amina reported that she felt good about her attempts to include windows and mirrors when she said, “I felt pretty good about it. As far as...showing the mirror to your students, making sure that they’re able to relate to things that you’re teaching them as well as having that window to look through and learn more about other cultures” (4<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/1/14). When the participants were able to align themselves to the windows and mirrors frame, their understanding of how CRP can be enacted was greatly improved.

In the following exchange, three of the study participants discussed how they pedagogically addressed windows and mirrors relating to the topic of homes. They came to the conclusion that explicit instruction around curricular windows is as valuable as attention to curricular mirrors.

Alex: We are reading a book called “Cabin Creek Mysteries.” It’s like a series. Mysteries are always hard for [ELs] because you have to use a ton of clues from the book and put them all together. These kids [book characters] spent summers at their cabins, and their families live on the same lake ... I realized they had zero idea what was going on in the book, and it all stemmed from that they didn’t know what a cabin was – or a lodge ... They thought these kids didn’t go to school and that’s why they were in trouble and the police were there. I’m like “This is their summer home for them.”

Ann: It’s crazy how much they didn’t get from that simple fact.

Alex: They've gotten through like three-fourths of it and missed all these clues. We slowed way down after that. That was really interesting. (CoP Meeting #6, 4/17/14)

Alex regretted not noticing how her students' failure to understand the term "cabin" left them confused about the storyline of the book, and she responded by providing explicit instruction around the topic of cabins. While Alex was teaching in the fifth grade, her colleagues who taught kindergarten related this account to their experience teaching a unit on homes. The following is a continuation of the same CoP conversation.

Ann: We had that, too. We had a book that was like homes of people ... I talked about how I live in a townhouse, which is a combination of a house and an apartment.

Amina: A lot of kids were ... connecting it to themselves. Like "I've seen this before, but I live here." Only three of my higher kids knew what a cabin was.

None of my EL kids knew them. (CoP Meeting #6, 4/17/14)

Ann and Amina's exchange shows how their learners were engaged in the lesson when they saw visible windows into their own lived experiences. Like Alex's fifth grade students, they needed explicit instruction on concepts that they weren't familiar with. In both cases, there was value in explicit attention to windows and mirrors in the curriculum.

Alex's enthusiasm for CRP was greatly enhanced after learning about Style's windows and mirrors frame. She shared a conversation that she had with the school's university liaison:

...it's crazy to me about how obsessed I am with [CRP] now...every lesson I look at, it's like 'Where can I fit it in? What can I do in this lesson? How can I change it?' I always refer to your windows and mirrors. How can I offer mirrors and windows in this lesson? (4<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/1/14)

Alex's experience represents Wenger's (2002) mode of belonging – imagination. Once Alex conceptually understood the windows and mirrors frame, CRP enactment became a welcome challenge for her. She engaged her imagination to consider how she might provide windows for her ELs and in the process, she experienced an evolved identity as a practitioner of CRP. After the “windows and mirrors” frame was presented in the CoP, all of the participants appeared to better understand CRP enactment. Ann had initially conflated CRP and multicultural education. She shared, “I didn't realize the difference between multicultural education and CRP. If you just do pure windows, then that's multicultural education” (3<sup>rd</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/24/14). Alex considered Chapman Hills to be the ideal site for CRP enactment because of its culturally diverse student population. She noted, “...Because we are so diverse here, I think when we offer those mirrors, we are also offering windows to other students” (4<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/1/14).

While it is a safe assumption that teacher learning would take place within CoP meetings, a salient finding in this study is that the teacher candidates reported many cases of learning *in between* CoP meetings as a result of their accountability to the group. For example, Adriana's feelings of allegiance to the group kept her focused on her goal of CRP enactment for ELs, causing her to consider how she could have done things differently and what she could bring to the group discussion each Thursday afternoon. She noted, “[Reflecting on practice in a community] really helps me become a better

teacher 'cause you're always consciously thinking about what you're doing and why you're doing it" (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14). Ann's experience paralleled that of her colleagues as it relates to group accountability and *engagement* in the learning process. As the student teacher participants spent each week gathering material for the Thursday meeting discussion, their enthusiasm for CoP meetings heightened. Adriana echoed Alex and Ann's sentiments about enjoying the CoP meetings and her attention to CRP for ELs during the week:

In the PLC, we would talk about and learn about different ways that people were incorporating CRP in their classroom. I would think about those things that we talked about or try to find different alternatives, like 'How can I do what they did in a similar way but with this new concept that we're learning right now?' I guess I always look back to what we talked about. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

Similar to Alex's sentiments about feeling anxious to explore ways in which she could enact CRP for ELs in her classroom, Adriana's experience echoes the same increased *imagination* for how she can provide pedagogical mirrors for her students. Amina agreed that her participation in the CoP contributed to her sense of awareness about how she could teach her ELs in culturally relevant ways. She noted,

It definitely, definitely helped me become more aware of it during my instruction and just my connections with the students to be able to bring stories up with them and talk about it and build connections with them and their cultural background...It's helping me be aware of CRP in general and keeping it at my forefront so that I can talk about it later and then getting that feedback with our PLC. It's been really helpful. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

All of the four study participants reported a common experience: they learned to better understand CRP enactment not only at CoP meetings, but in between meetings as well. They noted that their attention to culture in the classroom was heightened do to their responsibility to the group. Wenger (1998) established this to be true when he wrote "... the practice includes the ways that participants interpret reified aspects of accountability and integrate them into lived forms of participation" (p. 82). As CoP participants hold themselves accountable to the group, their practice changes, which is a manifestation of the CoP working not only *within* group gatherings, but *in between* them as well.

The following are three digital journal entries in which study participants relate how they learned from their group members and how they looked forward to CoP meetings as a place to seek advice about CRP for ELs. In this first data excerpt, Amina recalled how she learned from her colleagues how to get to know her ELs. She shared,

Something that I took from the [CoP] this last Thursday was the whole idea of being able to get to know our students better, which in turn will really help make our pedagogy more culturally relevant to our students. And so that's kind of been my goal this week. (Amina, Digital Journal Recording, 5/6/14)

While Amina commented on something that she took *from* the CoP meeting, Randi and Ana noted in their journals what they hoped to bring *to* the upcoming meeting. As questions arose during the week related to CRP and ELs, they shared them with me via digital journal entries and took note of what they wanted to ask their colleagues at the following CoP meeting.

I'm going to kind of bring this topic and look hopefully to Thursday's meeting because I really don't know exactly where to go with it ... I'm going to hope to



bring those topics up on Thursday to see with the other [teacher candidates] think about them. (Alex, Digital Journal Entry, 4/29/14)

I want to get some ideas from everyone on Thursday to see what suggestions they have to help [ELs] feel welcome. (Adriana, Digital Journal Entry, 5/28/14)

These comments evidence one of the realms of CoPs: “Community: Learning as Belonging” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5) taking place within the CoP. The mutual trust that was established amongst the group members provided a critical space for pedagogical learning to take place.

If teachers are to create culturally relevant learning spaces, they must understand how to “encourage students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for the academic success of others” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). What Ladson-Billings suggests sounds remarkably similar to a CoP. Through Wenger’s (2002) modes of belonging – engagement, alignment and imagination – the learning experiences of the student teacher participants in this study were enhanced. Perhaps if teachers learn in a collaborative community of learners, they will better understand how to successfully create learning environments that value the same tenets.

**Chapter 5: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS:**  
**HOW PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SHAPES**  
**PEDAGOGY**

**Research Question #2: In what ways is pedagogy for ELs shaped by teacher candidate participation in a CRP-based CoP?**

The situated learning experience and the resulting symbiotic relationship between student teacher understanding and practice allowed the teacher candidates to move beyond superficial ideas of culture that are often considered by teacher candidates in teacher preparation (Huang, 2002; de Jong, et al., 2013). Participation in the CoP provided participants with the opportunity to put their evolving understanding, as explored in research question #1, into practice as they sought out ways to bring their ELs' lived experiences into their pedagogy. This dissertation research employs Watkins and Mortimer's (1999) definition of pedagogy as "any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance the learning of another" (p 3), which is aligned with Ladson-Billings' definition of pedagogy as direct instruction as well as "structured social relations within and outside of the classroom" (1995, p. 163). This definition responds to the concern that CRP might be reduced to surface features of teaching "strategies" (Bartolome, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001). In this chapter, data that evidences CRP enactment is centered on "social relations". Chapter 6 presents CRP as "direct instruction" through revealing obstacles to CRP and how teachers pedagogically overcame them.

It is essential to note that the greater sociopolitical environment of Chapman Hills Elementary, at the time of data collection, had a significant impact on the

pedagogical experiences of the study participants. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the participants read standardized curricula from scripts for the first three weeks of data collection, which resulted in no observed or reported occurrences of CRP. Following the removal of the principal, participants proceeded cautiously toward enacting CRP for ELs, as policy still stated that teachers were required to read lessons from scripts, but there was no longer an administrator policing the hallways to ensure policy compliance. Classroom observation evidence of CRP enactment became more prevalent at the end of data collection, and decreased participant vulnerability may have been one reason for this change. Another possible reason for later increased enactment of CRP for ELs is that after the study participants had spent time in the CoP, their understanding of how CRP is enacted improved. As they negotiated together where CRP was needed and how they might pedagogically respond to their ELs' lived experiences, they likely felt more comfortable and capable of enacting CRP. While classroom observation data evidencing CRP enactment was limited, it is a critical finding that examples of CRP enactment in classroom observations increased in frequency toward the end of the study as the participants' understanding of CRP improved. It is also important to note that coming to a deep understanding of and learning to enact CRP is very likely to be a long process for most teachers.

This chapter responds to the second of three research questions that asks how teacher candidates' pedagogy for ELs was shaped by their participation in the CoP. It is framed by the following realm of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998): Practice: Learning as Doing. Findings indicate that: 1) CRP enactment for ELs requires awareness

and commitment, and 2) Student teachers learn to navigate the intersection of immigrant family experiences in the classroom.

### **Practice: Learning as Doing**

Wenger (1998) highlights the connection between CoP learning and practitioner activity when he refers to experiential learning as *learning as doing*. As presented in research question #1, Wenger posits that learning is a social act, therefore “doing” refers to the enactment of CoP member’s practice within the “historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what [they] do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 47). “Doing” is a social practice through which learning takes place, as situated learning is based on the understanding that people generate meaning through engaging in the practice that the CoP shares. Given this understanding, a critical component in social learning is informed and committed action.

**CRP enactment requires awareness and commitment.** As Ladson-Billings (1995) initially presented the facets of a culturally relevant educator, she recalled the awareness that her study participants had regarding greater sociopolitical factors and their commitments to CRP for the purpose of educational equity. She wrote, “...their common thread of caring was their concern for the implications their work had on their students’ lives, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements” (p. 474). Years later, she wrote further on the topic of the commitments of culturally relevant teachers,

[Culturally relevant teachers] understand the need to *study the students* because they believe there is something there worth learning. They know that students who have the academic and cultural wherewithal to succeed in school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to others; in a

democracy, this commitment to the public good is paramount. (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 97)

Once the participants in this study became aware of ways in which they could respond pedagogically to their ELs' lived experiences, they developed a commitment to do so.

It took time for participants to understand how CRP could be incorporated into their lessons. In the third week of the study, Ann reported "I think right now I'm just starting to realize where the openings are and where that can happen...I see where it is now, and now I'm ready. Now I can act it out. I don't know why it took me three or four weeks to finally figure out where it can fit in" (Mid-Study Interview, 4/29/14). Like other participants, Ann was initially very concerned about her perception that *doing* CRP for ELs would necessitate additional instructional time, which was limited in her class. All of the four participants reported realizing that time was no longer their greatest obstacle to CRP enactment. Ann continued:

...it doesn't take a huge commitment. I mean, you have to get your mind thinking about it. But once your mind's on the right path...it just kinda naturally comes up. You just learn to recognize it. And that's the hardest part – is like getting in the habit of recognizing it...It doesn't have to be a whole block that you have every day and lesson plan and all this stuff, which was nice to realize. (Post-study Interview, 6/13/14)

Amina agreed with Ann regarding recognizing where CRP fits into a lesson. She called this recognition "awareness":

I think this whole study has made me so much more...aware of CRP and just keeping in mind that kids are not always gonna relate to what you have to say and

making sure that you're always considering them in everything that we do as teachers and in our planning and in our instruction. Even if it's not something that's planned, but if you see that a student can't relate to something, then bring up a story that you might know about them or something that you've seen them doing in school that might relate to it or something. It definitely made me try to put myself in their place and think about what could I do for this unit to help them relate to this more and connect to what we're learning. I honestly think just more awareness. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

In the above excerpts, Amina and Ann revealed the impromptu nature of CRP enactment as they reflect on their understanding of how *doing* CRP takes place. Alex later added that that she resented excuses teachers make for failing to enact CRP: "It's obviously hard to fit everything in. But I guess it just kinda comes down to where you place importance. And what's more important than others is gonna get your time. And I think it's important" (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14).

The groundwork for the enactment of CRP for ELs is teacher understanding of culture and what CRP looks like. Following this groundwork, participants were able to more effectively see how CRP for ELs could be incorporated into their pedagogy.

**Pedagogy as social relations: Student teachers learn to navigate the intersection of immigrant family experiences in the classroom.** For more than thirty years, anthropologists have studied how teaching can better reflect the home lives of students of color who struggle with academic achievement (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mohat & Erickson, 1981; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests that teacher candidates have a tremendous task

ahead of them as student diversity is vast and ever-changing. She writes that ideas about diversity “are broader and more complex” (p. 14) than ever before as they involve immigrants around the world with ethnic, religious and linguistic differences.

Focused specifically on what Wenger (2002) calls *doing*, this section of Chapter 5 examines the student teacher participant enactment of CRP for ELs in light of their participation in the CoP. Findings from this research reveal that the participants often found themselves at cultural intersections as they learned of the complexity of their ELs’ lived experiences and had to make sense of how to best meet their learners’ diverse needs. The following three incidents illustrate pedagogy as social relations in which the teachers experience learning to respond pedagogically to immigrant students’ familial experiences. In the first incident, Amina pedagogically responds to her student’s question about food by inquiring about the Liberian foods that her family prepares. In the second incident, teachers are called to consider how to respond respectfully to students of Hmong descent, a culture that is significantly more collectivist than the cultures from which the participants come. The final incident examines the decision-making process of a teacher who witnessed her fifth-grade Mexican student unwittingly announce to the class that his mother was undocumented. All three examples highlight the participants’ experiences exploring the intersection of immigrant family backgrounds and pedagogy.

***What kind of food do you eat in your world?*** Ann and Amina were student teachers in kindergarten classrooms and often came to each other for support and ideas. While Ann represented teacher learning from a position of white normativity and privilege, Amina’s experience was that of an English learner who was from a minority culture in the region. Potentially due to Amina’s use of the hijab, she was perceived as

different by her kindergarten learners. In the following excerpt, that illustrates the impromptu nature of *doing* CRP for ELs, Amina shared an encounter with kindergarten students who approached her in an effort to learn more about what she ate, given her Tunisian culture.

I had quite a funny thing that happened today this morning. I was... taking all of my kids out to recess and lunch and as we were in the line, one of my students... goes “Oh, Miss Amina, can you tell us, what do you eat in your world?” And I looked at him a little confused, like “What you mean? We both live in the same world.” And he said “No, I mean where you were before you came here.” (Digital Journal Entry, 5/27/14)

Amina noted that she was caught off guard by the remark, particularly when other students became drawn into the conversation. She decided to use the opportunity as a cross-cultural lesson and explained:

I said “Oh...we eat this kind of food that’s called couscous.” And he’s like “What’s couscous?” And so I described it, and then Darlene, our girl who is originally from Liberia, said “Oh, Miss Amina, do you eat fufu?” And I was like “Actually, I just ate fufu last week,” and I was like “Oh, how do you like your fufu?” And she’s like “I like to put it with soup and the rice, and I like to mix it all together and then eat it.” And I was like “Oh, my goodness. That’s how I eat it, too.” And so as we were walking, she kept on. She was super excited, and just talking all about it. She’s like “Yeah, my mom makes it, and I love eating it. Maybe I’m going to eat that tonight when I go home.” And then she was like – and then – oh, she goes – “Oh...what else do you like to eat?” And then I was



thinking, what other West African food could I also talk about? Then I said “Oh, I like eating the plantains.” And then in her accent, she goes “Oh, plantain?” So I don’t know if that’s how they say, but she was like “Oh, the plantain.” I was like “Yeah.” And she goes “Yeah, my mom she makes it. She cuts the banana, and she fries it,” and – yeah, that’s how she makes it, and she really, really likes it, too.

(Digital Journal Entry, 5/27/14)

Amina recalled this exchange as a particularly positive one for her and for Darlene. The week prior, our CoP had shared a West African meal of Fufu, soup and plantains. The meal wasn’t particularly popular amongst the participants. However, many of them commented that it offered them an experience that they may not have otherwise had in relationship with their West African students. Amina shared, “It was just a lot of fun to kind of see them bringing it up and talking about it... It just really helps honestly to just bring up culture in general. I feel like kids become more open about sharing their own culture and talking about it to us, too” (Digital Journal Entry, 5/27/14). Amina’s understanding and experience were evidently mediated<sup>14</sup> by her experience in the CoP as she grew to become more accustomed to addressing culture in pedagogy. In this example, Amina is made immediately aware of the greater social structures that collide in this interchange. Her act of *doing* CRP does not exist within a vacuum, rather it is mediated by the Nigerian, Tunisian and US cultures that intersect and influence the

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<sup>14</sup> Wertsch (2007) provides the following description of “mediation”, as conceptualized by Vygotsky. “In [Vygotsky’s] view, a hallmark of human consciousness is that it is associated with the use of tools, especially ‘psychological tools’ or ‘signs’. Instead of acting in a direct, unmediated way in the social and physical world, our contact with the world is indirect or mediated by signs. This means that understanding the emergence and the definition of higher mental processes must be grounded in the notion of mediation. (p. 178)

perspectives and contributions of the student and student teacher. Thus providing further evidence for the necessity for attention to teacher sociocultural identity in the tenets of CRP.

*Hmong home responsibilities and classroom implications.* Alex, Amina and Ann took an interest in Hmong culture and ways in which they could be relevant to the lived experiences of their Hmong students. During a CoP meeting, Ann brought up how she had noticed that her Hmong students enjoyed fishing on the weekends with their families. The following week during morning meeting, Amina asked her kindergarten students to toss a ball around the circle and share what they had done the weekend prior. She shared her experience in practice about one of her students who rarely participated in class:

... One of our Hmong students, he's ... special ed and he doesn't talk very much. So he goes, 'Oh, I caught a big fish'. I said, '...Tell us more about that'. And he goes, 'Yeah, I went to the lake and me and my dad caught a big fish. [Points to another Hmong student]. We went together. We both caught fish together'. I said, 'Oh my goodness ... I didn't even know that you guys' families...knew each other...and...you guys like to go fishing? This is awesome .... (Digital Journal Entry, 4/28/14)

Amina furthered that "...it was just kind of fun to see...just being able to get to know our students better and then, in turn, being able to change or modify our instruction in a way that'll involve all those different cultures" (Digital Journal Entry, 4/28/14). In this excerpt, Amina demonstrated a clear understanding of how CRP takes place. It emerges when the teacher knows his/her students and incorporates their lived experiences into the

curriculum. Examples such as this are direly needed to serve as examples for CRP enactment. Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that "... the practice of exemplary teachers will form a significant part of the knowledge base on which we build teacher preparation...we need to consider methodologies that present more robust portraits of teaching (pp. 483-484).

Alex, Amina and Ann all contributed examples of their Hmong students' family responsibilities and how their home experiences manifested in the classroom, and stated that at times they found their Hmong students' familial ways of being to be concerning. On the other hand, the following example presents Ann's experience with the norms of her Hmong students and while she is surprised, she shares that she finds their group accountability to be endearing.

The other day I was at the bus and I turned around, and some girl was tugging at my shirt like that. I looked down, and it's like some tiny little kid. She's like 'Miss Alex, Miss Alex, where's Amy? Where's Amy?' She was literally about to cry. I was really confused. It threw me off. It was like 'Amy, Amy... You must be her little sister... Are you looking for her? Do you usually go home with her after school?' 'Yeah. And she's not where she usually is' ... We both looked. She was there. I turned around and I never noticed this. I probably should know this about one of my students... It was... my student and her four younger siblings, and they were all literally holding hands. They all hold hands and walk home. They... must have been every year literally. It was like equal distance between all their heights. They were... missing one because you could tell they were looking for her. (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14)

At this point in the conversation, Ann added that she was impressed by the siblings' accountability for each other's well-being and that her student waits for his brother to walk him home as well. She said "He knows he has to stay and his brother takes him. Then he has another brother, too. They all have the same sweatshirt and look exactly the same and hold hands" (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14)

Later in the CoP meeting, Ann brought up another experience that relates to Hmong students and family responsibility; however in a way that challenges Ann's cultured perspective. She perceived the following learner to be so entrenched in family responsibility that she didn't allow herself to play like her kindergarten peers. She said,

Mai never wants to play with the other kids. They get along fine when she does play with them. It's not a big deal. They treat her nice. She treats them nice. It's not a big deal, but she prefers to hang around adults. She prefers to have adults tell her to go do something, like pick up pieces of trash off the floor or erase the whiteboard or put away papers. She's always asking me 'What can I do? What can I do?' If I don't tell her, she's my little shadow standing behind me all the time, free time or whenever. It doesn't matter. I think some of it is because she does like me. During...free time when she's supposed to be doing normal kid stuff, it seems like she can't self-correct herself to do something fun. She needs to be doing something useful or something that matters. Either that or she needs to be near an adult in case something like that comes up and she can help with that. I don't know the best approach to take it. I've been kind of using her a little bit, like 'You can erase the board and put away these things'. Other kids like to do it, too. 'You guys can pick up paper. It's always fine to clean up the classroom. We are

being caring and respectful’. Then I also don’t know how much to be like ‘You need to go and play now. You cannot help clean. We’re not going to clean or do anything. We’re all just going to play in the classroom’. It’s so hard to tell a kid to go play. Does she know how to play? If she doesn’t, it’s really hard to describe that to a kid. I can say ‘Go play a board game with these kids’. I can just tell she’s not into it, and it just sucks. How much should I push that? Should I let her do her own thing because it’s what she wants to do? So that’s been on my mind a little because it happens every day. (Digital Journal Entry, 5/23/14)

In this example of *Practice: Learning as Doing* (Wenger, 1998), Ann found herself in a conundrum, caught in between two of the tenets of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). She felt compelled to choose between a) upholding *cultural competency* by allowing Mai to bring her lived experience into the learning environment and b) engaging in *social critique*, which calls her to empower learners by not allowing them to be taken advantage of or to be marginalized. Ann’s act of humbly and honestly presenting this critical incident to the group is illustrative of how teacher learning took place in the CoP: through open and honest dialogue and a willingness to be vulnerable. Because *Learning as Doing* acknowledges the “historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what [teachers] do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 47), it is prudent that CoP members consider the contributions and challenges that historical and social constructs bring into their pedagogical decisions. *Doing* requires great foresight and planning, which is facilitated via participation in a CoP. In light of the two aforementioned examples, the four study participants explored the idea of cultural relativism and they considered how such differing perspectives could impact the schooling experience of their students.

*Student disclosure of an undocumented parent: Discerning the role of the teacher.* The following incident presents an example of *doing* CRP for an EL that was very uncomfortable for the participant. Adriana, who in addition to being a student teacher participant, is also a first generation immigrant of Mexican descent. During a fifth grade lesson about immigration, a Mexican student named Carlos raised his hand to share with the class. In Adriana's words, he said: "[My mom] crossed the border, the police caught her and fingerprinted her" (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14). She remarked "He said it in front of the whole class...so everyone heard. The kids didn't know what was going on or what that really meant...Some kids were like 'What does that mean?'" (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14).

This experience was particularly difficult because of how Adriana's lived experience (which Wenger [1998]) would consider a historical or social context) mediated the discourse. She grappled with how to respond to the situation and ultimately decided to consult her family members for advice. She shared:

Then I realized how big of a deal it was and just like the consequences that it could have on the student. Not now necessarily but later on if he does something like that again. So I was debating what to do. So this is what happened. I talked to my mom, I talked to my sisters, I talked to a ton of my family, and I just wanted to ask their opinion because we understand what the situation is like and we have family members in those situations. So that was kind of hard. I got their opinions and everyone did eventually say that I probably should mention it to her [Carlos' mother] or...call her somehow or let her know what happened and have her be aware of what happened...I know she should be aware of what happened...I

didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable or make it awkward or make it seem like I was being nosy or make her feel like I was accusing her of something... .

(Digital Journal Entry, 5/7/14)

After Adriana decided to call Carlos' mother, she spent time reflecting on the exchange and whether or not she made the right choice. When recalling the phone call she noted:

I called her yesterday and the conversation was short. I started it by saying I was from the school and I had met her before at conferences. And I told her about what we had been learning about in school and what Carlos had said. And I just told her that I have family members in that situation and that I know they would definitely want to know...what happened so they could handle it themselves...And I tried to make her feel comfortable. I wasn't trying not to...seem like I was judging her. I just said...this is what happened, here are the facts... So I don't know. Maybe I was more uncomfortable with it than she was but maybe she was nervous, but all the responses that I got from her were 'uh-huh, okay, uh-huh, okay, okay, thanks'...I know I shouldn't expect her to be like on the phone telling me...and so I understand why she might have not said as much. But that was hard...it's so hard. I don't even know how I did it. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

Adriana's learning process was personally challenging. After addressing the mother, she considered whether or not to discuss the issue further with Carlos:

Today I saw the student and he was fine. He acted normal so I don't know what happened. I don't plan on asking him [if] everything is okay... I don't even know if I should sit down with him and talk to him about what happened. I don't know

because his mom didn't say anything, so. And I don't want to intrude and keep pushing the issue. I don't know. I just--I hope I didn't scare his mom or make her think that I was judging her...because I know even though I am Mexican and my family went through that and I experienced that...there's a stigma between some Hispanics where those Hispanics that have already become citizens or have some sort of like documentation allowing them to stay here think they are better than those that don't have it. But that's not...what I was trying to do...I just wanted her to know what happened...It hit so close to home...and it's a student that I care about. I mean I care about all my students but I guess as a teacher you have to learn how to be uncomfortable and I'm learning for sure. (Digital journal entry, 5-17-14)

Not only was this a learning experience for Adriana, it also served as one for the other three participants in the study. They listened to Adriana and supported her as she went through the process of hearing the comment in class to deciding to call his mother to reflecting on her decision to call home. All four participants' understanding of CRP enactment for ELs was improved as a result of Adriana's *learning as doing* (Wenger, 1998). The following is an exchange from the CoP meeting after Adriana's phone call:

Ann: I think you handled it beautifully. I don't know what I would've done differently.

Amina: As a parent, I would love to be told that – rather it come [from] someone else or in a worse situation.



Ann: That warning that someone might know. And the most important thing is to talk to your child and be like ‘This is what we say in school, and this is what we don’t say in school’. It’s hard to tell your kids to lie. (5<sup>th</sup> CoP Meeting, 5/8/14)

Alex remarked that she felt privileged to have been able to support Adriana through this difficult process. She supported her by listening to her experience and her perspective, by physically staying in the room while Adriana made the call and by counseling her after the call. While Alex learned about how to respond critical incidents around immigration issues, Adriana learned that her CoP colleagues were there to support her when she needed it. As Alex reflected on her experience on the day of the phone call, she said:

I actually sat with her ’cause I saw the whole progression of that...the day it happened and her talking about it with her immigrant boy and then...[we] brainstormed what she was gonna do...And we came to the conclusion that...it’d be a great idea to talk to her family. And then I kind of saw the next day where she actually made the call. And I was actually in the room...And now she’s speaking Spanish.... So I could kinda tell what was going in. I could tell by her tone of voice...the awkwardness, uneasiness. I tried to reassure her at the end that I thought that was the right choice, too... She kinda felt bad after. I think that’s where she kinda needed me to go back and forth and...get her back up to okay spirits. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

Alex’s offering of moral support throughout this very emotionally challenging ordeal was meaningful to both Adriana and Alex. All of the study participants concluded that this learning experience helped them feel better prepared if a similar situation would happen

in their classroom. However, despite this new feeling of preparedness, in the next CoP meeting Alex wondered if she would have been able to do what Adriana did, given that she doesn't have the same cultural and linguistic background. She said,

It kinda scared me, to be honest. She just had a couple things that are like her resources that I don't have. How awkward would that have been to go through a translator...I mean a) she had the language, and b) she had her own family to use as resources. She had firsthand experience to go off of – like brainstorm ideas on how would you feel if that was your family. Those aspects kind of made me scared. Like okay, what if that would've been in my class? It also kinda made me think ahead – like what could I do to be proactive about that? (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

While Alex referenced being “scared” because of how her lived experience would mediate a similar situation differently from Adriana's lived experience, she concluded that it was a learning experience for her and that she would think ahead about how to avoid and/or respond to such dilemmas when they came up in her class. This anecdote provides further evidence of a need to consider teacher lived experiences and their role in CRP enactment during teacher preparation and professional development experiences.

Powell (1997) posits that CRP enactment is a learned process. The student teacher participants examined the ways in which culture “determines how we think, believe, and behave” (Gay, 2010, p. 23) in order to tailor their pedagogy to the unique backgrounds of their students. The incidents presented in this section illustrate the ongoing learning process of CRP enactment (practice) for ELs that takes place amongst colleagues in a CoP as well as in the classroom. Together, they support Wenger's (1998) assertion that

practice takes place within social and historical structures, as the teacher learning experience is mediated by the sociopolitical climate of schooling.

Given the constraints on the participants at Chapman Hills, it is not surprising that the majority of the examples of CRP enactment reflect pedagogy as social relations, rather than direct instruction. While there were explicit constraints on teachers that made curricular modification difficult, such an obstacle to social relations didn't exist. Examples of CRP as direct instruction are presented in detail in the following chapter. Chapter 6 reveals study participants beginning to consider the role of CRP in direct instruction, which was only possible following the removal of the principal and the gradual (yet still subversive) departure from the scripted curriculum on the part of the teachers and student teachers.

**Chapter 6: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS:**  
**HOW PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFY AND OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO**  
**CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

**Research Question #3: What do student teachers identify as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs and how do they overcome them?**

Chapter 6 responds to the last of three research questions and is framed by the following realm of CoP: Meaning - Learning as Experience (Wenger, 1998). As the teacher candidate participants came to identify obstacles, they often sought out creative ways to enact CRP for ELs.

**Meaning: Learning as Experience**

This final realm of CoP demonstrates how learners understand meaning through experience. Wenger posits that people are “meaning-making” (Wenger, 2002) through their complex participation in social groups and that they experience “negotiation of meaning” (Wenger, 1998), which is how individuals make sense of the world and understand their engagement in it to be meaningful. Given this perspective, learning takes place whenever there is change, which results in “negotiation of meaning” and “meaning-making”. Wenger notes that “negotiation of meaning consists of two parts: *reification* and *participation* (Wenger, 1998). He defines reification as the “process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into thingness” (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). He defines participation as the “complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging. It involves our whole person including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 56).

Through *Learning as Experience* (Wenger, 1998), the participants in this study confronted the complexity of the social structures in which they worked.

**Policies that mandate standardization inhibit CRP for ELs.** At the first CoP meeting, I handed out brightly colored Post-It notes and markers and asked the participants to write down what they predicted to be potential obstacles to CRP enactment. The participants appeared confident in their responses as the table filled with Post-Its. The predominant assumptions were that time and teacher cultural competency would be the greatest barriers to CRP enactment for ELs. Amina shared:

It's gotten a lot easier to find those little bits of time where I can include [CRP]. I think it just came with more experience .... and ...being more cognizant...and keeping it on the forefront...I don't think time is a challenge. That's what I thought before. (Post-study interview, 6/13/14)

As the study progressed and the participants began incorporating CRP into their lessons, they noted that they no longer perceived time to be a limiting factor to CRP enactment.

Parhar's (2011) assertion that CRP is largely impeded by existing school policies is in line with the primary obstacle to CRP for ELs that presented itself in this study: curricular standardization. Researchers agree that the schooling climate is often in conflict with the tenets of CRP (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Langer, 1987; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998; Phuntsog, 2001). Parhar and Sensoy's (2011) study of teachers learning to enact CRP in Canada revealed that the teachers had limited control in designing lessons as they reported, "deep cracks that add complexity to participants' agency to enact culturally responsive pedagogies" (p. 214). They furthered that the majority of the challenges that the teacher participants in the study faced were the result of structural or institutional

constraints and noted that “teaching practice is structured fundamentally by the institutional structures that support or interfere with at least some of the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 215).

Paris (2012) developed a concept that is similar to CRP called *culturally sustaining pedagogy*. In his writing about culturally sustaining pedagogy, he notes that the languages, literacies and cultures should be pedagogically supported by the teacher. The focus on language is a needed additional dimension in the teaching of diverse learners, especially English learners. Paris agrees with Parhar and Sensoy but takes a more critical stance by asking what the purpose of schooling is, in light of policies that marginalize non-white, multilingual learners. He writes,

As we consider the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies, we must once again ask ourselves that age-old question: What is the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society? It is brutally clear that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages and cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of color in the United States. (p. 94)

Ladson-Billings (2001) explains that CRP “[asks] teachers to function as change agents in a society that is deeply divided along racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class lines” (2001, p. 104).

This section presents two occurrences in which the teacher candidates confronted the intersection of CRP for ELs and curricular standardization policies. Wenger’s (1998) *reification* and *participation* are used as frames for analysis. Findings indicate that: 1) Policies that mandate standardization inhibit CRP for ELs, and 2) Teachers learn to weave together CRP and standardized curriculum.

*Scripted, standardized literacy curriculum leaves no room for culturally relevant pedagogy for English learners.* In the introduction to the seminal article *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Ladson Billings (1995) notes that her study participants took great professional risks in order to pedagogically respond to students' lived experiences. Such risks included defying administrative mandates. One example of this that Ladson-Billings provides is that of a teacher who writes a letter to her administrator asking for permission not to implement a standardized literacy program that was mandated by the school. In doing so, she cited research about literacy from a critical perspective and she was granted permission to approach literacy instruction without the standardized program. In subsequent years, this teacher's colleagues were able to do the same

Amongst the participants in this study, perceptions about a new scripted literacy curriculum changed quickly within the first two weeks of the study. During the first week of data collection, the teachers (who had recently voted to implement the curriculum), appeared to be pleased. The teacher candidate participants echoed their enthusiasm. In the pre-study interview, Ann shared "We got a really awesome grant" (Pre-Study Interview, 4/7/15). When further asked about it in the same interview, she recounted,

I think a lot of teachers were misled how it was going to be used. I think that they were told when they voted for [it]... that it would be a tool and I think that a lot of people are feeling that it's been implemented very rigidly...people were kind of taken aback...it takes up every moment of my day that's not math.

Prior to the implementation of the literacy curriculum, the faculty and participants attended a training in which the district superintendent presented the “non-negotiables” of the curriculum. On the list of non-negotiables was: time allocated for each topic. No deviation from the schedule was permitted for any reason, including bathroom breaks. The only parts of the school day that were not scripted were math and guided reading. Ann reflected on what she was told at a training session:

Don't talk about what kids are saying... If it's not on topic, if it's not your question – even if it's a good comment that is kind of about what you're talking about, unless it's an exact answer, [say] ‘That's not what we're talking about right now.’ Just move on. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

Ann also referenced an email that was sent to all teachers letting them know that if they didn't comply with the curriculum and its non-negotiables, they would be “written up,” which resulted in a lot of unease amongst the faculty and administration. My role as the researcher was precarious at this point, because the school had a relationship with the university where I studied. I was aware that the administration was very supportive of the new curriculum and my research revealed some concerning aspects related to its implementation.

During the first few weeks that I was in the field, data collection from field observation was sparse. The two student teacher participants who were in kindergarten classrooms (Ann and Amina) were actively employing the scripted standardized literacy curriculum throughout the day. The two participants who were in fifth grade classrooms (Adriana and Alex) were preparing their students for the state standardized exams. The



following is an example of teacher enactment of the Milestone standardized literacy curriculum.

Ann began her kindergarten lesson by attaching a large, colorful poster to the board with a poem on it. She read the poem aloud to them. It was called “Pet Parade”. One line from the poem read “Pandas and parrots, pink bows on dogs, and a big pot filled with tiny frogs”. She proceeded to read the poem a second time, this time asking students to tap their heads when they heard a word that starts with the letter “P”. The third time, She did a choral reading of the poem with the class. She then pulled out large flash cards that illustrated the nouns from the poem. The students helped her to organize them on the board under the first letters of each word. Words included were: pumpkin, plant, pear, panda, frogs, pet. She then passed out white papers in plastic sleeves (used as whiteboards) so that the students could practice writing the vocabulary words. Students needed many reminders to “be principled” as many of them were off task and not engaged. Similar lessons were observed in Amina’s kindergarten class.

The study participants in fifth grade spent the majority of instructional time during my first few weeks at Chapman Hills on preparation for the mathematics state standardized exam. On my first day of field observation, Alex taught a lesson about equivalent fractions. The following is an example of one of the problems that she projected onto the board. “MN 5.1.2.4 Which decimal is equivalent to  $\frac{6}{24}$ ? A. 0.167, B. 0.25, C. 0.33, D. 0.5” (Alex, Field Observation, 4/7/15). Lessons were directly related to standards and classroom activities consisted of pretest math problems. On the same day, Adriana taught a similar lesson to her fifth grade students. Both of the above lessons lacked cultural relevancy. Adriana noticed that the EL students in her class, in particular,

struggled with the format of the lesson. As a researcher looking for evidence of CRP for ELs, I grew increasingly concerned that I wouldn't be able to see any CRP enactment in the classroom at all.

Adriana's bilingualism benefitted her learners and it brought an aspect of cultural relevancy into her pedagogy when she spoke Spanish with her learners. Paris (2012) refers to this ability as "linguistic dexterity", which he defines as "the ability to use a range of language practices in a multiethnic society and linguistic plurality as consciousness about why and how to use such dexterity in social and cultural interactions" (p. 96). In my time observing in Adriana's classroom, she used Spanish sparingly and when she did so, she generally whispered. I questioned how English dominance and Adriana's position as a student teacher of color might have resulted in her decision to speak Spanish quietly so that others could not hear. Amina mentioned that although she enjoyed bringing CRP into guided reading, she was fearful of being penalized. She noted that many of the materials were culturally biased and confusing to her students. During a field observation, I observed Amina giving a phonics lesson to her ethnically diverse kindergarten class. The picture cards that came with the pre-packaged standardized literacy curriculum for that lesson overwhelmingly represented US white middle class norms. They included, for example, a beach ball, hot dog, baseball cap, cat, house (American-style single family home), baseball bat, cowboy hat, and old-fashioned toy car. This was the first of two incidents that Amina experienced when the picture cards failed to reflect the lived experiences of her students.

In Chapter 4, data were presented that showed Alex noticing a cultural disjoint when she realized that her ELs didn't understand the concept of a cabin. This word was

also introduced in Amina's kindergarten lesson about different kinds of homes. After noticing that her ELs didn't know the word "cabin", she struggled to explain the term to this group of students that she believed were living in poverty and could be confused by the concept of a vacation home. Later, one of her ELs mentioned that he and his EL classmates lived in apartments, however there was no picture card in the curriculum for "apartment". Another group of students heard him and they contested whether an apartment was actually a home. Amina shared, "They said 'That's not a home. That's not a home because a lot of people live there'" (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14). This interaction reveals how a simple vocabulary lesson can unveil racial divides and socioeconomic stratification in the classroom. Motha (2014) posits that English language teaching can reveal how "school and classroom practices shape meanings of racial formations and provide terrain for the dynamic and continuous construction and renegotiation of racialized identities" (p. 79-80). Amina later reflected on this learning experience and the next time that she taught a similar lesson, she was prepared with images from Google to supplement the curriculum. This strategy was a small way to ensure that students saw their lived experiences in the curriculum; however it failed to address the monolingual, middle-class white ideologies of the students in this kindergarten class.

Both of the above examples illustrate pedagogy as direct instruction. In the first example, Amina presented curricular materials that were not relevant to her diverse learners and she didn't make any modifications for learners who failed to make connections with the picture cards. In the second example, as Amina experienced the same failure to connect with students, she finished the lesson but recognized its

shortcomings and committed to modifying the materials for the next day's lesson.

Through *participation*, Amina recognized the obstacle that the standardized curriculum placed in the way of CRP enactment for ELs. She brought this problem into “thingness” (Wenger, 1998, p. 56) by recognizing it and committing to resolving it.

Like Amina, Ann also student-taught in a kindergarten classroom. In the following excerpt, she shared her experience with her colleagues of complying with the new curriculum and the subsequent reaction of her ELs:

When I was following it, I did it for like a week. I followed it strictly. I read the script. I did it exactly how they wanted me to do it. [My cooperating teacher said] ‘The kids are hating this. You’re hating this’. It was like ‘Yep, I am. I’m hating it... It’s not genuine’. My EL kids are always the first to usually check out. It’s not because they’re the lowest kids; they’re not. (2<sup>nd</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/17/14)

As the participants began to realize that the new curriculum represented white middle-class norms, they noticed that their ELs, in particular, struggled to make connections with the content. Ann’s noticing that the ELs “check out” illustrates the value of CRP for ELs and the challenges that come with curricular standardization in schooling, thus bringing this problem into *thingness*. The incompatibility of the new curriculum and attempts at CRP for ELs becomes increasingly evident to the participants through their *participation* in their classroom and in the CoP. Amina and Ann’s experiences illustrate the general struggle that the student teachers experienced following the implementation of the literacy curriculum. The disconnect between the lived experiences of their ELs and the

norms represented in the curriculum was apparent and they were concerned about further marginalizing students that already had significant obstacles in front of them.

Despite the student teacher candidates' concerns about the rigidity and the culturally-biased nature of the literacy curriculum, they felt varying degrees of pressure to abide by the policy. Ann furthered,

I hate that you feel bad about kids' social time... especially at the year that we are right now... They don't get any time to talk.... [I say] 'Hurry up. Eat your snack. Hurry up. Eat your breakfast. Hurry up. Eat your lunch... No talking. Stop talking. This isn't social time... I say that probably like 40 times a day. (3<sup>rd</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/24/14)

Of the four participants, Ann and Amina most often obeyed the non-negotiable policy and they questioned whether the kindergarten curriculum offered less flexibility than the fifth grade curriculum. Again, Ann represented *reification* in her naming and acknowledgement of this problem despite her perception that compliance with the standardization policy was a necessary evil that she needed to endure to gain respect as a teacher. She noted,

I think especially as new teachers, I think we almost just have to play the game. We have to jump through the hoops... I'm gonna play the game until I have enough respect built up from people for them to be like all right, she knows what she's doing... It sucks. (3<sup>rd</sup> CoP Meeting, 4/24/14)

Ann's perspective of the necessity to *participate* in a practice that she wasn't philosophically aligned with wasn't shared by all of her colleagues, however. Alex expressed that she often opted not to use the curriculum at all. I found the candid sharing

of the white student teachers to be indicative of their level of comfort discussing controversial topics within the CoP. The student teachers of color were significantly more restrained when discussing issues related to school policy. It is likely that my position as a white woman of authority contributed to the varied ability of participants to share their perspectives.

The study participants expressed that the teachers at the school were increasingly angry about the implementation of the curriculum. During the third CoP meeting, the participants noted that the principal had resigned and was escorted out of the building by the district's human resource department. Some of the participants noted that following the principal's resignation, teachers felt more comfortable enacting CRP for ELs and putting the scripted curriculum aside. Ann shared that people were "less afraid...less walking on eggshells...There was always that threat with people, like 'You better be doing it this way, or [the principal] will hear about it'" (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14). However, other participants noted that there was minimal change in their classroom dynamics after the administrative turnover.

After the principal resigned, Adriana's cooperating teacher demonstrated *reification* of the problem and its solution by modeling active resistance for her when she chose to avert policy. After Adriana noted that sometimes she knowingly taught lessons that weren't in the curriculum, she shared, "That really helped me to see that you don't always have to do what is handed down to you and regurgitate it back" (Mid-study Interview, 4/28/14). Following this experience, Adriana's perception about policy compliance changed. In response to an interview question about overcoming obstacles to CRP for ELs, Adriana said,

...Those things can just be excuses. I don't have enough time... Well, you make it. All the curriculum is too limiting. Yes, it is but you make it your own... You are the only one that can limit yourself and be that barrier to being a better teacher that implements CRP (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14).

Alex echoed Ann's sentiment about averting policy when it marginalizes ELs. She said, "Definitely [early] challenges... were time and maybe just not... feeling ready to dive in. But I feel like I'm definitely over that and I don't mind at all being like 'Well, we're not gonna do this from the book, it's crappy'" (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

Through participation, both in the classroom and in the CoP, participants came to bring the problem of CRP enactment and standardized curriculum into *thingness* through *reification*. Similar to the participants in Ladson-Billings' (1995) research, the four participants in this dissertation study experienced the implementation of the standardized literacy curriculum in different ways. While all of the participants expressed concern for their ELs' potential for success in light of the scripted standardized curriculum, pressure to comply appeared to be stronger amongst the student teacher participants in kindergarten than it was amongst the 5<sup>th</sup> grade student teacher participants, as kindergarten curricular units included not only scripts and books, but also manipulatives and posters that provided less flexibility for teachers to make modifications. Another potential advantage that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers had was the maturity level of their learners. Ann shared,

Kids are at such different levels that it's hard to have that connection come together where they're thinking about the same thing and really on task. I don't know if that's significantly easier in older grades. I'm sure you still come up

against struggles with things like that as well. I think that's my biggest struggle right now is just trying to get the kids all on the same level and focus and thinking about the same thing and contributing to it. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

It is possible that the maturity-level of the young children and the increased standardization in the kindergarten curriculum led kindergarten student teachers to perceive that their context was a more challenging environment to enact CRP for ELs.

***Fifth grade promotion policy alienated English learners: Student teachers forced to choose between CRP or policy compliance.*** Unlike the above example of a school policy that affected ELs across the entire school, the following policy impacted ELs in the fifth grade. The following example illustrates the struggle of two student teacher participants in light of a policy that was standard for all fifth grade students and was unrealistic for many ELs and threatened to further marginalize them. This cross-case analysis demonstrates the emotional experience of one teacher candidate who was unable to prevent her ELs from being marginalized and her colleague, who overcame the same obstacle in order to provide an equitable experience for her ELs, but at great risk.

As the end of the school year approached, the fifth grade teachers started preparing for fifth grade promotion, an annual tradition at Chapman Hills Elementary. Parents were invited to a graduation-like celebration in the school gym that included a slideshow featuring pictures of the students. As the deadline to submit pictures for the slideshow approached, Adriana and Alex noticed that many of their ELs became increasingly anxious about not being able to furnish the number of required pictures by the deadline. Alex shared her concern about a particular student and his futile attempt to have his pictures included in the slide show:



...the Somali boy, whose family has moved four or five times this year...He comes up to me on Friday and says that he wants to turn in his photos, but he couldn't because his aunt hadn't went and developed them. And I knew exactly where this was going because it was already Friday and that's when they were due, and he was just coming and telling me now that his photos were in the process of being developed. So I did not have the heart to tell him right then that they might not be accepted...Sure enough, he came in today with his photos. And I didn't have the heart to send him to the teacher because I figured she might be kind of mean and rude about it to him. So I was like 'I will ask for you. I'm not sure that it's past the deadline. I'm not sure if they will be accepted any longer.'... So in the meantime I was going to go just bite the bullet and talk to Shelley about getting these photos for this kid on the video. I was even going to offer to do it myself... The student, took it upon himself to go ask her before I could go ask her. I didn't even really know that had happened until she came in close to the end of the day when it was just me and my cooperating teacher...she kind of like joked around with my teacher, being like 'Of course you had to send like the best puppy dog face to me and try to get his photos in the video'...My heart did kind of break for him because I knew he just wanted his photos on the video, and she did say no, like I had expected...It's just one of those situations where as a teacher candidate, I don't feel comfortable stepping in in any respect. I guess I will just let it go. (Digital Journal Entry, 5/28/14)

While Alex acknowledged the injustice that her student experienced, she also expressed frustration about her limited power as a student teacher. When the policy was upheld,

she was disappointed but not surprised. She later reflected on the incident in light of her evolved thinking about social justice and CRP. She shared,

I feel like [the inequity for ELs in the fifth grade promotion slideshow] would've passed by me, even first semester. That would've just never even crossed my mind. I would've been like 'Oh, yeah, well, [its] general responsibility' ...I would've felt...sad maybe that they weren't on the video. But it wouldn't have crossed my mind that that's a very...white middle-class dominant kinda thing underlying that...So I definitely think that is a success in just opening up my mind in that way. (Post-Study Interview, 6/13/14)

While Alex was unable to remedy her student's predicament, through *participation* in the CoP she acknowledged her personal and professional growth in noticing how race, culture and social class contributed to the problem, which was consequently brought into *thingness* and ultimately *reified* by her CoP colleagues.

Like Alex, Adriana was also aware of the risk involved in averting the policy in place by the fifth grade teachers. She also witnessed EL anxiety about submitting pictures. Her highly mobile immigrant students had few pictures from their childhood, and their parents lacked the resources needed to take and develop pictures before the looming deadline. In response to this, Adriana demonstrated enactment of CRP by creating her own slideshow of photographs that she had taken in the classroom over the year and invite parents to come to her classroom to see it. In doing so, she overcame an obstacle to CRP enactment. She shared:

I tried to make [my ELs] feel like they were important and they are valued. We always do that throughout the year. It's not like it's the only time, but especially

for the end of the year promotion thing, where some of them won't be on that final video. This video still reinforces to them that to us they are important and we value them. I'm glad they really liked it. They all were laughing, and they wanted to watch it again and again. That made me feel really good. (Digital Journal Entry, 6/11/14)

By creating her own slide show, Adriana appeased the fifth grade teachers who organized the event without alienating her ELs and other students who were unable to supply photographs. In so doing, Adriana complied with policy *and* ensured that her learners felt valued, recognized and cared for. It is essential that practicing teachers develop the skill that Adriana demonstrated in the above example: abiding by policy while keeping commitments to students to respect and recognize them.

**Teachers learn to weave together culturally relevant pedagogy and standardized curriculum.** Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that the participants in her study were "... cognizant of the need to teach certain things because of a districtwide testing policy, the teachers helped their students engage in a variety of forms of critical analyses" (p. 482). Similarly, the participants in this dissertation study found ways in which to comply with administrative curricular mandates while still enacting CRP in its three tenets (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Adriana reflected on her perceived responsibility to her students in light of the mandated standardized literacy curriculum,

[The curriculum is] really scripted so a lot of it is you read this and you teach it like that. That's how they told us to teach. You teach exactly from the book.

You just read it and follow their instructions. So that part is hindering because the curriculum company doesn't necessarily know your classroom or the students in

it...so it might just be about something neutral like the weather....But...it's my job...to be able to connect that and make it relevant to them. (Mid-Study Interview, 4/28/14)

While Adriana was aware of the limitations in the curriculum and the risk involved in averting policy, she believed that it was her duty as a teacher to make her lesson relevant to her ELs. Although she was unaware of it at the time, Adriana ultimately presented a direct instruction teaching method that served as a model for CRP enactment in a standardized schooling environment that was *reified* by study participants for the duration of the school year. This method became known to the participants as *weaving*.

It is critical to note that field observations in Adriana's 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom yielded a disproportionately larger amount of data that evidenced CRP enactment than observations in the other participants' classrooms. There are a variety of reasons why this might have occurred. For example, I may have visited her classroom at optimal times for CRP enactment and the other participants' classrooms at times when CRP enactment was more challenging. It is also possible that she was more adept at putting her understanding of CRP into practice than her colleagues. Another reason might be that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum was more flexible than the kindergarten curriculum, as mentioned previously. Perhaps a more compelling reason might be that Adriana was the only participant that personally experienced schooling as an EL in a mainstream US school. The other participant of an immigrant background (Amina) attended Islamic schools in the US and shared that she felt that she was among peers while in school. It is possible that any or all of the above factors contributed to Adriana's success in CRP enactment. It would have been interesting to ask Adriana why she believed that she

demonstrated more instances of CRP enactment. Unfortunately, I did not include that question in the post-study interview.

During field observations in Adriana's class, I observed her working with a small group of ELs on guided reading. They read photocopied books about heroines such as Jane Goodall, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai. The curriculum presented what some scholars would classify as a limited conception of culture as it focused specifically on heroes (Anderson & Stillman, 2012; Duesterberg, 1998; Gay, 2010; Huang, 2002); however, Adriana's delivery of the lessons offered opportunities for a more complex understanding of the text and its relation to the identities of the learners in her guided reading group (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998; Phuntsog, 2001). In this section, I will illustrate the process of *weaving* together CRP and standardized curriculum by presenting examples from Adriana's guided reading group. I will then present Amina's attempt to reproduce the weaving strategy in her kindergarten class.

***Weaving together CRP and Jane Goodall.*** In the first example of weaving within CRP, Adriana began by presenting Jane Goodall and her travels. Then she asked "Have any of you traveled anywhere before?" followed by "Where would you like to go if could go somewhere?" Her transitions in and out of windows and mirrors (Style, 1988) were seamless. She referred to the text, then to the students, and then back to the text. The students appeared to be very engaged and accustomed to her style of weaving in windows and mirrors. One responded, "I would go back to Mexico because I want to see my grandparents". Adriana listened, praised them, and went back to the book about Jane Goodall's travels, which included time in Cameroon. She later recalled that this lesson held a missed opportunity for one of her students, who was from Cameroon:

I caught it after it happened, and I was kind of a little disappointed in myself. As soon as that happened, I thought – what can I do to make that up?...Since we were reading this book for six days, I could talk to her and ask her. Immediately after that small group, I talked to the girl and asked her a little bit about where she was from, and if she felt comfortable sharing with the class the next day. She agreed. I had her explain a little bit and share, and the kids were really interested. She looked pretty happy to be able to share about her culture. (Digital Journal Entry, 4/30/14)

Like Ann, Adriana acknowledged her responsibility to get to know her ELs so that she could effectively enact CRP. To this point, De Jong, et al. (2013) assert that “Teachers must learn about ELLs’ cultural experiences both within and beyond schools. Since ELs frequently come from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that are not familiar to teachers, it falls upon the teacher to get to know students” (p. 89). Adriana initially perceived her missed opportunity to utilize a students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) as a pedagogical mirror to be a failure. However, she later considered it to be a learning experience:

I learned a big lesson that...culture is everywhere...No matter what you’re doing, you can incorporate some kind of cultural aspect or a mirror...I learned that even if you make a mistake or forget or just completely it goes over your head, you can always go back and retrace your steps and do things in a way that you would have wanted them to be done – just to go back and redo them. (Digital Journal Entry, 4/30/14)

This discovery of meaning through *participation* served as an example of how teachers can enact CRP under administrative mandates of standardization. Adriana's development as a reflective practitioner of CRP for ELs served as a model for the other participants in the CoP. As such, the group benefitted from the knowledge that she gleaned from this experience.

In a subsequent group meeting, Adriana followed up the book reading with a guided discussion. She asked the group - "When is a time that you gave something and got nothing in return?". A Liberian female student responded, "Every morning I wake up at 5:00 to take care of my baby sister because my mom has to go to work". Immediately thereafter, a Nigerian boy announced

When I was in Africa I got stabbed in the leg, but they got a bad medical. Some of the kids were messing with us and the kids started chasing us and I let my brother run away and a kid picked up a piece of glass and stabbed me in the leg. They don't have the best medical there so I just wrapped it up. (Field Observation, 5/7/14)

Adriana and the other students showed concern for this learner and they asked if he healed from his injury. While his comment was not related to the question asked, it is indicative that the learner was thinking about the context of the book (West Africa) and he felt safe sharing this story with his classmates. A classroom environment such as this, one that creates a safe place for learners and welcomes risk-taking, is critical for CRP enactment to be successful.

*Weaving together CRP and Ruby Bridges.* While working with the same group of ELs in guided reading group on a book about Ruby Bridges<sup>15</sup>, Adriana employed the weaving technique in order to make the text relevant to her ELs. Three learners responded to the prompt by revealing lived experiences.

Adriana asked each EL to give a text-to-self example<sup>16</sup> after reading the text. Carlos, (the same learner who disclosed his mother's immigration status) shared "A lot of kids were sick one day in Mexico when my auntie was teaching. Only one kid came, but she taught anyway. She teaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade and ninth grade....sometimes together in one class. She teaches in Zacatecas" (field notes, 5/5/15). Carlos smiled and sat up straight when he shared this with the class. He appeared to be very proud of his aunt and glad to share this story with the class. Ana responded by saying "Cool!". Another Mexican male student interjected "My uncle was in a white school and he was born a long time ago and they didn't let him go there because he was Mexican and he cried a lot and he said that he still went to school anyway" (field notes, 5/5/15). While this learner was very enthusiastic about sharing, I wondered whether his connection was reflective of his lived experience, as it very closely reflected the story of Ruby Bridges. Finally, a third student (Liberian female) shared "

When we were in Aldi<sup>17</sup>, this grandma, she was poor, she made a sweater with newspapers and she had no food and she was so skinny and my mom, she was with her friend and her friend is black and she said that to not give her money but

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<sup>15</sup> Ruby Bridges was the first black child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South.

<sup>16</sup> Text-to-self is a strategy in reading comprehension that allows the reader to make connections between the text and their lived experiences (Miller, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Aldi is a low-cost supermarket that is prevalent in the region in which this study took place.



my mom just gave her money, she gave her like 100 dollars and then the next day, something nice happened to my mom. Like a boomerang. Like karma. The kindness comes back to you. (field notes, 5/5/15)

It is evident that the students in this group shared stories that they believed would impress their teacher and their peers. There are facets of the final story (e.g., \$100) that also call into question the storytellers' authenticity, however the experience of making personal connections to the text was overwhelmingly positive and it attended to *social critique*, which is a tenet of CRP that is challenging to incorporate into pedagogy. For homework, Adriana asked the group to write a story that someone orally told them. She used a legend as an example. This activity is also ripe for cultural relevancy as many of the immigrant learners are apt to have heard stories through their families' oral traditions.

***Weaving together CRP and Rosa Parks.*** While reading a book about Rosa Parks with the same group of ELs in a guided reading session, Adriana began a discussion about human rights. During a quiet time in the lesson, a Latino learner was overheard whispering to Adriana "Como se escribe?" (How do you spell that?) (field notes, 5/29/14). Adriana spelled a word quietly for the student and moved on to the discussion. She prompted the class to think of a time when they were treated unfairly. A female Liberian learner shared "One time when my dad told my sisters that he was going to take them somewhere and I wanted to go too but he said no" (field notes, 5/29/14). Other students whispered to each other but appeared too shy to contribute to the group as a whole. The same Liberian student mentioned in the previous section continued to tell the group about an incident when her classmates were eating "hot fries" and they didn't share with her. A female Mexican student then shared about a time when she was out with her

mother and the older kids got more ice cream than the younger kids. Despite some of the students' labored English language, Adriana created a safe space in which they could express their cultured identities and be understood. Adriana returned to the text and read a few pages in the Rosa Parks story. She then asked the group "How did it make you feel when you didn't get the same things as someone else?" (field notes, 5/29/14). The ELs shared that they felt "sad" and "unhappy". Adriana then used the weaving technique to make connections between the students' feelings and those of Rosa Parks. She closed by asking students to illustrate one scene from the book.

***Weaving together CRP and Malala Yousafzai.*** Before beginning to read a book about Malala Yousafzai<sup>18</sup>, Adriana shared with her guided reading group of native English-speaking students and ELs that the main character's name means "sadness" in Pashto. She proceeded to ask the group if their names had any special meanings. A Somali boy responded, "My name represents the 99<sup>th</sup> prophet! My name represents the 99<sup>th</sup> prophet!" (field notes, 5/29/14). He proceeded to share different ways that his name is commonly spelled. A Hmong female shared that her English name is the name of a flower and a variety of tea and that her Hmong name means *moon*. Adriana asked her to share her Hmong name and she said that she preferred not to share it with the group. A Native American student shared that her name means *bear* in Cherokee. She blushed and noted that she found this to be embarrassing. A Mexican male student shared that he is named after the famous painter, Diego Rivera. Another Mexican male student believed that he was named after a British king. A male Somali student shared that so many

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<sup>18</sup> Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani activist for female education and the survivor of a gunshot wound to the head that she suffered while she was on her way to school after the Taliban outlawed schooling for girls in Pakistan.

people share his name that if you search his name on Google, you will find 2 million people with the same name.

After reading the book, Adriana asked the group to trouble the idea of access to education. She asked them “Can anyone think of examples of people that didn’t go to college but are very smart?”. A Mexican male student shared that Duke only accepts really smart people and his sister received a letter from Duke but she didn’t attend the university. He followed by saying that he is very proud of his mom and that she is very smart. A Nigerian male student remarked that his sister gets lots of emails from colleges and that once he saw an email from Yale. He said she only needs to take two years of college because she completed two years through the post-secondary education option. This exchange could have been an excellent example of CRP enactment as it attends well to the tenet of social critique by calling learners to notice strengths in individuals that might not otherwise be recognized because they didn’t attend higher education. It also provides a unique space for ELs (many of whom come from trauma and poverty) to share their family members’ talents as opposed to their level of formal education. Unfortunately, the majority of the responses from Adriana’s students reified the very belief that her question sought to deconstruct: that college education equates intelligence.

In this excerpt, Adriana attends to the CRP tenets of academic success and cultural competency, as the students advance their knowledge of heroism and Malala Yousafzai, while they also have the opportunity to examine their own cultural backgrounds. After this discussion, Adriana asked the students to read a few pages of the book silently.

*Weaving together CRP and the kindergarten curriculum.* After we discussed Adriana's model of weaving together content and CRP, Amina decided to try it in her class. She was disappointed to find that she didn't experience the same success. The following is an excerpt from a CoP meeting in which she discussed her attempt.

Amina: So I tried to talk about the homes that were presented in the book and then try to bring it back to the homes that they live in and talk about that aspect or like homes that they've seen before and not necessarily lived in and then kind of bringing it back-and-forth between them. But I don't know ... with kindergartners, it's kind of harder because their focus [attention span] is a lot shorter. And they get distracted a lot easier ... It's like you go on one tangent, and you can't circle back.

Ann: I never tried to put that into words before. That's what it is. It's that it just gets too distracting.

Amina: I think just with kindergartners or if it was just with that lesson – I don't know. I haven't tried it again after that.

Ann: That happened with us too. (CoP Meeting #9, 5/8/2014)

Ann identified with Amina's struggle, which indicates that the maturity and proficiency levels of learners could have been factors that contributed to the student teachers ability to enact CRP for their ELs. At the same time, the teachers might have explored more how CRP needs to be enacted differently with younger children. Despite this conversation, and another occurrence when Alex noted how her kindergarten colleagues struggled with CRP enactment, I didn't bring the issue of student maturity or language proficiency into the CoP discussions in an intentional or explicit way. This would have

been a helpful discussion for the participants and an opportunity for me to learn from them.

Fortunately, Amina succeeded in weaving together CRP and content on another occasion. She was confronted with a challenge when she worked with her kindergarten class on a book about a family that went on a picnic. The curriculum included a poster that portrayed a white family with a mother, father, son and daughter who had a picnic on the beach. As she perceived this to be a "...middle-class or upper class kind of activity for people who can afford to travel to the beach or even have the luxury of having the time to do that" (Digital Journal Entry, 5/20/14), she considered how she could keep the existing curriculum while making it relevant to her learners by weaving. She shared,

A lot of the other kids mentioned that they had never gone to the beach or had had a picnic...I [thought]...Instead of being so negative and looking at it like this is super different than what most of my kids could relate to... I talked about how sometimes you can even have a picnic in your own backyard... It was good because I did have one Hispanic student who was able to talk about how he went to a picnic with his family. He was able to relate to that, so that was awesome...I think the way that the curriculum is presented, you can't change what's on the poster, but you can change the direction of the discussion in a way that's more culturally relevant for the students. That was kind of nice to figure out and do with the kids yesterday. (Digital Journal Entry, 5/20/14)

Amina's experience of learning to weave in windows and mirrors is modeled after that of Adriana, as they were "learning as doing" (Wenger, 1998).

**Weaving: How *Learning as Experience* for one CoP participant resulted in meaning-making and reified participation of her colleagues.** For the remainder of the study, as the participants attempted to weave mirrors into the curriculum, they mostly experienced success. This method proved to be particularly advantageous in the standardized schooling environment as it offered a middle ground between complying with policy and therefore marginalizing ELs (and other students who don't see themselves reflected in the curriculum), and averting the policy entirely and putting the participants' professional standing as student teachers and graduate students nearing completion of licensure in jeopardy. Incorporating mirrors and windows into the curriculum allowed the participants to experience a lesser degree of vulnerability as they didn't entirely eschew the curriculum. The success of the weaving method was partially due to the ongoing collaborative *participation* of the CoP members and the reification of this method as a viable option for CRP enactment. After meaning was initially established through Adriana's lesson on Jane Goodall, the method of weaving together CRP and standardized curriculum was repeatedly *reified* by the study participants.

The CoP offered this study's student teacher participants the opportunity make meaning about how CRP praxis for ELs could take place under mandated standardized curriculum. Participant upholding of the tenets of CRP in light of veritable risk was profound as they considered "ways [they] might systematically include student culture in the classroom as authorized or official knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 183). While it is appropriate to champion these teachers, it is also prudent to examine what Anderson and Stillman (2012) call "the situated and mediated nature of pre-service teachers' learning in the field" (p. 3). Ultimately, my choice to conduct this research in

an urban public school, rather than within a university-based teacher education course was based on my assumption that there would be variables to CRP enactment for ELs that would be unforeseen on a university campus. For the purposes of this research and for the purposes of the teacher candidate participant learning experience, situating our CoP *in* the school was a critical to the success of the study.

## Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the course of this study, participants developed as culturally relevant pedagogues through their participation in the CoP. Their understanding and practice of CRP for ELs developed in spite of, and in light of, evident barriers to CRP enactment. The findings from this research result in increased knowledge about how CRP enactment is learned: collaboratively and in the sociopolitical environment of schools.

The role of whiteness in their identities was prevalent in the data, as white participants struggled to make sense of their cultured and privileged identities, and the participants of color expressed that they were well aware of their cultured identities and the active marginalization of people of color. This is not to imply that the student teachers of color weren't also challenged in their attempts to enact CRP. As evidenced in the dialogue about Hmong culture in Chapter 4, the participants of color were equally susceptible to cultural essentialism and had similar struggles learning to understand and enact CRP for ELs.

The student teacher participant understanding of CRP for ELs advanced through their awareness of their evolving sociocultural identities. A needed component in the tenets of CRP is greater emphasis on teacher sociocultural awareness. As the student teacher participants came to examine the intersection of their lived experiences and those of ELs, they were better equipped to pedagogically respond to their students' cultured selves. In addition, their shared experience of connectedness in community supported the learning process during and in between CoP meetings.

As participant understanding of CRP developed, so did their pedagogy. The student teacher participants' pedagogical considerations for ELs were shaped by their



participation in the CoP. As the participants developed in the CoP, their awareness of CRP and their commitment to its tenets increased. They became focused on improving their cultural competency by learning about their ELs' home lives and families in order to appropriately pedagogically respond. It is critical to note that each participant experienced learning to enact CRP for ELs differently and they all approached CRP enactment in light of the school policy differently. Ann was the participant that abided most consistently by the scripted curriculum. She also expressed dismay about her feelings of limitation in light of the curriculum. When I began data collection, Amina also firmly complied with the school policy regarding the standardized curriculum; however she soon took on a more flexible role by supplementing the curriculum with topics that were culturally relevant to her student population. Adriana's method of weaving together the standardized curriculum with culturally relevant themes emerged as a strategy that her colleagues sought to emulate. Alex freely admitted to putting the curriculum aside entirely and teaching her students lessons that she had developed. Her lessons were consistently culturally relevant. It is not known why each participant had such disparate experiences, however it is likely that the influence and opinions of the classroom teachers affected their pedagogical decision-making. By the end of data collection, all four study participants had demonstrated *some* enactment of CRP for ELs as evidenced by classroom observations. However, in the case of all of the participants, their ability to put into practice their developing understandings of CRP was just beginning to emerge.

Lastly, findings indicate that the factors that the student teacher participants initially identified as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs, such as time and student

teacher cultural competency, did not result to be significant obstacles. Rather, standardization policies, such as the standardized literacy curriculum, presented themselves as more obstructive barriers to CRP enactment for ELs. Through individual experience and reification of the practice of their colleagues, participants learned to overcome this barrier through what they called weaving, a teaching method observed and identified through the process of this research.

In this final chapter, the original research questions are re-introduced, along with summaries of key findings, which are supported by related extant literature. Next, based on the findings and presented literature, recommendations are made for teacher education, teachers and district/school administrators regarding how to support and facilitate teachers learning to enact CRP for ELs in CoPs.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question #1: How do CoP activities mediate student teachers' understanding of CRP for ELs?**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the student teacher participants in this study grew in their understanding of CRP for ELs through their participation in the CoP. The findings under this research question also aligned with two of the four realms of CoPs- Identity: Learning as Becoming and Community: Learning as Belonging (Wenger, 1998).

**Identity: Learning as Becoming.** First, as the study progressed, the participants became aware of their evolving cultured identities, which is an essential step toward understanding CRP for ELs. They began to understand their own sociocultural experience and draw connections to how their lived experiences shaped their identities and perspectives. In addition, they noted that through participation in the CoP, the

experienced a shift in their personal and professional identities. This shift was particularly prevalent for the two white participants.

Second, the student teacher participants made connections between their evolving identities and their subsequent understanding of CRP for ELs. Through self-reflection, the study participants began to see how their lived experiences influenced their cultured perspectives. Subsequently, they sought to understand the cultured perspectives of their students and respond pedagogically. One salient finding is that both white participants and participants of color fell victim to cultural essentialism while they sought to understand how to enact CRP for ELs. All of the four participants experienced evolving understanding of CRP for ELs.

**Community: Learning as Belonging.** First, the study participants reported that their experience of group “connectedness” contributed to their understanding of CRP for ELs. Their shared sense of camaraderie resulted in a richer learning experience and they noted that their feelings of camaraderie energized them to consider new ways to engage ELs whom they believed would have otherwise been marginalized in the classroom. Both sharing and listening were opportunities for participants to deepen their thinking about CRP enactment for ELs, and although they often found themselves overwhelmed with the struggles of their ELs who experienced trauma, the CoP served as a therapeutic mechanism as they processed their experiences and then returned to the classroom feeling refreshed. The CoP offered the participants a safe haven in which they could orally process their experiences attempting to enact CRP for ELs that they attested they wouldn’t have found elsewhere. This community was intimate and generative. As meetings progressed, participants came to understand the culture and purpose of the

group and they arrived with so much to discuss that my role as facilitator required much less effort. In the post-study interviews, two of the participants expressed anxiety to begin a new teaching job the following academic year because they had grown accustomed to social learning amongst colleagues and they questioned how they would evolve as reflective educators without such an outlet.

Second, teacher candidates reported that the learning process took place not only within CoP meetings, but in between the meetings as well. Participation in the CoP helped teacher candidates realize how they could pedagogically respond to their ELs' unique lived experiences and cultured perspectives, and to avoid essentialist attempts at CRP such as heroes and holidays. Through Style's (1998) frame of pedagogical windows and mirrors, the participants sought ways to consider how to offer mirrors to their ELs. As candidates considered how they would contribute to each Thursday group discussion, they challenged themselves to use what they knew about their ELs' lived experiences and respond pedagogically.

**Research Question #2: In what ways is pedagogy for ELs shaped by the student teacher in a CRP-based CoP?**

As mentioned in Chapter 5, participation in the CoP resulted in student teacher participant learning to enact CRP for ELs. The findings under this research question also correlated with one of the four realms of CoPs- Practice: Learning as Doing (Wenger, 1998).

**Practice: Learning as Doing.** First, the study participants noted that CRP enactment requires awareness and commitment. As time passed, the study participants found themselves more aware of opportunities for CRP enactment for ELs. Even prior to

pedagogically responding to students' lived experiences, participants noted that time was needed in order to become aware of what Ann called "openings" (Mid-Study Interview, 4/29/14) for CRP enactment. The participants also noted CRP enactment for ELs can only be possible if the teacher recognizes CRP for ELs as a priority and is committed to its tenets.

Second, the participants learned to navigate the intersection of immigrant family experiences and pedagogy in the classroom. Critical incidents that most challenged the student teachers as they considered how to respond to ELs involved immigrant familial norms in contact with the norms of the student teachers. In the case of Alex, Amina and Ann's experience with Hmong students, they first noticed behaviors that were different from their own and then they sought ways to integrate their students' lived experiences into their pedagogy. The participants also questioned whether perceived cultured behaviors (e.g., cleaning instead of playing) should be encouraged or discouraged by teachers. However, this conversation went down a slippery slope toward cultural essentialist ideologies when the group sought to understand Hmong norms in general.

Another example illustrates the difficult position that Adriana found herself in when an EL chose to publicly share details of his family's lived experience without knowing that his sharing put his mother in a precarious position. All of the study participants learned that just as culture extends beyond heroes and holidays, pedagogy is much more than instruction. A culturally relevant pedagogue responds to students' lived experiences even when it is uncomfortable to do so. A final, noteworthy addition to this finding is that CoP participants learned to enact CRP not only through sharing and listening in the CoP, but also through their colleagues' experiences. In the

aforementioned critical incidents, the study participants supported their colleagues and considered how they would respond to a similar situation. In addition, after participants shared their experiences enacting CRP for ELs, their colleagues often modeled their suggestions in their own classrooms.

**Research Question #3: What do student teachers identify as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs and how do they overcome them?**

As described in Chapter 6, what the student teacher participants initially perceived as obstacles to CRP enactment for ELs were not actually obstacles. Policies that mandated curricular standardization proved to be the most significant barrier to CRP enactment and the study participants responded differently to this challenge. The findings under this research question also correlated with one of the four realms of CoPs: Meaning–Learning as Experience (Wenger, 1998).

**Meaning: Learning as Experience.** First, Chapter 6 presented two critical incidents in which the student teacher participants were confronted with standardization policies that marginalized their ELs. After the participants realized that their ELs were marginalized by a school-wide policy that mandated a scripted, standardized literacy curriculum, they had varied pedagogical responses. The second incident presents a local policy that actively marginalized ELs in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. After Adriana and Alex recognized that a policy requiring all students to produce printed photographs from childhood was unrealistic for their ELs and would result in their lack of representation in the fifth grade promotion slideshow, Adriana risked offending teachers by holding her own slideshow in the classroom and Alex expressed that her vulnerable position as a student teacher prevented her from taking a stand against the policy. All of the four study

participants reported learning from these experiences and they preemptively considered how they would respond to a similar event in the future.

Second, the student teacher participants learned to weave together CRP and the standardized literacy curriculum. What began as an impromptu response to a lesson that was seemingly irrelevant to a group of ELs became a model for CRP enactment in light of the school's standardized literacy curriculum. Following Adriana's example of "weaving" windows and mirrors into lessons about Jane Goodall, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai, all four participants came to subsequent CoP meetings prepared to share their experiences attempting to weave CRP into the curriculum. Weaving offered the participants the opportunity to adhere to the curriculum while still responding to the lived experiences of the ELs in their classes.

## **Discussion**

### **How Teachers Learn to Enact Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners**

Little is known about how teachers can be prepared to enact CRP (Goodwin, 2002). Since the theories of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002) were developed, much of the research in cultural relevancy and teaching has maintained a focus on the experience of African-American students (Gilbert & Gay, 1985; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parsons, 2005). While this is a worthy goal, further value can be gleaned for other populations that are actively marginalized by US schooling practices and curricula.

There is a dearth of research that examines the intersection of teacher learning and CRP for ELs. Examples that are similar to this dissertation study have varying foci. For example, Powell (1997) and Li's (2013) research on teacher learning and CRP considered

the teacher learning experience to be individual, rather than collective, as the participants of this study learned in a CoP. The perception that learning is an individual act is overwhelmingly prevalent, and in the United States it is most readily evidenced by the organization of our schools from elementary school through higher education. Another study that is similar to this dissertation research is Jimenez-Silva and Olson's (2012) investigation of a Teacher-Learner Community focused on best practices for ELs. While there were some similarities between this study and my dissertation research, in Jimenez-Silva and Olson's study, attention to CRP wasn't made explicit and the emphasis was more heavily placed on teacher community building than responding pedagogically to ELs' lived experiences. No studies were found to address the role of whiteness in teacher learning to enact CRP for ELs. There is an evident need for increased research in the area of teacher learning in a CoP and CRP for ELs.

Findings from this dissertation research demonstrate that CRP for ELs is improved via teacher participation in a CoP. However, the participants spent considerable time in the CoP before CRP enactment manifested in the classroom. It wasn't until the last few weeks of data collection that evidence of CRP enactment for ELs was noticed in field observations. This finding lends support to the idea that CRP is difficult to understand and it takes time to learn to enact it. A limitation of this study, discussed further below, is that it took place over a relatively short period of time, just 10 weeks. Future research might yield more substantive results if the span of the study were longer, perhaps over an academic year.

The findings from this research show that the participants learned to improve their pedagogy for ELs via social interaction and commitment to the CoP. In addition, the



situated nature of the CoP within the elementary school in which the student teachers worked was a feature that proved essential to the relevance and success of the CoP. This is evidenced by the diverse lived experiences of the ELs in the teacher participant classrooms, which wouldn't have been accessible in a teacher preparation course. In addition, the obstacle of standardization was sociopolitically situated in the time and in the space of Chapman Hills elementary school. It would not have been possible for the student teacher participants to have sufficiently investigated the intersection of CRP for ELs and standardized literacy curriculum had this study taken place outside of the school.

Lastly, a missed opportunity in this research is focus on language, as language plays a critical role in culture and identity. For example, I could have further problematized and analyzed Adriana's use of Spanish with her Spanish-speaking ELs. There is a need to further examine how teachers can support students' first language and provide opportunities for linguistically relevant lessons and assessments.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Light of Standardized Curriculum**

CRP and culturally-responsive teaching were conceived in response to the climate of US schools exemplifying and reifying white middle-class norms and marginalizing students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In regions of the United States where the white privilege is particularly strong and the opportunity gap is notably wide (such as the Midwestern state in which this research was conducted), teachers, school administrators, teacher educators and researchers are compelled to reconsider the status quo. The findings from this research show that teacher candidates were aware of the educational disparities in the state's schools and were invested in being agents of change. However, a

feature of the greater sociopolitical climate of US schooling presented itself as an apparent obstacle only after the data collection had commenced.

Since No Child Left Behind's inception in 2001 and the resulting increase in standardized testing, educational researchers have deemed the implementation of a standardized curriculum inevitable (Milosovic, 2007; Taylor, 2012). The type of standardized curriculum adopted by Chapman Hills Elementary was "scripted curriculum" (i.e., curriculum scripting), which is a standardized, highly prescriptivist form of prepackaged curriculum (most commonly implemented in urban and high poverty schools) that grossly impedes teacher professional autonomy in the interest of providing schools with "teacher proof" curricula (Curwin, 2012).

At the onset of data collection for this study when teachers (including student teachers) more firmly abided by the scripted curriculum, they perceived that CRP for ELs was not achievable. However, after the change in administration, teachers and student teachers began to use the curriculum as a tool, rather than a guide. There is a need for further investigation in this area as the extant research that examines the intersection of teachers learning to enact CRP for ELs and standardization (Baker & Digiovanni, 2005; Connor, 2010; Wei, 2002) focuses on standardized testing, rather than scripted and standardized curricula.

### **Recommendations**

Much can be gleaned from the findings of this study. The first recommendation is for all stakeholders who are invested in CRP for ELs. Subsequent recommendations are listed under the following subcategories: teacher education, practicing teachers, and school/district administrators.

*Recommendation 1. Inform policymakers about the ramifications of standardization policies that inhibit CRP for ELs.*

Input from parents, teachers, administrators, researchers, and teacher educators is needed to convince policymakers such as legislators and school administrators that standardization policies further marginalize ELs and their teachers. When large sums of money are gifted to high-poverty schools for curriculum, questions should be raised about how the curriculum is to be implemented. If there is a requirement that curricular implementation be standardized for all learners, CRP for ELs and indeed for all learners will be inhibited. It is critical that government policymakers be aware of the multiple facets of the corporate education reform movement, in which school standardization is a key element. Locally, teachers can also keep administrators informed about the ramifications of district and/or school-wide policies that promote standardization practices and consequently marginalize ELs.

### **Teacher Education**

In response to the study findings teacher education can...

*Recommendation 2. Provide teacher candidates with long-term low-stakes CoPs focused on CRP for ELs within their student teaching site.*

This recommendation is hinged on the assumption that teacher candidates are placed in culturally and linguistically diverse student teaching sites. In this study, the teacher candidate participants' understanding CRP for ELs greatly evolved over the course of the ten weeks of CoP meetings but enactment only began to emerge towards the end of data collection. Teachers would benefit from a longer time together in a CRP-focused CoP. Early groundwork about self-cultural identity, cultural competency and

the theory of CRP can take place in teacher preparation; however, such lessons cannot be contextualized outside of the K-12 classroom (De Jong, et al., 2013). Lastly, the participants noted that since they did not earn a grade for the experience, they felt more willing to be vulnerable, which yielded a richer learning experience. Student teachers would benefit from a low-stakes CoP that is focused on CRP for ELs during the student teaching process. This is advantageous for all teacher candidates. However, the experiences of white teacher candidates and those of color will be different.

### **Practicing Teachers**

Practicing teachers can...

*Recommendation 3. Organize long-term teacher-facilitated CoPs focused on CRP for ELs.*

Teachers can request that professional development time be allotted for ongoing CoP meetings focused on CRP enactment for ELs. This could be implemented in a variety of ways. One suggestion is that a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) could facilitate the first CoP. It would be important to begin with an examination of teacher sociocultural identity, which would be revisited over the course of the CoP. In addition, the TOSA would spend time observing in the CoP participants' classrooms in order to generate material for discussion about the teachers' attempts to enact CRP for ELs. It would be critical that the facilitator not be in a position of authority and that CoP participation would be voluntary. Following this experience, CoP participants could serve as facilitators of subsequent similar CoPs. This would require time during the day for the facilitator teachers to observe their colleagues. Administrator buy-in is essential in order for this to take place. If the school has an evident opportunity gap that

disadvantages ELs, data from this study could be used to persuade school administrators to support such an initiative.

### **District and School Administrators**

District and school administrators can. . .

*Recommendation 4. Be cautious of private funding opportunities that impose standardization policies.*

In the case of the standardized literacy curriculum implementation at Chapman Hills Elementary, the teacher candidate participants reported that when the teachers voted to approve the new curriculum, they were misled about how it would be implemented. Before presenting any curriculum to faculty, it is critical that administrators ensure that they are receiving all of the facts and that it is flexible enough for CRP enactment.

*Recommendation 5. Encourage faculty to form long-term CoPs focused on CRP for ELs.*

Participants in the CoP under study at Chapman Hills reported that while teachers at the school had frequent PLC meetings, they were generally data-based planning meetings. While such meetings are important for topics such as student case management, placement and program development, the same allotted time could also provide an opportunity for teachers to fine-tune their practice for ELs.

### **Study Limitations**

While the standardized literacy curriculum originally appeared to be a limitation to this study, it resulted in being a needed contextual backdrop for this situated investigation. There are four primary limitations to this study. The first, and most evident, is that I had the role of the researcher and the CoP facilitator, as well as

participants' previous instructor. As my position was admittedly reflexive, it is possible that my contribution steered CoP meeting discussions. In addition, it is possible that participants sought to please me because of our established relationship at the university.

Second, time is a limitation of this study. I observed each of the four candidates weekly throughout the ten-week study. It is likely that I missed examples of CRP enactment or other instances where CRP enactment would have been possible but did not occur because my time in the classroom was limited. In addition, since this study was implemented over ten weeks, the early stages involved the student teacher participants making sense of CRP for ELs rather than enacting it. It is unclear how the results might have been different if the participants would have had more time to practice enactment of CRP for ELs. A significant contributing factor to this limitation is that for the first three weeks of data collection, the participants were required to read lessons from scripts, resulting in no occurrences of CRP. Following the removal of the principal, participants wagered their growing understanding of CRP with their vulnerable positions as student teachers as they considered enacting CRP in an environment where doing so was in breach of school policy. Upon completion of data collection, participants were beginning to understand how CRP could be enacted, as well as feel secure doing so in the changing climate of the school.

Third, as the student teachers were not employed by the school and therefore did not attend faculty meetings, it is possible that their understanding of the curriculum policy and the series of events surrounding the principal's resignation were inaccurate. They experienced the policy implementation and were kept abreast of important school events through conversations with their cooperating teachers.

Finally, whiteness is a factor that influenced this study in a variety of ways. First and foremost, white privilege permeates the society in which this school and these teachers operate. More locally, my whiteness likely affected the CoP discussions and how study participants interacted with me. It also likely impacted both the white study participants and the participants of color in their pursuit to better understand and enact CRP for ELs. While whiteness was considered in the analysis of data, I could not account for the myriad ways that whiteness affected the data from this investigation.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study suggests a variety of areas for future research that would further investigate teacher learning and CRP for ELs. The following suggested areas for future research are similar in design, but they focus on different school stakeholders as bounded units of analysis.

First, it would be advantageous to examine the EL experience while teachers are learning to enact CRP for ELs in a CoP. It would be helpful to understand how learners experience teacher learning, how they experience pedagogical mirrors and whether CRP improves their academic success and/or confidence. Ethnography would be well-suited for this research, as the researcher would need to spend an extended period of time in the classroom in order to best understand the EL experience.

Second, in order to better understand the teacher experience, a similar study on how practicing teachers learn to enact CRP for ELs in a CoP would better inform the field about differences in the learning processes of teacher candidates and practicing teachers and fill an existing gap in the literature. The researcher would need to spend a considerable amount of time in the classroom observing pedagogy and it would be ideal

for the CoP to meet over an academic year or longer. Longitudinal research on CRP enactment would contribute in important ways to the field. Depending on the role of the researcher, possible methodologies for future studies are participatory action research, collective case study, and ethnography.

Lastly, as was learned in this research, school administrators have a significant impact on the learning experience of ELs in schools and their work is consistently underrepresented in the literature. A study of school administrators in a CoP focused on the consideration and implementation of culturally relevant policies for ELs would provide a significant contribution to the literature. Collective case study and participatory action research would also serve as helpful methodologies to aid the researcher in this investigation.

### **Conclusion**

There is a great deal more to learn about how teacher candidates learn to enact CRP for ELs. Goodwin (2002) writes that this problem “must galvanize teacher preparation programs to rethink how their curriculum prepares pre-service teachers to work effectively with diverse students” (p. 157). The findings from this study offer a partial response to this challenge and as immigration trends change and the sociopolitical landscape in the field of education evolves, teacher education should be at its forefront.

At the onset of data collection for this research, it seemed that this study might not be successful. Field note templates remained empty while student teacher participants taught lessons to culturally and linguistically diverse students from scripts. While the context of this research proved initially to be a roadblock, it resulted in providing a critical backdrop that reveals a larger picture for ELs in public schools in the United



States. In order for teachers to bridge teaching theories and strategies presented in teacher education coursework in the K-12 sociopolitical sphere, they must be able to situate said theories and strategies in real classrooms, with real students, under current constraints that affect teachers and their students. Secondary to the greater context of the school was the CoP of developing practitioners showing that indeed teachers learn to improve their practice for marginalized students such as ELs through social interaction amongst colleagues.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA IRB APPROVAL

Internal Review Board Approval to Conduct Research



Michelle Benegas <benegas@umn.edu>

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**1212E25301 - PI Benegas - IRB - Exempt Study**  
Notification 1 message

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[irb@umn.edu](mailto:irb@umn.edu) [irb@umn.edu](mailto:irb@umn.edu)

Tue, Dec 18, 2012 at 1:31 PM TO : [djtedick@umn.edu](mailto:djtedick@umn.edu), [benegas@umn.edu](mailto:benegas@umn.edu),

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

**Study Number:** 1212E25301

**Principal Investigator:** Michelle Benegas

**Title(s):** How Teacher Candidates Learn to Enact Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota HRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

**SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.**

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654. You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at <http://eresearch.umn.edu/> to view further details on your study. The IRB wishes you success with this research.



**Michelle Benegas** <[benegas@umn.edu](mailto:benegas@umn.edu)>

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### **IRB Acknowledgment of Change in Protocol Request**

1 message

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**irb@umn.edu** <[irb@umn.edu](mailto:irb@umn.edu)>

Thu, Mar 27, 2014 at 7:50 AM TO : [djtedick@umn.edu](mailto:djtedick@umn.edu), [benegas@umn.edu](mailto:benegas@umn.edu),

The IRB has reviewed and acknowledged your change in protocol for the study listed below:

**Study Number:** 1212E25301

**Principal Investigator:** Michelle Benegas

**Title(s):** Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners: How Student Teachers Learn to Enact it in a Community of Practice

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Your study was determined previously to be exempt from IRB review in one of the following categories 45 CFR 46.101(b):

#1 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS.

#2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS;; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS;; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

#3 PUBLIC OFFICIALS;; SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS;; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

#4 EXISTING DATA;; RECORDS REVIEW;; PATHOLOGICAL SPECIMENS.

#6 TASTE TESTING AND FOOD QUALITY EVALUATION.

The changes you have proposed do not alter your exempt status. No action is needed at this time. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRB office at 612--626--5654 or [irb@umn.edu](mailto:irb@umn.edu) if you have any questions.

## **Appendix B**

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners:

How Student Teachers Learn to Enact it in a Community of Practice

A Dissertation Study

Study #: 1212E25301

You are invited to participate in a multiple case study of student teacher learning and the enactment of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners. You were selected as a possible participant because you are enrolled in the elementary education licensure program at the University of Minnesota, you have taken CI: 5645 Teaching English Learners in the Elementary Classroom, and you are student teaching at Earle Brown Elementary School, a linguistically and ethnically diverse school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by Michelle Benegas, doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction- Second Languages and Cultures at the University of Minnesota.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to examine how student teachers learn to enact culturally relevant pedagogy for English learners as part of a community of practice. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be a part of a professional learning community (PLC) that facilitates teacher candidate learning and self-reflection about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Allow me to observe your teaching ten times during the months of April, May and June 2014. Observations will be 30-60 minutes in length and will be scheduled in advance.
- Keep a digital journal in which you orally record your experiences related to learning to enact Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners. At minimum, you will be asked to submit an entry once per week (for a total of 10 entries). You may use a recording application on your cell phone or a recorder that I provide for you.



- Participate in ten weekly PLC meetings with one to three other fellow student teacher candidates and me after school for 90 minutes during the months of April, May and June 2014. Meetings will be video recorded.
- Participate in 3 individual interviews lasting approximately 30-60 minutes hour (one at the beginning of the study, one in the middle and one at the end). Interviews will be audio-recorded.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There is minimal risk involved in your participation in this study. You might feel uncomfortable talking about sensitive subjects such as racism or poverty during meetings or interviews. Know that you are free not to participate or to skip any questions if they make you uncomfortable. The potential benefits to this study are that you will have the experience of working in a professional learning community and you will have an environment in which to reflect on and improve your student teaching practice for English learners.

### **Compensation**

There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study. However, food (representative of local immigrant communities) will be served at each PLC meeting. And, I will offer to observe and provide feedback on your teaching should you wish.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. I will be the primary person to have contact with the study data. The data may be shared with my advisor, Professor Diane Tedick. I will assign pseudonyms to all data, and it will not be possible for you to be identified. In any sort of research report I might publish, I will use pseudonyms, and there will be no inclusion of information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the original data.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your choice to participate in this study is voluntary and will not affect your current and future relations with the University of Minnesota or the Elementary Education Licensure Program. If you choose to participate, you are free to not answer any question or may withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **Contact and Questions**

I, Michelle Benegas, am the investigator conducting this study. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [benegas@umn.edu](mailto:benegas@umn.edu) or 651-808-5999. If you have questions about the nature of this study, you may contact my academic advisor, Dr. Diane Tedick, 125 Peik Hall, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455; [djtedick@umn.edu](mailto:djtedick@umn.edu) or 612-625-1081.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact Research Subjects Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

**A copy of this consent form will be provided to you, the participant.**

Appendix C

FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Date	Time	Source	Text	Code	Research Question

## **Appendix D**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Pre-Study**

1. Tell me about your background and your experiences with immigrants.
2. What do you know about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and how would you define it?
3. Where have you heard about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy? How have people talked about it?
4. Who do you think Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is for?
5. From your understanding, what does Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners look like in practice?
6. Are you aware of any problems related to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy? If so, what are they?
7. What questions do you have about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?

#### **Mid-Study**

1. Revisit your initial definition of CRP. Over these last few months, how has your thinking about the definition of CRP changed or developed? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
2. Over these last few months, how has your thinking about the enactment of CRP for English learners changed or developed? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
3. Have you felt successful in enacting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners? How might participation in this PLC have contributed to your feelings of success or lack thereof?
4. What challenges do you perceive make Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners difficult? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
5. How has digital journaling affected your thoughts about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners?
6. How has digital journaling about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy affected your pedagogy?
7. Please share specific experiences in the PLC that affected your thoughts about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners?
8. Please share specific experiences in the PLC that affected your pedagogy for English learners.

## Post-Study

1. Revisit your initial definition of CRP. Over these last few months, how has your thinking about the definition of CRP changed or developed? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
2. Over these last few months, how has your thinking about the enactment of CRP for English learners changed or developed? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
3. Have you felt successful in enacting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners? How might participation in this PLC have contributed to your feelings of success or lack thereof?
4. What challenges do you perceive make Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners difficult? Please share any social interactions with members of the PLC that may have influenced your thinking or practice.
5. How has digital journaling affected your thoughts about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners?
6. How has digital journaling about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy affected your pedagogy?
7. Please share specific experiences in the PLC that affected your thoughts about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners?
8. Please share specific experiences in the PLC that affected your pedagogy for English learners.
9. Please share any general sentiments or experiences about your learning as a member of this PLC.
10. If there was a change in your pedagogy for English learners, which PLC interactions may have brought about this change?
11. Do you think that your English learners have benefitted from any changes in your pedagogy? If so, how so?
12. How could practicing teachers benefit from participation in a similar PLC?

## Appendix E

### COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (PLC) MEETING SCHEDULE

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy PLC Meeting Schedule, Spring 2014

Week 1	Thursday, April 3 Friday, April 4	Classroom Observation 1 <i>Interview 1</i> (30-60 minutes)
Week 2	Monday, April 7 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, April 10 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observation 2 <b>PLC Meeting 1</b>
Week 3	Monday, April 14 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, April 10 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observation 3 <b>PLC Meeting 2</b>
Week 4	Monday, April 14 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, April 17 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 4 <b>PLC Meeting 3</b>
Week 5	Monday, April 21 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, April 24 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 5 <b>PLC Meeting 4</b>
Week 6	Monday, April 28 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, May 1 3:00-4:30	<i>Interview 2</i> (30-60 minutes) <b>PLC Meeting 5</b>
Week 7	Monday, May 5 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, May 8 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 6 <b>PLC Meeting 6</b>
Week 8	Monday, May 12 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, May 15 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 7 <b>PLC Meeting 7</b>

Week 9	Monday, May 19 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, May 22 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 8 <b>PLC Meeting 8</b>
Week 10	Monday, May 26 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, May 29 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 9 <b>PLC Meeting 9</b>
Week 11	Monday, June 2 (30-60 minutes each) Thursday, June 5 3:00-4:30	Classroom Observations 10 <b>PLC Meeting 10</b>
Week 12	Monday, June 9 (30-60 minutes each)	Interview 3 (30-60 minutes)

## **Appendix F**

### **PLC MEETING PROTOCOL**

#### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners**

#### **PLC (Community of Practice) Meeting Protocol**

In each of the ten PLC meetings, participants will:

1. Share examples of tailoring pedagogy in culturally relevant ways to help English learners develop/maintain cultural competence
2. Share examples of tailoring pedagogy in culturally relevant ways to help English learners develop a critical consciousness
3. Share examples of tailoring pedagogy in culturally relevant ways to help English learners experience academic success
4. Discuss how all three tenets can be achieved in one lesson
5. Discuss specific issues that impede the enactment of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English learners and ways to work around them
6. Discuss how we learn the above five items through social interaction, via participation in an intentional community of practice.

Characteristics of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2008):

1. mutual engagement
2. joint enterprise
3. shared repertoire

Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2004):

1. Students develop and/or maintain cultural competence
2. Students develop a critical consciousness
3. Students experience academic success

Meetings will begin with a check-in and close with pedagogical items to consider in the upcoming week. Conversations will be videotaped and all members will be encouraged to participate in the conversation.



## Appendix G

### DIGITAL JOURNAL PROMPTS

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for English Learners:

How Student Teachers Learn to Enact it in a Community of Practice

Say your name

Say the date

If you email this to me put LASTNAME-DATE as the subject line

Please add any relevant details/stories to support your reflections. Also, if you remember, please include the co-participant names and how they influenced your thinking.

Prompts:

- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I noticed a time in my classroom when CRP for ELs was lacking.
  - I decided to. . .
  - It made me consider. . .
  
- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I noticed an example of CRP for ELs. It was. . .
  
- After our PLC discussion about \_\_\_\_\_, I enacted CRP for ELs. This is what happened. . .