DIFFERENT FACES IN OUR CLASSROOMS: TEACHERS' CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF HETEROGENEOUS SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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Dedication

To the scholars who have laid the path for this research to exist; I stand on your shoulders.

To Brian, my love, without you none of this was possible.

To Brayden, your perseverance and resilience inspire me every day.

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ABSTRACT

The foundation of the United States' educational system is that all students will be educated equally by offering access to knowledge, opportunities, and services resulting in the creation of positive societal contributors. However, this task is complex and challenging. Heterogeneous student populations due to increased culturally diversity, do not match the stable teacher population. Therefore, a disconnection occurs between student and teacher populations and corresponding cultural views.

Adopting cultural theories from anthropology, business, and education, this quasi-ethnographic study, within one elementary school, examined the relationship between the created culture and understandings of various sociocultural student identities by three first grade teachers and how, if at all, their classroom practices afforded any student academic advantages or disadvantages. Presented are teachers' personal interpretations about various cultures and how these constructs formed beliefs, attitudes, and values about student capital, teaching, educational practices, judgments, and accurate allocation of resources (entitlements) for their students.

Study findings indicate an acute participant awareness of cultural differences between themselves and their students when allocating appropriate academic opportunities and services. A shift in the teaching profession from one that imparts knowledge toward a focus on meeting physical and emotional needs of students, aligned with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The emphasis on standardized assessments and their effect on classroom teaching methods and strategies, has created a cultural lag

between classrooms and school district and state mandates. Addressing these challenges portends teachers become transformative learners and engage in culturally responsive teaching practices.

Keywords: *culture, heterogeneous student populations, sociocultural identity, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, cultural lag, transformative learner, culturally responsive teaching practices*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The public school system in the United States was founded on the basis that everyone, regardless of social background, would and could be educated (Ruane & Cerulo, 2012). As such, education became the "great equalizer" (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Jones, 2003; Ortner, 1998), offering all students access to knowledge and opportunities to shape their futures, leading toward individual opportunity and success. Theoretically, offering all students equal educational opportunities in schools yields multiple positive outcomes. First, by attending school an individual has the opportunity to be exposed to and learn from multiple bodies of knowledge. Second, an educated individual acquires necessary skills to perform a job and contribute to the societal workforce. Finally, as an educated individual exits the public school system, his knowledge acquisition elevates him to a higher social status resulting in a collective lifting of society's levels of egalitarianism. The goals and outcomes of the public school system are clear: train individuals through knowledge and skill acquisition to become positive contributing members of society. Are these accurate purposes of the public education system in the United States? Do all individuals have equal access to educational opportunities to make these outcomes happen?

Factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, [personal attributes], English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups

of students (Hidden Curriculum, 2014). Further, resources including money, curriculum, and supplies as well as quality teachers in classrooms, determine opportunities for students. These inputs are crucial to creating optimal outputs: teachers who are equipped with appropriate resources to teach, opportunities and services in schools that meet students' academic needs, and students who are able to take part in available opportunities and services due to need rather than other discriminating factors.

Coupled with the challenges of educating all students, educators also face a recent shift in student demographics in schools (Aud et al., 2013). For example, the number of White student enrollment in schools from 2000 to 2010 has declined, while Hispanic student enrollment has shown a 7% increase during the same time period (Aud et al., 2013). In 2011, approximately 21% of students came from families living at or below the poverty line according to the United States Census Bureau (Aud et al., 2013). Teacher demographics, however, have remained relatively stable (NCES, 2012). The majority of educators employed in public school systems nationally remain White, middle-class, women exposing a possible disconnection between student and teacher populations and their respective cultural views.

Many classrooms are heterogeneous environments, filled with students from various races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Students bring their individual cultures or the learned beliefs, traditions, and behaviors (Barrett, 1984) from their familial environments into the school environment. Students learn these behaviors through observation and instruction that transmits the culture of their ancestors through multiple generations. This process of transmission, solidifies a culture in time.

Upon entering school, a new culture is introduced to the student: the school culture. This culture is comprised of two parts: the individual cultures brought to the school by each administrator, teacher, school staff member, and student; and the collective normative culture operating as a result of all individuals acting together within the school. The individual norms are bi-products of the cultural behaviors the adults and students have learned over time from past experiences, relationships, and environments. The collective norms may include procedures for daily school functions, curricular methods, assessment measures, and other teaching and learning decisions as well as a combined attitude about "how we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 4). As a result, school environments as places of teaching and learning become a vibrant and rich cultural combination between personal experiences of students and school personnel. What impact might this cultural combination have on the students? How would this impact affect students in an academic nature?

The Statement of the Problem

The problem this quasi-ethnographic study explored, within one heterogeneous elementary school setting, is the possible relationship between the culture of the school personnel (first grade teacher participants) and the degree to which these teachers' understandings about various sociocultural identities of their students relate both to the practices in their classrooms and to any academic advantages or disadvantages afforded to students. I am particularly interested in what the teachers personally believe, construct attitudes about, and value in terms of teaching first grade students and how they use these constructs to create a classroom culture that is indicative of various educational practices, judgments, and accurate allocation of resources (entitlements).

In general, *heterogeneous* is defined as "made up of parts that are different" (Heterogeneous, n.d., no pg.). For this study, the term heterogeneous is used to describe an elementary school setting comprised of multiple individuals who define themselves differently in some manner. The differences will focus on the manifestations of various cultures present in this school setting.

The term *culture* is an abstract concept and one not easily defined. Broadly, culture is "the body of learned beliefs, traditions, and guides of behavior that are shared among members of any human society" (Barrett, 1984, p. 54). This definition encompasses a comprehensive meaning but centers itself in a *Weltanschauung,* a particular perspective or point of view (that of the group). Behaviors are the manifestations of the cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values adhered to within social groups; people are born into specific statuses as well as achieve others. Statuses prescribe certain agreed upon behaviors that signal to others belongingness and relate to the cultural aspects held by and about the statuses. These behaviors are patterned; they are acquired by observation, imitation, or instruction by other group members over time. Further, behaviors, as the manifestations of culture are dynamic (Zion & Kozleski, 2005) and can be altered based upon the development of an individual, movement from one cultural group to another, or both.

This study incorporated definitions of culture from multiple perspectives and theories in anthropology, business, and education. Goodenough's (1971) definition of culture as the pattern of shared ideas and conceptual designs of how individuals learn and decide standards for knowing, feeling, and acting upon these patterns was used to study and analyze the activities, materials, and social arrangements within one elementary

school setting. Additional theories were used to analyze patterns found as they related to the creation of valid assumptions and perceptions thus justifying educational solutions and the creation of shared meaning from arbitrary concepts and acts that individuals and groups acquire over time.

Additional perspectives define culture as a "system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to interact with their world and with one another" (Zion & Kozleski, 2005, p. 3). Studying the perspectives of school personnel within an elementary school setting offers insight into their basic assumptions on the teaching and learning of their student population and the contextual standards and perspectives for which these assumptions are situated as a collective group of people. The ability for individuals to make something of random acts and define criteria for these acts offers both emic (internal) and etic (external and with assistance from the researcher) understandings of the resulting manifestations of behaviors.

This study is situated in an interpretivist/social constructivist paradigm within ethnography using participant-observer methods. As such, I sought an understanding of the world through the eyes of my participants. This approach offers a complexity of views rather than narrow meanings of concepts and ideas (Creswell, 2013). These created meanings were formed through participant actions and interactions, based on their individual cultural and historical norms. During my fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I gained an understanding of how the participants viewed culture cognitively and how the culture is manifested by observable behaviors and symbols.

For the purposes of this study, *academic opportunities* is defined as remedial, advanced (i.e., gifted education services), special education services, and extracurricular

services and opportunities offered to students on a school-wide and grade- and classroom-specific basis. All opportunities must be considered academic in nature and based on a single or multiple core subject, content, or discipline (i.e., English/Language Arts, science, social studies, mathematics). The term *provisions of academic opportunities* will incorporate not only what opportunities are offered at the elementary school site and/or in the classrooms but the act and process of supplying and providing (Provision, n.d.) the available opportunities to students.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study sought to determine the relationships between teachers and the provisions of academic opportunities offered to students in a heterogeneous school setting. The frameworks of culture by Goodenough (1971) and Barrett (1984) provided a context for exploring and understanding the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the participants in the study as the reasons behind how they provide academic opportunities for their students. The research questions I addressed include:

1. What are the demographics of the teachers at the selected school?
    A. Who are these individuals? Where did they come from?
    B. What is their academic employment background (i.e., years teaching, credentials, past educational experiences, etc.)?
2. What are the demographics of the students at the selected school?
3. What are the academic opportunities available to students at the selected school?
    A. Are the academic opportunities fixed in number (only a certain number of students can participate)?
    B. How and are the academic opportunities distributed at this school?

C. To whom are the academic opportunities distributed at this school?

4. How do the teachers at the selected school define culture?
    A. How is this definition of culture manifested through patterns of behaviors and symbols in individual classrooms?
    B. How is this definition of culture manifested through similar patterns of behaviors and symbols of the participant group?
5. Does the participants' view of culture have any impact on the provision and distribution of academic opportunities for students? If so, what accounts for this impact?

The Significance of the Study

This study offers insight into the culture (the beliefs, attitudes, and values) of the select first grade teachers in one school. Through interviews and observed behaviors and symbols, I was able to interpret how they consciously and unconsciously react to the differences of others. This study offers insight into the view of culture as understood by the teachers. This study helps to understand a relationship between heterogeneity of students in one elementary school setting and the possible impact this relationship has on the provisions of academic opportunities for diverse students as well as students who require additional academic opportunities to meet their learning needs. It provides insight into which students are offered academic opportunities and the reasons behind these decisions within the selected elementary school setting. This study also provides insight into classroom cultures created by teachers and the relationship between a teacher's cultural perspective, academic opportunities for students, and how some students are advantaged or disadvantaged based upon these results. Finally, this study

unpacks other larger systemic factors that affect the academic opportunities for students in this school setting including lack of resources (monetary, material, and availability), little to no professional development opportunities for teachers, the cultural lag that exists between classrooms and school district, state, and national initiatives, and the use of transformative learning theory to situate and justify teacher opinions, interpretations, and decisions.

Due to the small sample size, this study's implications on educational research are only applicable to the selected school setting. This study provides information on cultural/ multicultural educational practices that may assist teachers, administrators, and school personnel at this school and asks questions of current and future practice such as Where are we? and Where do we need to go? This study also provides suggestions for preservice and current teacher training and multicultural education that can be adopted by the school. It is important to have a definition and purpose for multicultural education where "complex social, economic, historical, and cultural factors" are taken into account (Ogbu, 1992, p. 7). The teachers and administrators at the selected school can begin or continue to ask questions about various cultural terms relevant to their student population including: How is the term culture defined collectively as well as individually? Do we need more information on cultural/multicultural educational topics in our professional development opportunities? What types of topics should be included and why? and How will this information help to better educate our students?

Limitations and Delimitations

My research study is delimited to three first grade teachers in one elementary school setting. Because of this small participant number, I do not have a representative

sample of participants based upon gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. In addition, working with only one school site does not allow me to generalize my findings to other elementary school sites. Further, working with one public elementary school included some logistical challenges found in many public school settings including having adequate time to spend with participants during the school year and summer vacation, working around school breaks, and adhering with school procedures and accessibility of information due to confidentiality concerns, etc. I was able, however, to schedule participant interviews and observations around these challenges.

This research study did not employ a pilot study, therefore, some of the questions and methodology strategies were altered as the study progressed. For example, the original research questions were altered as a result of the first and second participant interviews to better reflect the study results. Finally, due to the qualitative nature of this study, the "researcher as instrument" statement serves as a bracket of my experiences, however, I am human and as such have inherent biases that were recognized and considered throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The governmental, economic, and social systems of the United States are dependent upon educated citizens to function properly. As such, educating our youth is an important component of ensuring these systems operate according to their intended purposes and that all members within these systems contribute in a positive manner. On a macro-level, schools provide the education to students to guarantee they possess the requisite knowledge to understand these systems and ensure these systems will continue to function into the future. From a micro-level perspective, schools afford individual students opportunities and skills necessary to perform job functions thus elevating his or her status in the collective system.

One caveat, however, is that no system is perfectly structured or functions as intended. Systems are always deviating and changing, based upon the relationships characterized by: the interdependence of elements, complex networks of social relationships, individuals motivated by their personalities and needs, and interactions with its environment (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). Systems exist in the classroom, school, and educational system at large. Ideally, these systems work in tandem, providing all students equal access to educational opportunities, however, systemic structures may be set up to maintain limited access for certain students. What are some reasons for these challenges?

Educators face challenges educating all students equally while also facing the element of shifting student demographics in public schools. As the White student population is declining nationally, the combined Hispanic and Black student populations are increasing (Aud et al., 2013). Further, statistics indicate an increase of students coming from families of poverty (Aud et al., 2013). The change in student demographics has not been met with a similar shift in educator demographics, however. More often, the majority of educators remain White, middle-class women, whose cultural group differs from that of many students in their classrooms (NCES, 2012). In this chapter, I will report further details about student and teacher statistics showing the increasing diversity within the student population and misalignment of the homogeneity of the teaching staff within our nation's schools. As noted in Chapter 1, schools should provide not only the education of all students (Ruane & Cerulo, 2012) but the opportunity for all students to have access to knowledge and opportunities to shape their futures, leading toward individual opportunity and success (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Jones, 2003; Ortner, 1998).

Schools may serve as a pathway toward future opportunities for students but they also may create roadblocks at the same time. These pathways and barriers result from the culture created at the school and based upon how individuals within the school view culture. The school culture consists of the individual cultural dispositions brought to the school by the school personnel and the students that feed into the everyday enacted collective culture. The following review of the literature first addresses the myriad definitions of culture arising from anthropology, business, and school administration perspectives in order to explain and establish a definition and the component parts of this

term. Later in the chapter, I will describe four related terms: judgment, entitlement, cumulative advantage, and cumulative disadvantage that help create a theoretical framework to explore the nature of this study about culture.

Current Student Data Trends

The public school system in the United States continues to experience a shift in student demographics that includes racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic (SES) characteristics. During the 2010-11 school year approximately 49.5 million students were enrolled in public education systems (Pre-K through grade 12) (Aud et al., 2013). From 2000 to 2010, the White student population enrolled in public schools decreased from 28.9 million students to 25.9 million students; a decline from 61% to 52% of the total student population. In comparison, Hispanic student enrollment increased from 7.7 million students to 11.4 million students, an increase from 16% to 23% of the total student population. Black student enrollment has remained stable at 16% of the total, while the Asian-Pacific Islander student population increased from 4% to 5%. The American Indian-Native American student population has also remained stable at 1% of the total student enrollment (Aud et al., 2013, p. 52). As these percentages continue to shift, educators in schools continue to face increasingly diverse student populations in their individual schools and classrooms.

Racial and ethnic makeups of student populations enrolled in the public education system are not the only demographics that are shifting. Changes in socioeconomic status and family income have also occurred during the past decade. "In 2011, approximately 21% of school-age children (approximately 10.9 million) in the United States were in families living in poverty" (Aud et al., 2013, p. 26). According to the United States

Census Bureau (2013), poverty is defined as consisting of a family's total income (including money income before taxes and not including capital gains or noncash benefits such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps) that is less than the family's threshold (measurements taken based upon the size of the family and the ages of its members). In 2012, the poverty threshold for a family of four was $23,492. From 1990 to 2011, the percentage of students living in a family in poverty increased from 17% to 21%. Incorporating race and ethnicity as factors, the percentage of both White and Asian students under the age of 18 living in poverty was 13% in 2011. In comparison, 39% of Black students, 34% of Hispanic students, 30% of Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander students, and 36% of American Indian-Native American students were living in poverty (Aud et al., 2013, p. 28).

In addition to the students living in poverty, schools are also facing an increased homeless population nationally. National data records approximate 1.4 million homeless students are currently enrolled in public schools (ED Data Express, 2015). This total has nearly doubled since the 2007-2008 school year. These numbers indicate that the majority of the United States student population in the public school system now come from low-income families. According to Michael Rebell of the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College at Columbia University,

> The shift to a majority-poor student population means that in public schools, a growing number of children start Kindergarten already trailing their more privileged peers and rarely, if ever, catch up. They are less likely to have support at home, are less frequently exposed to enriching activities outside of school, and are more likely to drop out and never attend college. It also means that education

> policy, funding decisions and classroom instruction must adapt to the needy children who arrive at school each day. (Layton, 2015)

Educators are faced with diverse cultural and socioeconomic needs of various student populations being served in public schools as well as meeting students' physical and mental health needs and providing additional before, after, and early childhood school services. Racially, the data indicate students of diversity and poverty continue to populate our schools juxtaposed against an increasingly White teacher population.

Although the demographics among students in the public schools are changing, composition of the teaching workforce is not changing along similar lines. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the 2007-8 school year, approximately 77% of the teachers in United States public schools were female. In addition, 80% were White, 7% Black, approximately 8% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 3% identifying with two or more races (NCES, 2012, p. 6). The United States Department of Labor (2012) calculates the average national elementary and secondary teacher salary as $56,100. These data suggest a persistent, growing gap between the current racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background of students in public schools and the teachers providing instruction. The gap not only includes racial and ethnic identification and income but also raises a question of diverse cultural experiences and understanding by a homogenous teacher population. An all-White teacher population consists of understandings of cultural norms that are different than those of a diverse group of students. These understandings, when not addressed, could lead to biased or deficit thinking on the part of the teacher. Differences in backgrounds between students and teachers, if accompanied by biases or deficit thinking based upon cultural norms and expectations, raise concerns

about whether all students of diverse backgrounds are receiving appropriate and equal learning opportunities in schools. Understanding cultures of human populations, in this case, student populations, becomes an important part of a teacher's ability to distribute academic opportunities equitably to students in their classroom. What follows is a review of culture from anthropological, business, and educational viewpoints leading toward a deeper definition of how this knowledge affects, if at all, teacher practices and academic opportunities for students in the classroom.

Views of Culture

Although culture as a concept was the purview of anthropology from the middle of the nineteenth century, sociologists, then business management researchers, and finally school administration specialists all have appropriated the term for explorations of issues in their fields. Anthropology offers the broadest understanding of the term while education most often has adopted a definition of culture from the business sector. This section reviews first, the original source of the concept providing a definition useful for this study. Then I discuss the variations in definition and usage within the various fields.

Culture: An Overview

In its broadest sense, "anthropology is the study of humans, past and present" (American Anthropological Association, 2015). In order to understand fully the complex concepts surrounding human life the discipline of anthropology builds upon existing knowledge from humanities and the social, biological, and physical sciences leading toward understanding human problems. In this study, the problem is focused on the culture fostered by teachers and the possibility of them affording academic opportunities to students of various sociocultural identities. Therefore, cultural and sociocultural

anthropology concepts must be included in the review of literature and subsequent definitions for this study.

Cultural and sociocultural anthropologists view culture as a concept that encompasses the dimensions of customs, behaviors, patterns, and practices including the understanding of human actions (Keesing, 1958). Broadly, cultural anthropology seeks to answer questions about humans and human action: Why do humans behave the way they do? What makes some people different from others whose customs represent another view of the world? Sociocultural anthropology then "examines the social patterns and practices" (American Anthropological Association, 2015) across various cultures and emphasizes such characteristics as race, sexuality, class, gender, and nationality through observations and conversations surrounding problems of truth, power, and justice.

Culture is a collective phenomenon, learned and shared by people who live within the same social environment (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Culture is also a behavioral phenomenon, one that deals with social behaviors of individuals who interact with each other (Bohannan, 1963). Each generation of humans contributes to the cultural store of knowledge over time, creating and supporting shared systems of meaning and behaviors that individuals use to communicate meaning to their children and to others within their culture. Therefore, culture is a dynamic process (Zion & Kozleski, 2005). Culture denotes the unwritten rules of a social environment, accumulated over time, and stored within an individual's cognition and manifesting itself into the behavioral practices of beliefs, attitudes, and values of the collective group – and vice versa.

Behaviors and symbols are the manifestations of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of a culture that provide an outsider with meaningful clues (Geertz, 1973). Symbols include "words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who share the culture" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 7). Meaningful clues from behavior and symbols convey ideas, feelings, and images of the culture (Schein, 1992) while also providing a holistic reason for humans to exist (Guggenheim, 1968).

In addition, "culture refers not only to those (racial, national, and ethnic groups) that we are born into, but also those that we choose to belong to, such as religious or social groups" (Zion & Kozleski, 2005, p. 3). An individual simultaneously may be Native American, male, and a participant in local government, for example. Culture is learned and derived from "one's social environment" rather than emerging from an individual's innate characteristics (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 4). An individual is not born knowing how to participate in a particular culture. Rather, individuals are enculturated and taught various beliefs, attitudes, and values by other members of the cultural group, giving them tools to view the world in the "right way." Individuals first learn behaviors of their primary culture while becoming accustomed to aspects of secondary cultures or cultural settings. Even though an individual may be attached to or identify with one or more cultures, "he is not a slave to it. He may even participate in several cultures in his lifetime, as many immigrants to the United States have done" (Guggenheim, 1968, p. 54).

The elemental properties of culture include beliefs, attitudes, and values and will be described in more detail in Chapter 3. Briefly, non-anthropologists explain that

"beliefs are the deeply personal, individual truths one holds about physical and social reality and about self" (Rokeach, 1968). People often are reluctant to change their beliefs (Bandura, 1986; Bruner, 1996; Pajares, 1992), thus beliefs are powerful predictors of an individual's behavior (Nespor, 1987). Attitudes are the connected substructure of individual beliefs (Rokeach, 1968); they are constructs that guide individual behaviors about people, objects, and situations. Attitudes are highly personal and although rare, can cause a change in culture when they conflict with a belief. Values are the core of culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005); they are fixed, unconscious reaction to the unanswered question why people do what they do (Schein, 1992). Ultimately, cultural values help individuals form judgments about themselves, their own culture, and other cultures as well as promote forms of entitlement and advantage to those within the culture who are deemed "worth it."

The Anthropological View

Anthropologists have debated the meaning of the concept of culture almost since Edward B. Tylor (1871) first used the word. The term culture is difficult to define because it is a social phenomenon and must be placed into context in order to be understood. Tylor defined culture holistically as the capabilities (i.e., knowledge, beliefs, laws, customs, etc.) and habits that make man [sic] a member of a particular society. Culture is deciding standards for what is, what can be, how one feels about it, deciding what to do about it, and deciding how to go about doing it (Goodenough, 1963), representing all of the patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting within a specific collective of people. But what about the symbols as manifestations of the behaviors in this definition of culture? Goodenough leaves out symbols and symbolic representations of a

culture. These are arguably key components of a culture and assist those within and outside the culture with evidence to provide a deeper understanding of the culture.

Barrett (1984) adds to these definitions by incorporating more clearly the concept of human behavior. He defines culture as "the body of learned beliefs, traditions, and guides of behavior that are shared among members of any human society" (p. 54). Barrett posits that behaviors are the manifestations of the cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values of a particular group of individuals based upon what is cognitively understood. However, Keesing (1958) focuses more on human action, arguing that culture is "the totality of learned, socially transmitted behavior, or custom" based upon a "unique system of behavior" (p. 16) that pertains to both individuals and groups of individuals.

One of the confusing aspects of anthropological definitions is that the term culture is used two different ways. First, it refers to a group of people who share and act upon a particular worldview. Second, it is the worldview of that group of people. Using a systems theory approach, Frick (1991) defines culture as the social or normative glue that holds an organization together. More specifically, systems theory of culture describes relationships between the cultural components as well as how the culture (that is, group) interacts with its larger, social environment. Therefore, a cultural system exists both within the culture itself as well as the relationship between the culture and its surroundings, but also with other cultures.

These systems of behaviors (within a culture) are supported by statuses among individuals within that same culture. Statuses are denoted by different types of behaviors of certain individuals and are achieved as an individual exhibits more complex behaviors over time (i.e., a young boy learning to hunt and reaching the status of manhood) or

simply ascribed by birthright (i.e., a young boy born to inherit the status of king or ruler) (Bourdieu, 1986).

Statuses also relate directly to the *capital* individuals acquire or are given within a culture signaling group belongingness. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as both accumulated labor and the capacity an individual has to produce within the structures of a social world. Capital is "the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which governs its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success" (p. 241). The higher the status, the more resources an individual can access and the more capital an individual is able to possess. Within a given culture an individual of higher status "naturally" is deemed "worth it" and afforded more opportunities, advantages, resources, and investments by others in the culture.

Not only do individuals within a culture acquire and maintain various statuses, they also acquire various types and levels of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) offers a theoretical framework of a hierarchical social structure that integrates dispositions, perceptions, and past experiences labeled *habitus*. Based upon his understandings of French society, habitus is a dynamic "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences and actions, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 83). The system of permanent and transferable dispositions (or trained capacities to think and act) within a group of people function as the basis of their collective behavioral practices that are orchestrated without an actual conductor. Habitus is the schemata individuals within a particular cultural group formulate and by which they abide. By using past experiences, including actions and observations, an individual produces a world view that assists in

creating and internalizing "objective probabilities for [personal] success" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 83) as well as the proposed success of other individuals from other outside groups.

Bourdieu identified three forms of capital within the various classes of individuals in France: economic, cultural, and social (Bourdieu, 1986). Beginning with economic capital as money or property rights, Bourdieu believed that individuals have the ability or inability to transform the capital given to them or inherited by their class delineation. How that capital is accessed and transformed is dependent upon learned behaviors. Cultural capital includes cultural goods (books, instruments, etc.) as well as individual educational attainment.[1] Using economic and cultural capitals, an individual can obtain social capital or the "institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance or recognition" —the credential of being backed by members of a particular group" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 256).

Bourdieu's theories of capital extend beyond an economist's view and present a premise to explore unequal scholastic achievement in children based upon their social class. Habitus, social class, and the requisite capital obtained in each socioeconomic class level either afford or deny children academic success. The behaviors and cultural traits children acquire from their elders based on the stratified socioeconomic class structure as well as the unconscious and conscious dispositions, perceptions, appreciations, and actions other individuals (namely, teachers in schools) can link these children to a lifetime of triumph or defeat.

[1] Clearly, Bourdieu is using culture here as a part of the social system and not as an anthropologist would as THE system.

Yet, individuals are not destined to fail or achieve solely based upon the lack of or given opportunities placed before them as Bourdieu contends. Rather, individuals do have the ability to convert various forms of capital into higher levels of economic, class, or educational attainment, albeit often with much personal perseverance and resiliency. Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital is only gained by transmission to those individuals deemed worthy by those in the highest positions in a culture, allowing them to achieve while others fail or remain in their current position.

Individuals Within a Culture

Each generation of humans contributes to the cultural store of knowledge through various manifestations of behaviors. As innovative behaviors emerge, they are observed, imitated, and used as instructional techniques by other individuals within the group. As a result, each subsequent innovation is reworked and patterned to become the basis for the next generation of individuals (Barrett, 1984). Further, as individuals straddle multiple cultural groups, behaviors can be diffused from cultural group to cultural group. For example, a Black female student may have certain behaviors at home that belong strictly to her African-American culture (such as braiding her hair) that may be initially foreign but explained and adopted by her peers in her mostly White school classroom as a new fashion statement.

Individual behaviors within a culture develop over time as a response to the teaching and learning process through observation, intimidation, or instruction by other members of the group. Therefore, culture is a cumulative manifestation of *learned* behaviors. After individuals learn primary behaviors from their initial caretakers, a phase called enculturation, socialization or learning additional behaviors in an acceptable

manner, occurs. Learning of cultural behaviors is emphasized as individuals are not programmed to act in a particular manner; rather, they are taught how to act based upon the culture of other members of the same society (Durkheim, 1895/1982). For example, an elder may teach a younger child how to whittle wood, a seemingly dated behavior but still popular in cultures that value a man's ability to create something interesting and complex out of a seemingly uninteresting object. Learned behaviors can also be applied to create better solutions to problems encountered within the culture. For example, whittling particular woods over others is favorable as is using particular knifes and blades because the learned behavior of wood whittling has evolved over time. Particular woods are preferred over others because the instruments used in the craft have become more precise, yielding better overall results.

Some of the learning is explicit as in the teaching of whittling wood, hunting a bear, or using a napkin to wipe your face after a meal. Other learning is elusive and transmitted from one individual to another through a series of cues that communicate attitudes, values, and conceptions of the surrounding world (Barrett, 1984). In this type of behavioral learning, the cues and signals of thinking, feeling, and acting may be repetitive and patterned allowing individuals to act in harmony with these cues and signals without consciousness (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Many of these behavioral patterns are acquired in early childhood through a social environment including one's family, neighborhood, and school when a person's mental framework is being established. Over a lifetime, an individual experiences multiple social environments beginning with a single environment and moving toward multiple environments resulting in altered behavioral patterns or codes (Barrett, 1984; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The cultural behavioral code learned by individuals is complex. This code continues to form while perpetuating general bodies of rules that govern the way an individual thinks, acts, processes information, and forms culturally acceptable behaviors. Some individuals follow these rules precisely, while others defy, ignore, or evade the rules. Hence, "social rules [within a culture] rarely receive total compliance" (Barrett, 1984, p. 73). Individuals who share a culture exhibit different behaviors due to diverse motivations. Further, an individual within a culture may follow some rules and purposefully ignore others based upon personal beliefs, attitudes, or values.

Even though culture is considered a collective phenomenon, cultural identity can be individualized and diverse. "Cultural identity is constructed within the individual, but continually influenced by the interactions among and between people in society" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 3). Individuals belonging to a culture are not robotic nor do they act in completely uniform ways. All cultures and the individuals within these cultures exhibit diversity including outside influences coupled with biological differences of individuals. Therefore, "the idea of culture, then, signifies a double refusal: of organic determinism on the one hand, and of the autonomy of spirit on the other" (p. 4).

Organizational Culture: A Business Perspective

As anthropology is rooted in studying the concept of culture, the business sector has adopted a version of culture called *organizational culture*. Like the sociocultural anthropological definition of culture, organizational culture is described as involving people in groups. These groups create organizations and within these organizations, people create their own cultures and cultural identities. Definitions of organizational culture are as diverse and extensive as those found in anthropology. Schein (1992) views

organizational culture as "the accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements of the group members' total psychological functioning" (p. 10). Such elements include language, customs, traditions, norms, values, philosophies, rules, and symbols. Also included in organizational culture, according to Schein, are embedded skills of various group members that are passed on from generation to generation, habits of thinking that assist with group socialization, the creation of shared meaning, structural stability of the organization, and patterning or integration of various elements that bind the culture together (pp. 9-10). Here, defining organizational culture is almost synonymous with previous anthropological definitions: the shared beliefs, attitudes, and values and the resulting norms that distinguish one organization from another, providing a sense of organizational identity (Daft, 1994; Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1992).

However, unlike the anthropological view of culture, Schein indicates that organizational cultures' primary purpose is to solve problems. Therefore, all of the components of organizational culture lead a group of individuals toward finding solutions to various problems the organization encounters. In order to meet this end goal, only those elements that produce optimal results are adopted, adapted, and integrated into the organization's culture leaving unsuccessful elements for naught.

A second purpose of organizational culture is defining the concept of a leader and understanding how the leader's behaviors affect the culture (Schein, 1992). Unlike managers, leaders create, manage, and change cultures as well as use their unique talents and abilities to work with others within the culture rather than just live among them. When leaders neglect to understand the cultural elements or try and change these

elements without consent or approval of others in the culture, leaders become a part of cultural destruction.

Smircich (1983) contends that although the anthropological and organizational views of culture are connected, the manner by which the theories and themes are organized and studied vary depending upon the assumptions made about the concepts of culture and organization. For example, Goodenough (1963) organizes culture into a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values that are shared on a cognitive level between members as cultural rules similar to cognitive organizational theory, which is meanings of knowing and acting created by the group and interpreted as functioning in a "rule-like manner" (Smircich, 1983, p. 342). These rules guide member interactions and shows outsiders how the group functions or is dysfunctional. In these examples, culture and organizational culture are both guided by rules and the rules a group follows (or does not) and are the result of the manifestations of behaviors of cognitive understandings of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the group. Here, the researcher is asked "to determine what the rules are" and "to find out how the members… see and describe their world" (p. 348) based upon these rules.

Organizational Culture: A School Perspective

Schools are organizations and as such, possess an organizational culture. School culture is often discussed in terms of teaching practices that improve student learning (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). DiPaola and Hoy (2014) define school culture as "the traditions, values, and beliefs that distinguish that school from others and infuse it with a distinctive identity" (pp. 61-62); a definition that is very similar to that of business organizational culture. School culture brings together an organization by providing "standards for

behavior" and commits colleagues to use these behaviors to embody the core values of the school (p. 62).

The definition of school culture remains elusive, however, making it difficult to study or project patterns across various school types for two reasons. First, school identities are diverse due to the varied populations of individuals who work and learn at each school. Second, values, as indicated earlier, are unconscious and individualized, and offer multiple perspectives toward how a school shall function or what the collective school personnel deems as worthy of portraying to the public. Research on school culture often resides in such topics as school improvement, change, and school effectiveness (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Metz, 1986; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988) and is philosophical, analytical, and rhetorical rather than empirical (Cusick, 1987; Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Marion, 2002), often based upon personal experiences of teachers, administrators, and school staff. Further complicating the discussion, the term school culture is often used interchangeably with school climate in educational literature.

Whereas culture has dominated the anthropological landscape, climate is rooted in social psychology and industrial psychology (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Climate was originally considered to be one quality of organizational life (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Other qualities of climate include: teachers' perceptions of the work environment, the formal and informal organizational structure of the school and school building, the personalities of the school personnel, and the organizational leadership of the school (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). By pulling apart elements of school climate, a definition separate from school culture begins to emerge.

Several researchers have posed various definitions of school climate, each taking a different approach as to the primary focus of organizational climate. Taguiri (1968) defines climate as "a particular configuration of enduring characteristics of the ecology, milieu, social system" similar to "a particular configuration of personal characteristics [that] constitute a personality" (p. 23). Taguiri defines climate (the superior term) as those moving parts of an organization that fit together in a particular way. This definition fails to give the reader a clear understanding of what either organizational climate or culture really means because it neglects to include the types of systemic configurations a researcher should see when studying organizational climate.

Gilmer (1966) describes organizational climate as "those characteristics (policies, practices, beliefs, values, and behaviors) that distinguish the organization from other organizations and that influence the behavior of people in the organization" (p. 57). Litwin and Stringer (1968) state that organizational climate is "based on the collective perceptions of people who live and work in the environment and demonstrated to influence behavior" (p. 1). Gilmer is vague in his definition of climate characteristics, but so too are Litwin and Stringer in their clear delineation of the term "perceptions." Both of these definitions of organizational climate fail to add clarity to the literature, leaving the researcher questioning terminology and shared meaning when attempting to study organizational school climate.

Authors in the field of organizational climate and culture often argue that both concepts are simply the initial "feeling" one perceives from an environment or "the perception of how things are going" (Furnham & Goodstein, 1997, p. 164) that influences how an individual behaves. This initial feeling may be true for climate, but culture, even

organizational culture, is rooted in deeper understandings than mere gut reactions. Further, issue can be taken with the research in the area of organizational climate. How does one define and study a term based upon gut feelings and manifested perceptions? In addition, how does one accomplish this research in an empirical manner?

The standard definition of *climate* incorporates "weather conditions or a region [such] as temperature, air pressure, humidity, precipitation, sunshine, cloudiness, and winds, throughout the year" (Climate, n.d.). School climate can also be thought of as the "temperature" of the building or the "enduring quality of the school environment" (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p. 210). The temperature (climate) may affect the behaviors of the individuals in the school building; however, climate is not the manifestations of those behaviors based upon deep rooted beliefs, attitudes, and values (culture). Thinking about climate within the boundaries of culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) becomes a clearer way to differentiate between these terms and study them more accurately and effectively.

"The term culture provides a more accurate and intuitively appealing way to … understand … [a] school's own unwritten rules, norms, and expectations" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 2). As the personnel in schools have sets of shared beliefs, practices, and behaviors (Skrtic, 1988), the culture shapes these behaviors and cultivates commitment among the faculty, students, parents, and outside influences. The leadership of the school often "embodies the core values of the school and is instrumental in shaping the school culture" (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014, p. 62) that may or may not be reflected in individual classrooms throughout the school. Understanding a culture requires a deeper understanding of an environment and encompasses more than mere "policy statements,

rhetoric, teachers' reflections or 'voices,' or 'wisdom'" (Popkewitz, 2001, p. 166) and I would add, climate.

Four Intertwined Concepts

Four intertwined concepts are relevant to this study: judgment, entitlement, cumulative advantage, and cumulative disadvantage. A discussion of the possible relationships of these concepts will lead the reader toward a deeper understanding of culture and the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 3.

Judgment

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (n.d.) defines *judgment* as a formal utterance of an option or forming an opinion based upon careful thought. However, research in this area defines judgment differently. The human brain is capable of many things including automatic and controlled responses. An automatic response is one that requires little to no cognitive effort and results in shallow, surface-level responses. In contrast, a controlled response requires more effort as the individual attempts to explore the meaning, validity, and importance of the information gathered.

Social psychologists have studied an individual's ability to use both automatic and controlled responses to create various stereotypes and prejudicial thoughts through judgments. In particular, "automatic responses have been studied as a means by which stereotypes influence perception and judgment" (Wegener, Clark, & Petty, 2006, p. 42). Research on judgment emphasizes the use of heuristics, simple cues, or short cuts that offer an individual a quick and sometimes inaccurate response to gathered information (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994), similar to an automatic response. Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, and Rocher (1994) contend that an individual will make a judgment

based upon either particular diagnostic information about the target (i.e., a surface-level response) or no information at all. People are generally unaware of how they make judgments (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Therefore, judgments are often the result of automatic responses, leading toward a biased decision and perpetuating a given stereotype. "The centrality of the role of judgment makes it a potential source of bias" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 603).

A biased judgment is not always negative, however, and is dependent upon the individual's response to the topic or subject. A judgment could result in a negatively-biased response if the judgment is made quickly, without much information, and no additional thought behind the judgment. Wegener et al. (2006) found judgments and biases remained unchanged when individuals were in situations that required quick responses and additional elaboration was limited.

Additional studies have been conducted in the field of social psychology on the concept of social labels or assimilated judgments based upon provided labels (Eberhardt, Dasgupta, & Banaszynski, 2003). Such labels include socioeconomic status (Darley & Gross, 1983), social class (Rist, 1970), racial group membership (Sagar & Schofield, 1980), race and gender (Rubovitis & Maehr, 1973), and physical attractiveness (Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Built into these labels are particular traits such as physical appearance, which can activate "a particular racial label and associated stereotype. These activations influenced perceivers' interpretation of the behavior producing an assimilation effect on judgments" (Eberhardt et al., 2003, p. 361). As a result, an individual is unlikely to revise or change a judgment about another person even when accounting for new

information that often contradicts the label because the label is perceived as cognitively important.

The cognitive manner in which individuals create judgments has been studied in teacher expectations of students in terms of race and gender. Almost fifty years ago, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found American teachers' evaluations of minority students were based upon their expectations, especially in the lower grades (first and second grade). When teachers expected students to perform, they did and did so at high levels. However, the research also indicated that based upon both race and physical appearance, minority (Hispanic) students with high IQ levels were still rated less favorably than White students with high IQ levels. Regardless of IQ level, minority students may still be judged negatively by teachers in relation to their ability levels. Several years later, Rubovitis and Maehr (1973) noted that Black children received less praise as compared to White children, even in identified gifted classrooms. More recently, Elhoweris, Kagendo, Alsheikh, and Holloway (2005) found teachers referred students of White, middle-class socioeconomic statuses into the gifted and talented programs before considering identifying the Black students in their classrooms. With regard to gender, boys are thought to need more criticism and direction from teachers (Bennett, Guttesman, Rock, & Cerullo, 1993; DeVoe, 1991) and are expected to be more disruptive in the classroom than girls (Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke, & Kakouros, 2003).

"Teachers' biases or assumptions about students' capabilities and behavior can have both major and subtle implications for students' social and academic outcomes" (Parks & Kennedy, 2007, p. 938). When positive judgments are present, students may benefit from equally positive expectations and experiences. In contrast, "inappropriate

judgments would be devastating for students, … and removes the students from opportunities for academic learning" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 609). Further, teachers' judgments about students are "compounded both by the bias inherent in the informal judgments that teachers make and the subsequent formal assessment (as in the case of special education) students undergo as a result" (p. 611). Negative judgments may also result in a decrease in student production and overall academic expectations (Brophy, 1993; Rosenthal, Baratz, & Hall, 1974; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

"Teacher judgments about students' abilities are important for instructional decision making" (Begeny, Krouse, Brown, & Mann, 2011, p. 23) as teachers make daily decisions about instructional materials, teaching strategies, and student-learning groups (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Hoge & Coladarci, 1989; Sharpley & Edgar, 1986) based upon their judgments of students' abilities. Judgments can create expectations of student achievement as teachers base "many of their decisions on what they surmised was happening" (McNair, 1979, p. 32) often predicting how interactions between teacher and student in the classroom lead to what, if any, academic opportunities offered to students. For example, teacher judgments about student behaviors may become determinants for long-term educational decisions about students including (but not limited to) eligibility decisions for special education (Hurwitz, Elliott, & Braden, 2007) or gifted education services (Cadwell & Jenkins, 1986; Good & Brophy, 1986). Gerber (2005) found that teachers process information about their students through "a series of teaching trials and perceives some range of students as within the teachable range" (p. 516) before any additional data is collected on students. The question remains: Are teacher perceptions enough to make accurate judgments about current and future student achievement?

Interestingly, teacher judgments made about student achievement may trump collected student data. A study by Begeny, Eckert, Montarello, and Storie (2008) found teachers inaccurately judged average and low-level reading fluency performance in their students before given collected data on each student. Hurwitz et al. (2007) determined that teachers made inaccurate judgments about a student's mathematical ability based upon a standardized test. These teachers consistently underestimated the ability of the students, especially those with a diagnosed disability. Further, Eckert, Dunn, Codding, Begeny, and Kleinmann (2006) found that second grade teachers inaccurately judged student achievement in mathematical and reading fluency especially for those students at the lowest level (or frustration level). These teachers needed to use grade-level materials to judge students accurately before receiving student achievement data on all student ability levels. In a recent study of teacher judgments about student abilities in reading, Begeny et al. (2011) found that slightly more than half of the teachers accurately identified the skill levels of their students, but their accuracy was associated more often with high-performing students. Of the 27 teacher participants, roughly half (57.5%) accurately identified actual reading levels of their students. However, these same teachers did not judge their low- or average-performing students well and often overestimated their abilities (62.9% of the students were overestimated). Without additional student data information, teachers are not the most accurate judges of student ability and achievement.

Entitlement

Often individuals researching teacher behaviors accept teacher testimonies as evidence of knowledge that informs their teaching practices. But this type of narrative

research is flawed. One flaw is accepting that a teacher's personal narrative matches her personal knowledge; in other words, does what a teacher believe actually translate into practices in the classroom? Arguably, a teacher's ethical views (or an individual's moral philosophy on how to interact with other human beings) can be different than her practical views (what behavior is actually used and seen; Argyris & Schön, 1974) resulting in certain students in the classroom receiving different or unequal treatment, translating into advantages or disadvantages. The teacher may, in fact, believe that certain students are entitled to receive such treatment, advantages, and disadvantages for a variety of reasons, namely personal attributes, class, and economic levels, based upon her ethical views. Here, "entitlement is a defense for beliefs and behaviors.... Entitlement is a based on teleological explanations, which are interpretive in nature. They do not require a correspondence conception of truth" (Caduri, 2013, p. 38). But are not all students entitled to receive the academic opportunities they need?

The concept of entitlement is derived from "epistemology of testimony within which philosophers have tried to form the conditions under which one can obtain knowledge on the basis of a testimony" (Caduri, 2013, p. 47). Individuals accept knowledge as truth based upon particular and acceptable information gathered. This information is often gathered *a priori* and assumes, without evidence, that a speaker or piece of knowledge is trustworthy and true. Not only are we "entitled to believe a person's telling as long as we lack reasons to doubt it" (Caduri, 2013, p. 48), entitlement "requires no positive reasons to support it" (p. 47). As a result, we accept experts and people in authority roles as speaking the truth often before we check their credentials against their message. Can the same be said for teachers in the classroom who gather

knowledge on students and determine whether or not these students are entitled to particular academic opportunities or not? Are teachers creating an accurate representation of their students if information is gathered a priori and assumed as truth when making determinations on which classroom practices to use/obtain for particular students?

The school system and classroom may reproduce various ideological philosophies that then segregate or oppress those individuals who do not adhere to prevalent societal standards.

> School is one of those state apparatuses that generate dominant ideologies. School as an institution can be at the heart of exclusion, as it combines repressive and ideological mechanisms. The curriculum that has been selected as well as the cultural behaviors exhibited can challenge educational equality regarding race, gender, special needs, sexual diversity, and social class. (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010, p. 180)

Entitlement then transforms from an assumption of faith or trust in someone or something to a concept that carries the caveat of certain privileges or services that are owed to another person. Arguably, teachers can negate these philosophies and still act equitably toward all students. However, if a teacher does succumb to the pressures of schools or state political views it is often in the form of inclusion/exclusion, specifically toward those students who can or cannot conform to the norms of society or a school setting (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). A teacher may believe that a student is entitled to a particular academic opportunity or not because of the students' sociocultural identity

rather than seeking the truth about a student's individual ability before making any determination.

Within the field of education, the literature and research on entitlement encompasses three main but limited areas: students deemed eligible to receive services and what services they are receiving, such as students eligible for and receiving services in either special education or gifted education; preservice teacher training models that include new teachers learning skills to employ professional classroom practices toward all students; and preservice teacher training courses that offer new teachers the opportunity to explore their own identity construction to better understand and accept all students in their classrooms. Absent is any exploration of the concept of entitlement in terms of analyzing teachers' cultural perspectives and how these perspectives shape teacher classroom practices or provide or deny academic opportunities for students.

In the case of special education, entitlement often refers to "the allocation of resources, placement, and individual rights" pertaining to the law (Corbett, 2001, p. 117) and the result of a student's individualized education plan (IEP). In both the United States (IDEA, 2004) and England (Corbett, 2001; Jordan & Powell, 1994; White, 1991), students receiving special education services are entitled to education appropriate for their needs. For education of gifted students, another form of special education services for students, researchers argue that students with high potential should be entitled to sufficient stimulation and education. Without any legal backing, however, educators argue the means by which gifted students are entitled to realize, fulfill, or reach their potential (Freeman, 1994; George, 1994; Lafrance, 1997). According to Bibby (1998), educational practice on teaching gifted students should include resources set aside for

other students. Bibby (1998) argues that educating gifted students appeals to the notion that "we may hope students of high potential will provide for us all" (p. 50) and therefore, these students should receive more resources and services than other non-gifted identified students. Regardless of special or gifted education services, the laws and literature are clear: students identified as such are entitled to receive their share of specialized educational opportunities.

Preservice teacher training models include competency-based teacher education, reflective teacher education, and constructivist teacher education (Téllez, 2007). The models promote skills to be used in classrooms with diverse populations of students; skills including studying diversity, multiculturalism, and whiteness or the institution of white privilege (Roman, 1993; Sleeter, 1993; Tantum, 1992). Here, entitlement is defined as creating a "space between us and them" (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 264). Some teachers, in turn, construct racial differences among students and themselves while accepting the notion that one race or type of individual dominates over another, thus justifying certain advantages or entitlements. More than a decade ago, Levine-Rasky (2000) found that White teacher candidates continue to justify their "racist practices in order to sustain their disjuncture from the effects of an unjust social order" (p. 278). By preserving a sense of entitlement, teacher candidates are able to legitimize forms of exclusion of particular students with different sociocultural identities. Any tension created by the "space between us and them" is softened due to an individual conforming to known and acknowledged standards, ideas, and thoughts about their own sociocultural identity, however, inaccurate they may be.

At Murdoch University in Western Australia, preservice teachers are required to complete a unit titled Education for Social Justice. The purpose of this unit is to allow students the opportunity to identify their own whiteness and to provide research and strategies "that move beyond feelings of guilt" (Aveling et al., 2012, p. 1) and examine and accept diverse student populations. Brown (2004) studied the effects of using a diversity awareness inventory on preservice teachers in a multicultural course. She found that the message of the course must include an examination of self-concept, perception, motivation, and probing into one's own history and belief system in order to change current beliefs and reduce student resistance. Similarly, Garmon (2004) interviewed one 22-year-old white female teacher candidate in a case study and found that after attending his mandatory teacher training course, her multicultural development included embracing openness to diversity, self-awareness/self-reflection throughout the course, and a personal commitment to social justice as a result of the information and skills received during the course. The transformation of this one student as seen in her ability to explore her own identity before accepting diverse students in her classroom, prompted Garmon to reconsider, and ultimately reconstruct, his course to seek similar results of future students. Creating a vision of multiculturalism through many means, including self-reflection/identity construction have been shown to offer preservice teachers the ability to successfully make sense of diversity and move toward accepting diverse student populations in their classrooms (De Freitas, 2008; Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The Matthew Effect and Cumulative Advantage

First coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1968, cumulative advantage refers to the phenomenon wherein certain training, location, and available resources "make for successive increments of advantage such that the gaps between the haves and the have-nots … widen until dampened by countervailing processes" (Merton, 1988, p. 606). Merton believed that the advantage an individual has continues to accumulate over time unless something (or someone) intervenes. In their research on Nobel laureates, Zuckerman (1998) revealed that eminent scientists get disproportionately more credit for their contributions to science than relatively unknown, novice scientists for their occasional contributions. Merton noted this phenomenon as "the 41st chair" (Merton, 1968, p. 1). As the French Academy deems only 40 individuals who "could qualify as members and so emerge as immortals" in the field of science, those who were not deemed admission due to a fixed number of spaces may have had scientific contributions equal or exceeding those who gained acceptance but remain without the same level of career recognition. Therefore, giving credit to more successful scientists yields more cumulative advantage for these individuals over those who are less known in the field. Further, Merton noted that unless something (i.e., a resource or opportunity) or someone (i.e., a mentor in the field) intervened, the advantage (or disadvantage) continues to accumulate over time and the individual becomes very successful or a relative unknown commodity within the scientific community.

The concept of a fixed number of occupants for the 40 chairs in the case of the French Academy poses a problem: many compete for the 41st chair. Other individuals who were limited by training, location, and available resources as well as those deemed

"late bloomers" who advanced in their scientific fields at a less rapid rate than their peers garner little prestige both within and outside of the scientific community. These individuals either compete for the 41st chair when they are able or never meet the requirements for this high level of distinction. Thus, similar to Bourdieu, a system is created where individuals fit neatly into categories and rarely gain access to other stratifications within the system.

The same unequal distancing of opportunities can occur to students in a public school classroom (DiPrete & Elrich, 2006). Those students who progress at rapid rates in content areas may be offered opportunities that are fixed in number; only a certain number of students can participate in the gifted program or science club. Therefore, students who advance academically at slower rates due to a variety of factors related to their personal attributes, class, or socioeconomic status may not be given opportunities to participate in such activities, thus limiting or even eliminating possible advancement and full potential. As Merton (1968) notes, the cycle of the 41st chair being perpetuated in other fields is due to "continuing interplay between the status system, based on honor and esteem, and the class system, based on differential life chances" (p. 2).

The 41st chair phenomenon continues into scholarly systems of reward. Labeled the *Matthew effect*, Merton devised the metaphor from the gospel according to St. Matthew: "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (King James Version, 13:12 and 25:29). In other words, the Matthew effect explains the social phenomenon in which some scholars (or students) receive larger increments of peer recognition for particular contributions while recognition of those individuals "who have

not yet made their mark" is minimized or withheld (Merton, 1988, p. 609). Thus the concept of the Matthew effect means that certain individuals gain a cumulative advantage over others not situated in academic or other pursuits for reasons aforementioned leaving the rates of overall gain relative and proportional to those training opportunities, location of the individual, and resources as related to personal attributes, class, or socioeconomic status.

Additional opportunities can also lead to additional rewards resulting in the distance between those who receive advantages and those who do not growing over time. "Cumulative advantage as an explanation of growing inequality… has a direct causal relationship on future levels" (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006, p. 272) magnifying small differences in individuals who are labeled as behind in educational development. This process creates and maintains a social structure that distributes chances for significant work products on a stratified basis (Zuckerman, 1970). As explanatory as this concept is, references to cumulative advantage remains scarce in the field of education and educational practices.

One reason for the lack of research employing cumulative advantage in the field of education is that overall the results of the Matthew effect have been considered fair play. Some individuals "begin the race, some drop out along the way, some finish in record time, and others finish very slowly" (Clark & Corcoran, 1986, p. 24). Further, certain advantaged individuals can still face challenges along the way. Without additional probing, these justifications offer researchers an opportunity to ignore the phenomenon of cumulative advantage and its implications, in particular, on students in the public school system. Arguably, further questions could be asked about whether the

Matthew effect is truly fair for all individuals. Is the Matthew effect fair because it supports all students or only those who represent the status quo? What happens to students who begin "the race" at different times or stages? Are they able to get appropriate opportunities and challenges along the way or are opportunities missed due to timing, individual maturation, or someone's inability to see a student as worthy or able?

Merton's Matthew effect has been used occasionally to analyze school systems as well as professional fields. In an early application of Merton's concept, Alan Gregg (1957) explained that when schools advance students based on chronological age rather than ability, they are set up for disadvantage. In addition, academic opportunities such as mentorships and scholarships are also offered only to those students "who are uncommonly bright for their age" (pp. 125-126). Gregg states, "In other words, you have rewarded precocity, which may or may not be the precursor of later ability. So, in effect, you have unwittingly belittled man's cardinal educational capital—time to mature" (pp. 125-126). In education, teachers may determine a student's academic ability prematurely based upon one standardized and age-generated measure and not a collection of various measurements over time. If teachers rely on the former types of measurement, they may be led to believe that one student's academic ability is static and the result of a yearly, generated number on one measurement rather than a dynamic, composition of many measurements and opportunities offered to them.

Gregg (1957) also noted that an institutionalized bias toward precocity yields different consequences in students of various social classes and groups.

> The potential late bloomers in the less privileged social strata are more likely to lose out altogether than their counterparts in the middle and upper strata. If poor

> [youths] are not precocious, if they don't exhibit great ability early in their lives and so are not rewarded by scholarships and other sustaining grants, they drop out of school and in many instances never get to realize their potentialities. (pp. 125-126)

Students from "well-to-do" parents have better prospects for recognition (belated or otherwise) because of the values of this social class. Parents from the lower social strata may not recognize or support their children's efforts, ultimately leading away from possible potential. "The bias toward precocity in our institutions thus works profound [and ordinarily hidden] damage on the [potential] late bloomers with few economic or social advantages" (Greg, 1957, pp. 125-126).

In another early study based on the Equality of Educational Opportunity National Survey, Coleman et al. (1966) found that although cumulative advantage increased steadily with each grade level, students of higher socioeconomic groups who scored higher in earlier grades, continued to score higher throughout their educational career due to overall economic and social advantages as well as positive educational values perpetuated by their parents over time. Similarly, Cook, Appleton, Connor, and Schaffer (1975) found children who watched Sesame Street and reflectively discussed the program with their parents on a regular basis (a practice often encouraged by middle-class parents) increased their academic cumulative advantage over time as compared to poor and lower middle-class children who simply watched the program and received no additional parental interaction about the program's contents. DiPrete and Eirich (2006) also reasoned that failure of some individuals to be exposed to various opportunities such as discussing rather than simply watching an educational program, affected the quality of

their learning opportunities as well as future wealth accumulation and career development and attainment. Using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 1977, Walberg and Tsai (1983) also found that early educational experiences (in the field of science and science-related activities) and the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of individuals and families were significant contributors to overall achievement in an individual's educational career and life experiences.

In addition to a lack of economic and social advantages, some students have limited access to various academic opportunities. Zuckerman (1998) and Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) note that individuals differ in their maturation rates in learning various disciplines. Related to exposure, class origin may dictate how or when an individual conceptually understands or grasps a particular subject area (Zuckerman, 1998). Individuals of a particular class may be more inclined to understand classical music, for example, due to a higher rate of participation in concerts and classical music experiences. In addition, the maturation rate of individuals participating in certain academic disciplines can determine how or when an individual is exposed to such opportunities. An individual may show possible aptitude toward mathematics at a young age (through a good sense of numbers and counting) but may not be able to understand or show achievement in psychology, for example, until achieving further study and an advanced degree later in life (Subotnik et al., 2011). Therefore, a student who excels in mathematics may be offered opportunities earlier in his/her life because the rate of talent and ability coincide and are easily recognized by adults. A student with possible abilities in social sciences, however, may not be recognized early in his/her life because he/she has not matured mentally to show aptitude in these disciplines. Educators may or may

not have tolerance for late bloomers; yet the slow maturation may be extra-individual factors such as class or exposure to certain academic disciplines. "Generalized, these conjectures hold that *contextual differences* such as social class or fields of intellectual activity as well as *individual differences* in the pattern of intellectual growth affect the likelihood of success and failure" (Merton, 1988, p. 616; Italics in original).

Removing the status/reward aspect associated with the concept, Stanovich (1986) developed a Matthew effect model for reading literacy that demonstrates a path-dependent process of cumulative advantage for learners. Here, reading literacy was broken down into subcomponents (word recognition and language comprehension) of the reading process. In his seminal work, Stanovich states, "the cumulative advantage phenomenon is almost inextricably embedded within the developmental course of reading progress…. A person with more experience has a larger knowledge base, and the large knowledge base allows that person to acquire even greater expertise at a faster rate [in reading]" (p. 381). Following Stanovich's lead, additional reading researchers have explored levels of decoding ability (Bast & Reitsma, 1997), recognition skills (Bast & Reitsma, 1998), reading skills and self-concept (Aunola, Leskinen, Onatsu-Arvilommi, & Nurmi, 2002), elementary reading instruction for bilingual students (Carreker et al., 2007), vocabulary skills of preschool children (Hindman, Erhart, & Wasik, 2012), and struggling college readers (Ari, 1996).

A study conducted by Carreker et al. (2007) found that elementary students rich in reading comprehension skills "became richer over time" and "many early poor readers became relatively poorer over time" (p. 203). Student standardized test scores between first and fifth grades showed such slow growth becoming limiting factors in academic

achievement, especially in the area of reading. Here, reading skills quickly became an indicator of cumulative intellectual advantage or disadvantage that may lead to or deter current and future educational opportunities for these students. In addition, Shaywitz et al.'s (1995) longitudinal study of student reading abilities discovered that when learning stops or slows down, students' achievement levels do not remain static but fall behind because others continue to move forward; thus, the cycle of disadvantage continues.

The applicability of the Matthew effect garners mixed results in reading research however and is heavily dependent upon the developmental period under investigation. The effect is found only in early phases of competency acquisition (Baumert, Nagy, & Lehman, 2012) and may appear to be reversed as children continue in school because some learn compensation processes and employ them when struggling (Parrila, Aunola, Leskinen, Nurmi, & Kirby, 2005; Skibbe et al., 2008). Baumert et.al (2012) found students of different ethnic and social groups using compensation strategies for their lack of abilities in school, experience negatively accelerated developmental trajectories. The overall experience is a net reduction in cumulative disadvantages over time. Therefore, any compensation strategies used by students make the source of the cumulative advantage or disadvantage unclear.

In sum, cumulative advantage has been utilized in research with four main connotations (Scholz & Levine, 2004). First, in the process of cumulative advantage, the rate of growth functions as a variable related to outcome. Second, even small advantages (or disadvantages) at an early stage accumulate and grow larger over time. Third, the process of cumulative advantage interacts with other factors (e.g., race, gender, social status, economic status, etc.) but the effects of these factors can be unequal for some

individuals. Finally, a consequence of cumulative advantage is a growing inequality between those who have opportunities and those who do not.

Cumulative Disadvantage

Literature on cumulative disadvantage is even more scarce than that of cumulative advantage. One reason is that it is easier and more appealing to study advantages, focusing on the positive rather than negative opportunities for individuals. Further, by focusing on advantages the literature offers readers insights into individuals who are successful. Focusing on disadvantages has often blamed the victim rather than carefully probing the institution that created the disadvantage.

Schuster and Van Dyne's (1984) stage model probed deeply into the blind exclusion and potential inclusion of women in liberal arts curriculum. Each stage describes a process progressing through curricular change, namely, the evolution of how women [and by extrapolation minorities] have been and should be represented in the curriculum. As the literature on advantages and disadvantages progressed, Banks (1993) adopted this stage perspective to describe four levels of integration of multicultural content into curriculum; his work has been used widely in multicultural literature to show deficit thinking related to minority cultures. As Schuster and Van Dyne focus on the deficit in the content approach of the curriculum as sanctioned by academe, Banks argues on the part of the minority victim. From which viewpoint should cumulative disadvantage lie: On the disadvantage adopted and promoted in the curriculum by the institutionalized academic perspective or on the disadvantaged individual?

Cumulative disadvantage is not simply the lack of advantages (training, location, and resources). The phenomenon of cumulative disadvantage is also the result of

individuals being judged negatively or blocked from opportunities of advantage by a particular dominant or more advantaged group. Clark and Corcoran (1986) argued that the success of pre-World War II women faculty in academe was dependent on the accumulation of advantages and disadvantages during their academic careers. Women seeking employment in academe were either blocked from faculty positions entirely or had limited advancement in the male-dominated career. In addition, early disadvantages came from negative or conflicting messages from their male peers, mentors, and advisors. Using Feldman's (1976) three-stage concept of differential socialization, Clark and Corcoran found that if a woman does not gain access to a selected occupational path through an avenue such as faculty sponsorship, the result will limit resources and advantages as well as her future occupational opportunities.

Similarly, Primack and O'Leary (1988) studied women in ecology professions to test Clark and Corcoran's theory of cumulative disadvantage. They also concluded women (single and married, senior and junior faculty members) suffered from cumulative disadvantage beginning in graduate school and continuing throughout their careers. At this stage in academe, men had more of an advantage. Women due to the disadvantages in graduate school did not publish as much, receive "higher salaries, reach high academic positions, have greater job security, or feel more successful in their professional lives" (Primack & O'Leary, 1988, p. 164) than men.

Just as some students are provided with academic opportunities leading to an accumulation of advantages in learning, conversely others are either not provided with opportunities or begin with an initial disadvantage. For them, cumulative disadvantages in learning persist over time (Shaywitz et al., 1995). Students who do well at the start are

rewarded more often, creating "early motivation capital," and continuing higher growth rates of academic skills and achievement (Stanovich, 1986). In addition, it is not simply the lack of advantages an individual accumulates but the institutional blocking of advantages for certain students (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Primack & O'Leary, 1988).

Arguably, individuals who experience relative disadvantages compared with their peers need more than academic opportunities and role models. Those who fail to develop, maintain high aspirations, or experience successful outcomes may need "to be surrounded by enough examples of success to believe that it is actually possible for them to attain [successful path, high aspirations, etc.]" (McClelland, 1990, p. 104). Analyzing data from the National Study of High School Class of 1972, McClelland found those individuals who developed highly ambitious tendencies often grew up in "relatively privileged social strata —as defined, for example, by social class, gender, race, ethnicity, or region" (p. 104).

Using the habitus filter from Bourdieu, as described earlier, cumulative advantages and disadvantage continue to intensify as time progresses. Successes, failures, encouragements, and discouragements are interpreted and responded to differently by an individual based upon the impact of past and present life experiences, that is, habitus. Individuals who have multiple successes to draw upon, perceive, and imagine future paths of success, whereas individuals who fight and constantly have to struggle against various odds, perceive setbacks as detrimental to their current and future path for success. Although less than one fifth of the highly ambitious individuals in McClelland's analysis remained on track to achieve their goals, he noted that those individuals who came from more privileged social groups, attained higher educational

goals by attending above average/elite collegiate institutions and were married, resulted in less cumulative disadvantage. Individuals are sorted by more than just ability. "Certain groups occupy a relatively privileged position in this process [of cumulative advantage/disadvantage]… and are able to maintain or even increase this advantage by the operation of a largely indirect process of cumulative disadvantage" (McClelland, 1990, p. 118). Thus, those individuals who have more capital (social status, opportunities, etc.) often achieve more than those who have less.

Summary

I have noted that systems, even educational systems, are not perfect and do not provide all students with the opportunities they may need. With a change in both student and teacher demographics nationally, there exists a disconnection between racial, economic, and cultural understandings. Due to these differences in understandings, teachers within an educational system may or may not provide the educational opportunities for all of their students.

As a result, it is important to understand the root of the issue: What is culture? Beginning with an overview, culture is the collective (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) and behavioral (Bohannan, 1963) phenomenon that encompasses the dimensions of customs, behaviors, patterns, and practices (American Anthropological Association, 2015). The elemental properties of culture, as described in detail in this chapter, include beliefs, attitudes, and values. Behaviors and symbols become the manifestations of culture that provide an outsider perspective to the meaningful clues about a culture.

Three views/perspectives of culture were unpacked in this chapter: the anthropological view, business/organizational culture perspective, and the educational

perspective. The anthropological view of culture interprets culture as the system, whereas organizational and educational perspectives view culture as part of a social system. It was also noted the difference between climate and culture; the former being the quality of organizational life (Hoy & Miskel, 2013) and the personality and feeling about an environment (Furnham & Goodstein, 1997).

In addition, three intertwined concepts including judgment, entitlement, and cumulative advantage/disadvantage were explored. Judgment is the automatic, biased responses created from information obtained but not based on data. Entitlement is the defense for behaviors that are interpretative and not based on truth. Additional areas of entitlement as seen in educational settings include students receiving academic services, preservice teaching models, and preservice coursework in higher education programs. Finally, cumulative advantage or the Matthew effect is based upon Merton's concept of the 41st chair and the training, particular location, and resources offered to an individual that provides advantages therefore incrementally widening the gap between the haves and have nots. Cumulative disadvantage is not just the lack of advantage in an effort to associate blame or create a victim, rather, it is carefully probing the institution for reasons behind the disadvantage, if at all.

How do these intertwined concepts relate? In all three concepts, sociocultural identities play a role. In addition, an understanding about culture both as the system and as part of a larger system, incorporate judgments made, ideas about entitlement, and who is advantaged or disadvantaged. As we move toward Chapter 3 and the in-depth understanding of the study's theoretical framework and methodology, some larger questions the study may uncover include: Is cumulative advantage/disadvantage the result

of fair play or the possible result of one individual's judgment or belief of entitlement over another? How do the cultural factors of beliefs, attitudes, and values play a role in determining judgments, entitlements, or advantages/disadvantages? Are there direct links between judgment, entitlement, and advantage/disadvantage or do other factors play a role? If so, what are these other factors?

Chapter 3

Methodology

The problem this quasi-ethnographic study explored, within one heterogeneous elementary school setting, is the possible relationship between the culture of the school personnel (first grade teacher participants) and the degree to which these teachers' understandings about various sociocultural identities of their students relate both to the practices in their classrooms and to any academic advantages or disadvantages afforded to students. In short: What do these teachers know and understand about themselves that translate into various educational practices, judgments, and accurate allocation of resources (entitlement) for their students?

Using participant-observation, this research sought evidence from the teachers of their cultural perspectives and how these views manifest into particular behaviors within the classroom setting. It questions whether or not factors behind individual ideas of culture determine if, how, and to what extent academic opportunities for students are distributed and offered to various types of students in the school population.

Conceptual Framework

> *Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery*.
>
> - Horace Mann, Educator, 1848

Horace Mann believed that education provides citizens with opportunities to better both themselves and society. In a commencement address 163 years later at

Fayetteville State University, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Brenchley, 2011) reiterated Mann's dictum: "Education is still the great equalizer." Theoretically by providing all students with access to education, the United States has a chance to train each individual with the necessary skills to become a positive contributing member of society. However, as noted in Chapter 1, students are given access to or denied various academic opportunities based upon many factors. This research attempts to gain an understanding of some additional underlying reasons for the disparities between understanding the educational system as an equalizer for all students and the accessibility of this system that still exist today.

As described in Chapter 2, the student population in public schools is continuing to become more diverse racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically. Little has changed, however, in the make-up of teaching population; it remains White, female, and from the middle class. Both the students and teachers bring into the classrooms of our schools their own learned beliefs, values, attitudes and related behaviors (Barrett, 1984) —that is, their cultures. These cultures originate from interactions between individuals and members of families and other social environments such as their homes, schools, churches, etc. The individual student brings his or her culture to school and then interacts with the cultures within the collective school, composed of those of the teachers, school personnel, and other students. When the student and teacher cultures differ, at least two outcomes are possible. Either the teachers believe that all students can and should receive appropriate and advantageous academic opportunities, regardless of the possibility of opportunity for the student, which fosters an accepting cultural orientation. Or, teachers may believe that only some students are deemed worthy or capable enough

to be truly educated, thus promoting an unaccepting culture. Within this latter situation, some students may become educationally devalued and disadvantaged. In this case, is education the great equalizer for *all* students?

Behaviors as the manifestations of cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values, are understood by individuals as well as social groups and practiced in patterned manners. Obviously within a complex society, the attitudes, values and beliefs of all individuals are not uniform. This lack of homogeneity is due, in part, to observation, imitation, or instruction by sub-group members yet, a certain amount of conformity helps to maintain cultural norms and thus social regularity. Goodenough's (1971) definition of culture is the pattern of shared ideas and conceptual designs of how individuals learn and decide standards for knowing, feeling, and acting. Barrett's understanding of human behavior becomes the standard for how a person contextualizes their world. These definitions together also act as the basis for this research on teachers' cultural understandings and the possible affects these understandings have on academic opportunities for students. In this study, I am adopting a definition of culture that blends the conceptualizations of culture of both Goodenough (1971) and Barrett (1984). Culture consists of patterns of shared ideas and conceptual designs, learned through enculturation that enable standards of knowing, feeling, and acting (Goodenough, 1971). Further, human behavior, symbols, and artifacts (material culture) are the manifestation of culture, reflecting the standards by which a person contextualizes his or her world (Barrett, 1984). Through these definitions of culture, I gained insight as to how teachers conceptualize the culture that they foster in their classroom and how that culture relates to the different sociocultural identities of their students. It is through these understandings that I will explore the types and

meaning of the pedagogical and organizational judgments the teachers make and determine if, how, and to what extent academic advantages or disadvantages result for certain students.

Components of Culture

As a part of the concept of culture, behavior as the manifestation of culture provides clues to its components of beliefs, attitudes, and values. Symbols also help researchers understand a group's culture better. Below are detailed descriptions of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and values and a conceptualization of how these components are related to each other and important pieces to this research study.

Behaviors

The term *behavior* can be defined as "the way a person or animal acts or behaves" (Behavior, n.d.). Unlike animals, however, behaviors are actions that human beings exhibit that directly relate to their experiences (Keesing, 1958). Behaviors are not only defined as "the way one conducts oneself" but also as "the response of an individual, group, or species to its environment" (Behavior, n.d.).

Human behaviors are a product of learning, have meaning, and are rooted in environmental and cultural influences. This study will incorporate *teacher behaviors* or those actions or visual symbols the teacher exhibits inside the classroom and school building. Behaviors exhibited by the teacher can be between a teacher and his/her colleague(s), between a teacher and a student, or an action within the classroom or school environment (e.g., how the teacher wanders around the classroom, how and where she stands to teach, etc.). Particular to this study are the behaviors exhibited as related to the manifestation of a teacher's beliefs, attitudes, and values about culture.

Symbols

Those who study culture agree on the meaning of the concept of symbols; they represent meaning. "Symbols are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who share the culture" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 7). Symbols convey the ideas, feelings, and images developed by the individuals within a culture to characterize themselves from others (Schein, 1992). According to Geertz (1973), individuals need symbols to create meaning that is interpreted, deciphered, and understood by those in the culture. Symbols:

> enable man [sic] to accumulate and transmit (learn and teach) information and change what he has learned by relating isolated events. Symbols make it possible to remember the past, interpret the present, and project the future. … Symbolic thought and behavior gives meaning to man's existence, and that is the foundation of man and his culture. (Guggenheim, 1968, p. 46)

Although symbols are unique to a particular culture they can be copied by other cultures, even though new meanings may be attached. The pictogram of the swastika, for example, has been used differently by Japanese, Hinduism, and Buddhism prior to being adopted by Nazism (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014). Prestige, a belief that carries certain values and attitudes, is represented through various symbols in diverse cultures. The swastika to Nazi Germans represented national pride and a pure race —a race that was believed by some to be superior and carried more prestige than all others. Within an American office culture, a symbol of prestige may be a spacious corner office with wall-to-wall windows and a private entrance. The individual who occupies this office space is recognized as an important asset to the company and office culture

because these combined symbols carry a high level of prestige. Symbols can also be modified as they develop or change to meet the needs of the individuals or the organization within a culture. If the same company downsizes due to an economic downturn, the individual who once occupied a spacious corner office symbolically may now occupy the largest desk in a corner of the room away from the hubbub of others.

Caution should be taken when interpreting and understanding cultural symbols. Schein (1992) argues that inferring the meaning of symbols can be dangerous because inevitably an outsider's thoughts and feelings may be projected and interpreted with an inaccurate cultural representation. In addition, researchers interpret symbols differently. However, if the researcher asks enough questions of the participants, he/she should be able to interpret the symbols according to the groups' understanding of the symbol and its representation.

Beliefs

"Beliefs are the deeply personal, individual truths one holds about physical and social reality and about self" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 16). Beliefs can be a powerful influence on how individuals view others as well as themselves. They are deeply personal and often formed by an intense personal experience or a succession of events. For example, a professor may structure a course on social studies for elementary preservice teachers to impart specific concepts because she believes that social studies should be taught with a values-based perspective. She believes that the field of social studies is not valued as highly as it should be in public schools and it should be an integral part of the education of all students. The professor teaches a social studies course in this manner because she believes that an in-depth understanding of social studies provides students with necessary

information to become positive contributing members of society. Becoming a contributing member of society is the professor's personal and professional deeply rooted belief.

Beliefs are resistant to change (Bandura, 1986; Bruner, 1996; Pajares, 1992) and have a strong influence on behavior, arguably more so than cognitive knowledge (Bandura, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Rokeach, 1968). Whereas reason and evidence support and occasionally alter knowledge, beliefs change only by a "conversation or gestalt shift" (Nespor, 1987, p. 321).

A belief at times has little connection to logic or reality and for many is not open to critical examination or evaluation. "Personal beliefs have such a strong effect that even in professional practice, personal beliefs are a greater predictor of a person's behavior than personal knowledge" (Bandura, 1986, p. 70). This effect makes beliefs more inflexible and less dynamic than knowledge. Studies have indicated that when personal beliefs conflict with professional knowledge, these beliefs are shown to override professional knowledge in the end (Pajares, 1992; Pohan, 1996; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). "A belief may be held in spite of empirical evidence to the contrary for reasons that have nothing to do with productive utility" (Goodenough, 1963, p. 70). This may be due, in part, to the episodic and emotional nature of beliefs as well as the influence on guiding images from past events and the environment (Goodman, 1988). "Once beliefs are formed, individuals have a tendency to build casual explanations surrounding the aspects of those beliefs, whether these explanations are accurate or mere invention" (Pajares, 1992, p. 317). To sum, a belief:

> covers all matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future. (Dewey, 1933, p. 6)

Attitudes

Psychologists use the term attitudes to describe beliefs that are connected to one another or as a substructure of an individual's belief system. Through complex and intricate connections attitudes are beliefs about constructs (Rokeach, 1968). Like beliefs, individuals can have attitudes about many things including schooling, learning, and students. "Clusters of beliefs around a particular object or situation form attitudes that become action agendas" (Pajaras, 1992, p. 319). An individual's attitude contains many different beliefs and other attitudes that guide one's way of interpreting life, additional information, and behaviors for even larger constructs such as personal attributes, race, and class. "Attitudes are held by specific people, about specific objects and situations" (Hayden, 1988, p. 421).

Attitudes involve a personal view of a construct, object, or situation. Rokeach (1978) claimed that objects and situations have meaning because of the attitudes that are activated within an individual. Through attitudinal responses to signs and symbols cultural environments and society are made more complex (Hayden, 1988). If everyday activities mold attitudes, cultural changes may occur when attitudes become inconsistent with beliefs and values. However, society may only experience these changes when both attitudes and beliefs are altered. One example of attitudes playing a role in teaching comes from a study conducted by Bingham, Haubrich, White, and Zipp (1990). The

authors found that teachers held high positive racial attitudes toward students attending a desegregated school and wanted to have a diverse population of students attend their school. However, these same teachers did not want their own children attending such a school. Here, context-specific beliefs by teachers have created particular attitudes about the students, their abilities, and the quality of a particular school setting. This resulted in the teachers seeing some students (those minority students living in the neighborhood) as able to attend a desegregated school but believing that this type of school environment was not good enough for their own children to attend.

Values

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), values are the core of culture. Values are the "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (p. 8). They are acquired early in life and deal with both positive and negative aspects of our lives (good versus evil or abnormal versus normal). Values are created from the inner associations between feelings and meaning (Goodenough, 1963). "We do not simply value some things positively and other things negatively. The same objects can both gratify and pain us" (Goodenough, 1963, p. 74). For example, we may want to tell our friend we do not like her new hairstyle but lie instead and say we like it as to not hurt her feelings. Here, the feelings of our friend are valued more than the truth although it may not feel good to lie to her.

But unlike beliefs and attitudes, values are fixed. Often values are what individuals cannot explain or discuss. Rather, they are an unconscious action or reaction that can only be inferred by others when observing a culture. Thus, the study of values is complex and ambiguous. Researchers may ask an individual in a culture why they are

doing what they are doing, only to get an ambiguous response (Schein, 1992). "If one asks why they act as they do, people may say they just 'know' or 'feel' how to do the right thing. Their heart or their conscious tells them" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 10) what to do, how to act, or what information should be used when making a decision. Even though individuals may not know where the root of the value, they are certain to have a personal, valued reaction in a given situation. For example, "people form their identities and self-images in terms of cultural values" (Guggenheim, 1968, p. 56) and, in turn, use these personal values to "judge others by their own standards" (p. 54). Here, individual values are juxtaposed onto others to further understand or make judgments about what is unknown.

Even with personal sets of values toward things, individuals existing in similar conditions or environments can have or adopt similar value sets. "People will have experienced much of the same things in similar ways" (Goodenough, 1971, p. 27) due to similar conditions under which individuals grow up. Individual preferences of private values can be ranked differently; however, the sense that individuals are connected to positive and negative orientations feels comforting and creates solidarity. However, individuals who are part of the same culture can have differing values. This diversity is due, in part, to individuals existing in multiple sub-cultures throughout their lifetimes as well as the complexity of understanding culture as the system in which individuals exist or the interacting system between the culture and its larger societal context.

Figure 1 visually represents the three main elements of culture as previously described. Values are positioned in the center of the diagram because they represent the broader, core of the understanding of culture. Beliefs are in the middle circle to represent

a personal truth developed within the context of an individual's environment. Attitudes are on the outside of the circle because they are a constellation of beliefs about constructs (Rokeach, 1968).

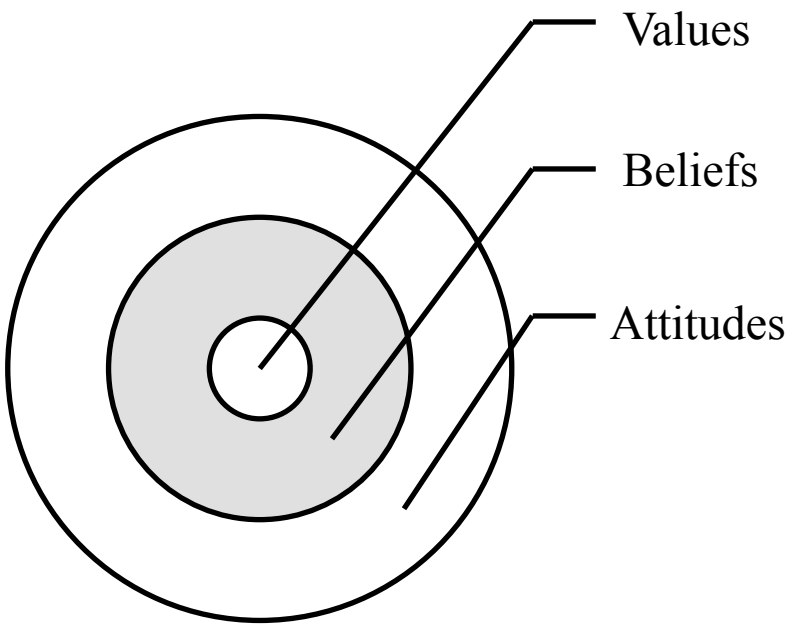

Figure 1. A pictorial representation of the elements of culture.

The cultural manifestations of beliefs, attitudes, and values are also interrelated as they create the components of culture. In Figure 2, the outside circle represents culture while the inside concentric circles are represented by beliefs, attitudes, and values. At the intersection of the beliefs, attitudes, and values are judgments. Judgments, as noted in Chapter 2, are the automatic response an individual portrays based upon their personal beliefs, attitudes, and values. It is here that a source of bias or stereotype exists. By watching for and analyzing biases in behaviors, hints concerning the beliefs, attitudes, and values may present a means to analyzing these core aspects of the classroom, which is structured and led by the teacher. In this study, I am concerned with how the teachers'

beliefs, attitudes, and values are understood at the cognitive level and how this understanding translates into teacher behaviors toward students. To acquire this information, I observed and questioned the behaviors exhibited by the teachers to better understand their beliefs, attitudes, and values. Further, the behaviors teachers exhibit toward students may also have a link to the resulting practices in the classroom, namely, particular academic opportunities teachers select for particular students and the type of culture of the classroom and school building. I am concerned with the connections between beliefs, attitudes, and values and whether or not my theory of these constructs creates a convincing understanding of culture and the resulting distribution of academic opportunities for students. If these connections exist, our understanding of school culture will deepen and as researchers, we will have created shared meaning in order to further our understanding of such a complex term. In addition, the possible connections between teacher beliefs, attitudes, and values and if, how, and to what extent they create a classroom culture, will shed light on how our preservice and veteran teachers cognitively comprehend culture. This individual comprehension may also provide a better understanding of how we, as educators, can begin to bridge the gap between our changing student demographics and stagnate teacher demographics, offering all students an equal opportunity to become educated in our public schools.

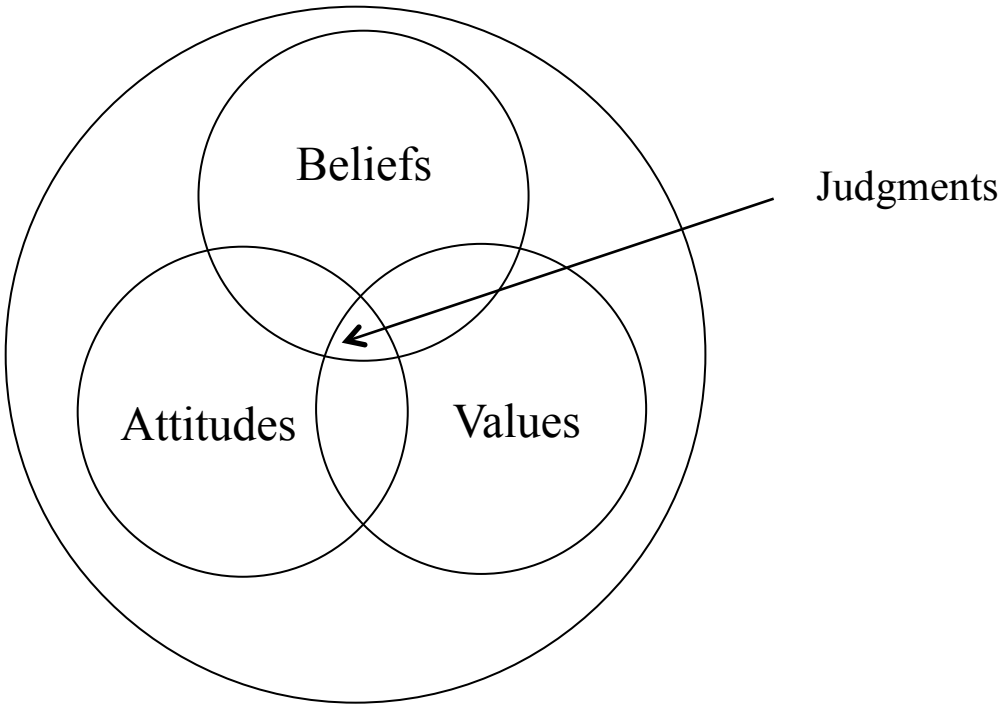

Figure 2. Components of culture.

The outside circle represents culture while the internal beliefs, attitudes, and values are the components of culture. Judgments occur at the intersection of these three components.

By further comprehending the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the teacher, I may be able to construct some understanding of what academic opportunities are available to which students and why teachers provide these connections and create these opportunities. Figure 3 demonstrates the conceptual relationship between one of the components of culture (beliefs) and behaviors and symbols. Here is an example of teacher beliefs about their students as well as the manifestations of behaviors and symbols that could be seen as a researcher in the classroom environment.

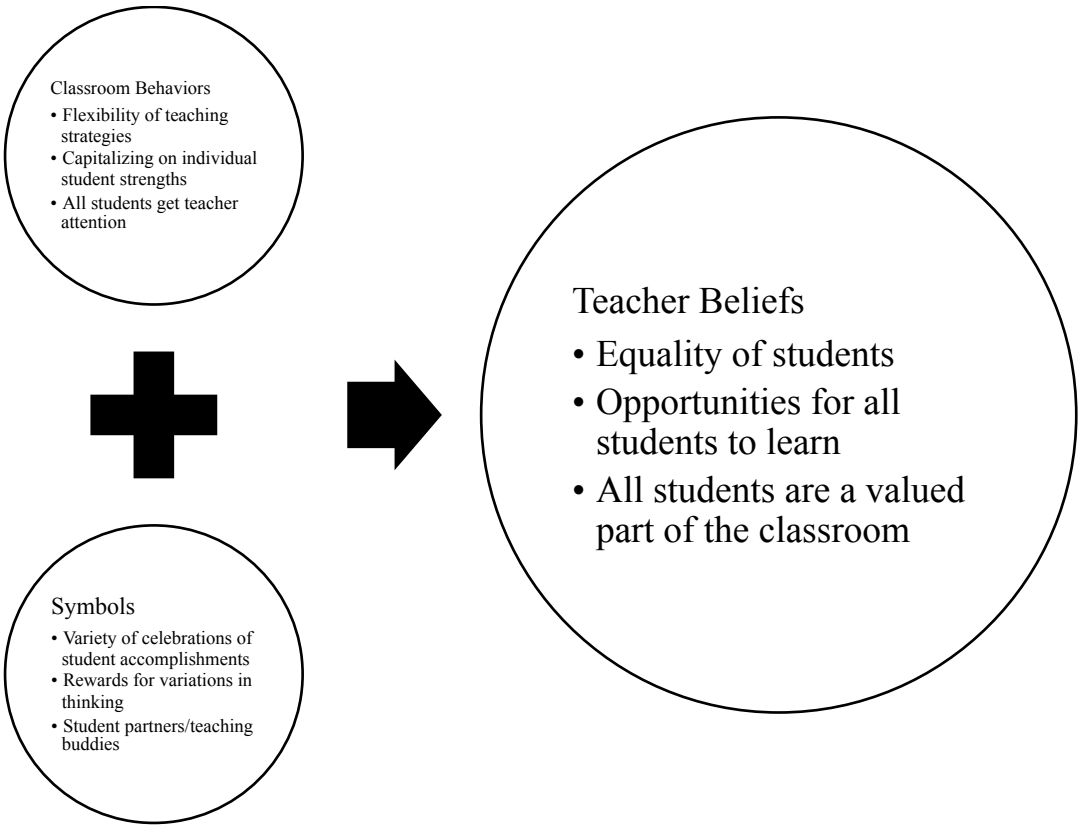

Figure 3. Manifestations of one cultural component.

As particular teacher beliefs are noted, subsequent classroom behaviors and symbols appear as manifestations of these beliefs. The manifestations of the teacher beliefs are what the researcher sees (or does not see) present in the classroom. These manifestations allow an outside perspective into the cognitive understanding of the concept of belief. Behaviors and symbols are what are consciously and unconsciously shown to the researcher —what can be visualized by an individual through an observation. Whereas a belief is a construct described by the teacher participant — something he or she has to put into words or actions and objectifies the thoughts from inside his or her mind.

Qualitative Research Design

The ultimate purpose of qualitative research is to ask questions in order to apply information that is learned (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Both a builder and researcher use information (data) to create walls that become the structure of the project or the building blocks of the knowledge acquired through the research. The researcher often begins with complex questions in order to learn more about a particular social circumstance. "Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the real world" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4).

Qualitative research is rooted in empiricism, or the "philosophical tradition that argues that knowledge is obtained by direct experience through the physical senses" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 6). Through observing by direct experience and then asking questions with individuals who work in that environment, I elicited information about the culture of the classrooms in order to gather data about how this culture determines if, how, and to what extent academic advantages and disadvantages result for certain students. Further, I analyzed the data that I gathered to create an understanding of the first grades in this particular school culture and what is occurring in the classrooms from the perspective of the teachers themselves. Only through qualitative research can these questions be answered in the depth conceived.

Research Paradigm

I approached this study through an interpretivist/social constructivist paradigm. I sought "to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 189). The results, no doubt, were varied and multiple, leading toward complex views of the world (Creswell, 2013). The concepts of

culture, academic opportunities, and provisions for academic opportunities in a heterogeneous school setting are described by how the participants perceive them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This paradigm allowed me to gather the subjective meanings, realities and viewpoints from the teachers to exhibit a complexity of views of culture in the context of a public school classroom. Through an interpretivist/social constructivist framework, I made interpretations of what I found in my study shaped by my own experiences and background. I analyzed the data collected to make sense or interpret the meanings my participants had about the world in order to develop subjective meaning(s) of their experiences. The teacher experiences were a combination of their personal, social, historical, and cultural norms and their interactions with others (Creswell, 2013). In addition, as a researcher I also positioned my interpretations on the concepts and acknowledged that my interpretations also shaped the lens through which I described the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and values (Creswell, 2013).

Research Approach

The research approach taken for this study stems from ethnography called a participant-observation approach. As many ethnographic studies take a year or more to complete, a participant-observation approach can be conducted in a manner of weeks (Bernard, 1994). In order to complete this study in a timely fashion, I employed a more rapid assessment procedure. This meant I achieved the beginnings of a theoretical framework based upon the observed and discussed patterns of the cultural group. However, although I built some rapport, I was not able to build the kind of rapport with my participants as often found in ethnographic studies. According to Bernard (1994), the amount of time spent in the field does matter and makes a difference in what information

the researcher finds. Naroll (1962) also found that sensitive issues are uncovered when ethnographers stayed in the field longer. Further, Foster, Scudder, Colson, and Kemper (1979) found that evidence used for social change has been found only in longer ethnographies. Beginning to extend research based upon the work of others is often the most appropriate way to continue difficult conversations and help to promote change. Even though my research topic was a highly sensitive issue and ultimately, I hoped this study will begin my future work toward social change in the field of education. A short timeframe through the participant-observation approach is appropriate because it allows me to begin research on a new theoretical framework surrounding the concept of culture.

Nevertheless, it is important to provide background in ethnography in order to understand the purpose of the participant-observation approach taken in this study. An ethnographic study focuses on a specific culture sharing group, involving people who interact over time (Creswell, 2013). An ethnographic researcher is immersed in the daily lives of the participants in a particular setting. This immersion allows the researcher a forum in which to focus on "developing a complex, complete description of the culture of a group, a culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 2013, p. 91).

Central to ethnographic work is the concept of culture. Culture captures the beliefs, attitudes, and values of members of a group and seeks to understand how their actions are guided by these premises (Bernard, 1994). Determining the culture helps the researcher understand what is *good* and *true* (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988; Italics in original). Ethnographers are interested discovering in patterns of behaviors based upon the group's mental activities expressed through actions and observed by the researcher (Fetterman, 2010). "This means that the culture-sharing group has been *intact*

and interacting for long enough to develop discernible working patterns" (Creswell, 2013, p. 92; Italics in original).

The culture-sharing group I studied has remained intact and has interacted for a time period in the school classrooms where they teach. Over time, patterns emerged from within the social organization of the selected elementary school setting, thus leading to an understanding of the culture that provides meaning to the organization. I interpreted and filtered the collected data through both *emic* and *etic* perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Through an emic perspective, I relied upon the participants' views and often reported participant beliefs, attitudes, and values through direct quotations. Incorporating an etic perspective, I analyzed the data using my own perspective to develop an overall cultural interpretation or description of the group and analysis related to the conceptual framework (p. 92).

Participant-observation is found in both anthropological and sociological studies (Kawulich, 2005). If observation is "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79) then participant observation "is the process enabling researchers to learn about activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing" (Kawulich, 2005, para. 2). By conducting a participant-observation study, I learned about the participants in their natural setting (Bernard, 1994) while blending into the school community. I remained open, nonjudgmental, interested in learning about other cultures, a good listener, and open to the unexpected (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). Through these processes, I was able to observe my participants and then position myself appropriately in order to understand the data collected and write about it.

Site selection. The context of this study is a public elementary school in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. I purposefully selected a school that has a representative heterogeneous student population. As part of a larger school district, the selected school also allows its students to access multiple academic opportunities, both at the school site as well as within the school district as a whole. As a public school site, it enrolls students with a variety of academic abilities as well.

An ethnographic study often begins with a "gatekeeper" or individual who is a member of or has insider status with the cultural group (Creswell, 2013) and is the researcher's initial contact leading to other participants" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Gatekeepers may require information about the study based upon such study aspects as: site selection, purpose of the research study, time involved, research results, and what the gatekeeper, the participants, and the site gain form the study (reciprocity) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The first gatekeeper I spoke with was the Director for Accountability, Quality, and Innovation from the school district. Additionally, the standardized forms of the district describing my research study and its components were completed and submitted to this individual. Next, a school site was determined with help from the school district representative and approval was obtained from the school principal. In order to gain access to a school site, I needed to present my research proposal to the principal. Upon receiving all of my paperwork, a Review Committee made up of school district staff members reviewed my application and determined I was permitted to complete my research study in their school district. This process took between 2 and 4 weeks to complete.

After my application was approved, I needed to complete an online form for a criminal background check and fingerprinting for the participating school district. Although I have had this information collected in the past as a former schoolteacher, I am not currently employed as such nor am I an employee of the participating school district. As my research did not pertain to students, I was not required to obtain any consent from parents or guardians.

At the school site level, each participant was given a letter outlining the research study, its purpose, participant time commitment, and types of data to be collected and analyzed. The letter also described the means by which I ensured the anonymity of the district and school name and participant names used in the research study report as well as particular methods of confidential and secure data collection and maintenance (see Appendix A). Prior to any initial formal contact, each participant was asked to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix B) and returned the form to me at the beginning of the first interview. Finally, my research approval process commenced after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB)/EDIRC approval through The College of William and Mary.

Participants and sampling. I selected three first grade teachers in one school site to participate in my study, as both a purposive and a convenience sample. Reasons for selecting teachers at this level stem from my literature review in two main areas. The first area is that of judgment as seen in teacher expectations (Gregg, 1957) of first and second grade students (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), student IQ levels based upon ethnicity (Rubovitis & Maehr, 1973), identified gifted students (Elhoweris et al., 2005), and students of both genders (Bennett et al., 1993; DeVoe, 1991; Maniadaki et al., 2003).

The second area is from the literature on cumulative advantage and disadvantage that emphasized reading skills (Ari, 1996; Aunola et al., 2002; Bast & Reitsma, 1997, 1998; Carreker et al., 2007; Hindman et al., 2012; Stanovich, 1986). In my experience as a first grade teacher, learning to read is one of the most important skills taught in the first grade classroom. During first grade, students must master the craft of reading before beginning the process of comprehension. Often during my teaching years, my colleagues would comment, "In first grade, students learn to read so that in second grade and beyond they are reading to learn." As such, many early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery occur at the first grade level in order to support struggling readers and writers (Dyer & Binkney, 1995); these programs provide a positive foundation for future academic opportunities for students.

As noted in Chapter 1, academic opportunities were defined as remedial, advanced (i.e., gifted education services), special education services, and extracurricular services and opportunities offered to students on a school-wide and classroom-specific basis. In addition, all opportunities must be academic in nature and based on a single or multiple core subject, content, or discipline (e.g., English/Language Arts, science, social studies, mathematics). I am interested in opportunities that are academic in nature because of the heavy emphasis on academic preparation of students that is placed on first grade teachers. For example, in first grade classrooms in Virginia, English/Language Arts instruction consumes almost half of the school day. Mathematics instruction occurs during almost one-quarter of the school day and social studies and science instruction are alternated for approximately one hour each day throughout the school year. My initial assumption was that many of the academic opportunities I found at the first grade level

would be English/Language Arts related (as noted above), however, based upon a recent change in the Standards of Learning (SOLs) assessments in mathematics, I also found that more school principals were requiring additional mathematics instruction as well.[2]

Three teachers were asked to participate in my research study (see Appendix A for invitation letter). Within the selected school district,, each elementary school has three to four teachers at each grade level. I selected participants based upon a convenience sample, those who are willing and able to participate in my study (Gay, L.R., Mills, G.E., & Airasian, P., 2009), I found that not all of the first grade teachers were able to participate. Teachers are very busy professionals and may not have the time to devote to the aspects of the study for a portion of the school year or be reticent to talk with me. In addition, the teachers not asked to participate were unavailable due to personal reasons. Due to the extensive nature of data collection and analysis in this study, three individual participants, who were interviewed twice and subjected to a week of intensive classroom observation, provided ample data to explore my research questions.

Participants could be male or female, of a variety of age groups, and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. A mix of sex, age, and ethnicity would have been ideal, but unlikely. My three participants were all female, of various age groups (early 30s, 40s, and 50s), and different cultural backgrounds (two White and one African-American). However, I solicited participation from teachers who have been in the profession for at least two years and working at the particular school setting for at least two years. These

[2] Mentioned in my definition of academic opportunities, I also included gifted and special education services. These may appear to be tangential opportunities, however, they are often based on a students' ability or inability in a content area.

criteria assumed that the participants were accustomed to being part of the selected school district and school culture; a true finding. In addition, two or more years allows school personnel groups (i.e., first grade teacher team) to have had ample opportunity to get to know and work with each other; another true finding. During this time, individuals grow accustomed to team dynamics, working, and communicating in ways that foster teacher and student learning (Johnson, 2003).

Data Collection

Interviews

"The interview is the ethnographer's most important data-gathering technique" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 40). Interviews explain what the participants know, feel, and believe and require verbal interaction between the researcher and participants; using words and expressions in the hope of communicating individual participant values (Fetterman, 2010). Although informal interviews or casual conversations between the researcher and participants are utilized most often in ethnographic studies, I conducted my research in a more formal environment: a public school. As a former public school teacher, I am conversant in the fundamentals of a public school community, namely, teachers' time being valuable and often scarce. Teachers are very busy individuals and need a purpose and structure for completing tasks such as interviews for a research project. The teachers "have work to do. An ethnographer should plan … interviews, around their work obligations and schedules" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 47). Although I engaged in two interviews with the teachers, I conducted the first interview of my teacher participants during the summer before the new school year began. This timeframe fit with the approval of the proposal by my dissertation committee, the school district,

school principal, and participants thus, alleviating the burden of their time allocation to my study.

The second interview took place after the school year began in the fall and around the classroom observation timeframe. Both interviews took a minimum of one hour in length. I used a semi-structured interview process to conduct the two interviews with each teacher. This process combines the best components of interviewing techniques: some guiding questions to be covered in a particular order and an opportunity for the teacher to speak freely and openly "on their own terms" (Bernard, 1994, p. 210).

The interview outline/protocol (see Appendix C) includes some specific questions of the teachers to "establish meaning" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 44). These questions elicited background information on the teacher: teaching background (including years teaching, particular subject areas (as applicable), teacher training/degree(s)/schooling, grade levels(s) currently teaching, etc. The next questions began to obtain information about the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and values by asking about various classroom behaviors and symbols. Although the questions were directed toward particular aspects of the school classroom, I encouraged the teachers to talk freely about their classrooms, experiences, and views. During the first interview, additional questions were asked to probe deeper into the teachers' responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Throughout the interview, I asked participants to clarify their narrative responses (a form of member checking) for accuracy (e.g., "So what I hear you saying is…") to insure my understanding of the information shared and to maintain credibility of the interviews throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

Questions for the follow-up interview stemmed from the responses from the first interview and observations of the classroom that took place in the fall (see also the section on Observations), and sought to clarify and obtain additional information about patterns and experiences that were collected from the data analysis process (Hoepfl, 1997). As such, the second interview was more individualized than the first interview.

Both the initial and the follow-up interviews were conducted one-on-one and recorded using an audio recorder because "recordings have the advantage of capturing data more faithfully than hurriedly written notes might, and can make it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview" (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 53). Interviews were recorded by me and then transcribed by a professional company called Rev©. The company transcribes recorded interviews in a timely manner (often within a 48-hour period) and ensures confidentiality by sending the completed Word documents to the researcher's email address. Each Rev© transcriptionist signs a confidentiality agreement with the company prior to working with any electronic files. After completion of the dissertation, I will contact Rev© and ask that all interview files from this research project be deleted. Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym at the beginning of the first interview to add an extra layer of security and confidentiality; this pseudonym was used for file names and for dissertation quotations. After the interviews were transcribed, I allowed the teachers to review the transcripts for accuracy (a second member check). After the second interview, transcription, and member checking process were complete participants received a $20 gift card in recognition of their time and effort.

At the first interview, I gained consent from the teachers (see Appendix B for letter of consent). The first interview (during the summer) was conducted at a mutually

agreed upon location, time, and date (their school classrooms and one colleague's office) selected for convenience (a central location that was available to both the researcher and participants). These locations permitted a calm environment and were quiet enough to allow me the ability to accurately record the interview.

Observations

In ethnographic studies, participant-observation means immersing oneself in the culture for an extended period of time. As this study is not a true ethnography but a quasi-ethnography, my observations were contained to a period of one week in each classroom, for a total of three weeks.

Methods of observation are used in research for a variety of reasons. According to Schmuck (1997), by observing, researchers can check nonverbal expressions of feeling of participants, view interactions and communication between participants, and observe how long participants engage in various activities. Further, participant-observation allows the researcher to observe and check on events and activities described in interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Participant-observation permits a more holistic appreciation of the phenomena being studied as well as increases the validity of the study, helps to answer research questions, builds theories, and tests hypotheses (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). It enables the researcher gain a more detailed description of behaviors, situation, and events in the culture being studied (DeMunck & Sobo, 1998).

Observations provided me with additional insights into the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and values through the depictions (or lack of) various behaviors and symbols seen in the classrooms. My observations of the classrooms included both teacher behaviors (and student reactions) as well as teacher-generated symbols as manifestations

of the culture being studied. I made notes and took photographs of objects and behaviors to document what I observed, namely, the classroom before school started and after students arrived in the fall. The observations were used to triangulate the data collected from the teacher interviews to compare between her cognitive thoughts and actions depicted in the classroom.

The first observation began with a short introduction (by the teacher) of whom I was and my purpose for being in the classroom for the week. This description was left general as to provide a baseline for the students to become accustomed to having me in the classroom. Initially, I may have been seen as an intruder, a stranger, and someone new to the classroom environment. A simple explanation alleviated any concerns the students had about my presence.

Participant observation required that I participate in the endeavors of the classroom. However, I limited my participation as to not disrupt the classroom teaching and learning processes. My limited participation produced a more authentic results than merely dropping into the classes randomly; young children often behave differently when a non-participating observer is present in their classroom, especially if they are unfamiliar with individuals entering and leaving the classroom on a regular basis. This proved not to be the case in all three classrooms as according to the teachers the students behaved authentically. I thought the initial observation might also change the behavior of the teachers as participants. This was not the case as the teachers and students "forgot [that I was] there, and let down their guard" (Gans, 1968, p. 314). I was an active observer of the happenings of the classroom for the week.

Observation days took place based upon agreement between the teacher and me. I wanted to ensure that the teacher understood that I would be observing her classroom for a total of one week, from the beginning of the school day when the students enter into the classroom to the end of the school day the students left the classroom. Each of the observation weeks were sequential and without interruptions such as standardized testing, assemblies, etc. I observed classroom interactions that had context in academic opportunities or all content areas (e.g., reading/Language Arts, mathematics, social studies/science, etc.). In the end, it was important that I observed a complete work week as each day presented similar yet varying academic opportunities for students, for example, Monday is art class, Tuesday is library day, and so forth.

After two days of observation, I conducted the second interview with two of the teacher participants. After a few days of observation in each teachers' classroom, I coded my notes and began to compare them to the interview transcripts. This action began the process of triangulation in which I determined what connections, if any, coincide in both the interview and observation data. Any outlying or varying information collected in the observation data that differed from the interview data became a source of interest during subsequent observations and the second interview. The third teacher participant, however, required her second interview to be completed in a separate week due school scheduling conflicts.

Often in research, observations are conducted with a checklist protocol. This method allows the researcher the opportunity to maintain a balanced and thorough approach to observing an environment. For this research study, I opted not to use an observation checklist but rather employ note taking of specific classroom interactions and

experiences, for example, conversations between the teacher and students and when students left the classroom for particular academic services. By not using a checklist, I was able to observe the classroom organically and be more concerned with watching the environment unfolding around me instead of keeping my head down in an attempt to check any requisite boxes. This decision was based upon protocol of participant observation in ethnographic research. "In the early stages of fieldwork, the ethnographer searches out experiences and events as they come to his or her attention" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 37). I was open to the activity in the classroom as it happened and noted these interactions as they occurred in real time. Second, my research premise was not to evaluate the teachers I observed; often the result of using a checklist to complete an observation. Rather, I wanted to simply observe the teacher behaviors and symbols exhibited in the classroom in an attempt to compare these artifacts with the beliefs, attitudes, and values discovered in the interview process.

Appendix D is a sample observation outline based upon my conceptual framework that I referenced during all observation sessions. The observations included any general behaviors and symbols exhibited by the teacher of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the teachers' personal cognitive understanding of culture as described in this chapter. In addition, I sought to observe additional components of this framework that help explain the manifestations of culture. These components included: classroom organization, classroom management, behavior modification tactics, and delivery of curricular content. *Classroom organization* includes any classroom bulletin boards, positions of supplies, desks, and chairs in the room, and any other indications of how inanimate objects are positioned in the classroom. *Classroom management* includes any

interactions between teacher and student and between teachers. Management also includes how students move about the classroom (e.g., get supplies, offer help to other students, attend stations, participate in whole/small group instruction, etc.) and student entrance and departure from the classroom. *Behavior modification* includes any systems of rewards and punishments, rules, behavior charts, prizes, tickets, class parties, etc. that occur and/or are employed by the teacher and students during the school day. Finally, *delivery of curricular content* includes the interchange between teachers and students as the content is delivered. In this research study, delivery of curricular content also includes how, to what extent, and with whom the content is presented by the teacher and discussed with the students.

Artifacts

Ethnographies consist of gathering information on what people do (behaviors) and say (language), and what they make and use (artifacts); they further require reconciling the potential tension between what they do and say (Spradley, 1980). More unobtrusive measures of data collection use physical evidence to draw social and cultural inferences (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 2000). As such, I collected artifacts from the classroom and the school in the form of (but not limited to) photographs of posters, bulletin boards, classroom furniture, and photographs of the inside and outside of the school site. I asked the teachers for artifacts from their classrooms and students (as applicable) to gain insight into the participants' cultural elements. I ensured that children's names were deleted from the photographs and/or work products to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as the identification of any child is outside of the scope of and not permitted in my study. Any artifacts collected were used for additional depth of

data analysis and will not be included materially in subsequent publication(s) of my research.

Additional Data Collection Information

I kept a reflexive research journal during the research, data collection, and writing processes. In this journal, I recorded personal thoughts about observations, interviews, and artifacts, questions to consider, and topics to think about and to consider for further research, and so forth.

Transcriptions of all interviews and artifact collection were stored safely in a computer in my home office. A final summary of the findings was provided to the participants at the conclusion of the study. Audio recordings, written transcriptions, and any collected artifacts will be securely stored for two years to allow me to continue working with the data for future publications. Names of participants will only be known to me and will be masked in any publications of the research study (Creswell, 2013).

School Site Professional Development Opportunity

One ethical consideration when conducting qualitative research includes reciprocity or "giving back to participants for their time and efforts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 55). When meeting with the school principal to ensure accessibility to the school site, I asked about possible ways I can give back to the participants and school personnel for allowing me to conduct my research there. One possible solution included a professional development session based upon some aspects of my research findings such as how teachers can set up their classrooms to accommodate all students.

Data Analysis

All data collected from my research study was analyzed according to the theoretical framework. The focus of my analysis was to determine if, how, and to what extent academic advantages and disadvantages result for certain students in a classroom based upon teacher practices of various sociocultural student identities. My *a priori* coding methods were based upon the theoretical framework and include behaviors, symbols, and teacher beliefs, attitudes, values, and academic programs.

Symbols as artifacts were collected throughout the data collection period (the one week period in each classroom environment). These data were analyzed and validated through triangulation with the interview and observation data previously collected to ensure confirmability. Although triangulation can produce conflicting results, its use in this study improved the quality of the data collected and revealed better study results.

Coding

"Ethnographers require a deeper understanding of and appreciation for a culture as they weave each part of the ornate human tapestry together, by observing and analyzing the patterns of everyday life" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 98). Initial codes were generated from my theoretical framework, *a priori* (see Appendix E). I used these codes to analyze the first set of interviews with the teachers, the observations of their classrooms, and any artifacts the teachers provided to me. I began by analyzing the interview data for each teacher. Next, I analyzed any classroom observation and artifact data collected on each teacher individually with the first interview data. Finally, I analyzed the data on all of the teachers' interviews, observations, and artifacts as a group.

Through the initial analysis, I began to find "patterns of thought and action repeat[ed] in various situations and with various [teachers]" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 97). However, data analysis process is not linear and often occurs in a repeated and simultaneous form (Hoepfl, 1997). As a result, I compared, contrasted, sorted, and generated additional codes and patterns. A few codes were added during the analysis process to further describe an existing code or due to participant emphasis during the interviews (i.e., all of the participants discussed the element of "team," a term I had not originally included in my code list).

The first level of analysis helped me prepare for the second interview, additional observations in the classrooms, and continued artifact collection. Exceptions and matches to the theoretical model emerged at this time, allowing me to revisit my initial theoretical framework, make adjustments, and conclude patterns for discussion.

After the second round of data collection, I revisited my previously determined and adjusted codes and patterns but did not make any alterations and additions at this time. I continued to analyze the teachers' second interviews individually, followed by any additional individual classroom and artifact data collection, and the teachers' interviews and observations collectively. The analysis of cultural patterns in ethnography is similar to a simultaneous, multi-dimensional process; as "the level of understanding increases geometrically as the ethnographer moves up the conceptual ladder —mixing and matching patterns and building theory from the ground up" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 98).

The process of analyzing the collected data was conducted with the help of a software database program called Dedoose®. Dedoose® is a computer application platform that allowed me to input interview transcriptions, field notes, pdf files, and

artifact pictures into one location to organize, code, and search for patterns. In addition, Dedoose® tracks and quantifies the number of times a code or pattern is used or found, increasing the reliability of my study.

Quality and Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that to establish trustworthiness and rigor, the researcher must spend considerable amount of time in the research setting to observe activities over time.

Trustworthiness, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the process of persuading the readers that the inquiry of the study is worth researching. The criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Hoepfl, 1997).

Credibility is the "truth" value of the results, meaning the participants' responses are accurate to their intentions. I developed credibility by conducting in-depth interviews with the participants, conducting member checking throughout the interview process, generating data to the point of thematic saturation, using triangulation, and providing rich and thick descriptions of the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Any personal perceptions and assumptions were presented in a "researcher as instrument" statement and an on-going reflexive journal.

Transferability is the extent that readers can apply aspects of the study results to their own context (Hoepfl, 1997). This was achieved by providing rich and thick details gathered from the results, generating data to the point of thematic saturation, and triangulation. Through detailed descriptions, I determined whether or not the findings could be transferred to other settings due to the collection and reporting of shared characteristics found in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Similar to credibility, confirmability is ensuring that study results are based on data generated and not on the researchers' expectations (Hoepfl, 1997). To ensure confirmability, I made frequent member checks, engaged in a peer review process, developed an audit trail, and used multiple data sources throughout the research study. Peer review or debriefing allows the researchers to share findings with colleagues, who can ask questions about meanings and interpretations of the data collected. Additionally, my perceptions and assumptions are presented in a "researcher as instrument" statement and an ongoing reflexive journal.

Dependability is the act of being consistent with the application of all methods of data. Dependability is the equivalent of reliability in conventional research (Hoepfl, 1997). This was achieved by member checking, peer review processes, writing a "researcher as instrument" statement, and maintaining a reflexive journal. In addition, dependability was enhanced through the use of an "inquiry audit" where the researcher and peer reviewer(s) examined the product and process of the research for consistencies (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 60).

Another way to maintain quality and rigor of this study is to address authenticity. Authenticity includes the following criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, as cited in Dimockk, 2001). Fairness includes all participants being equally and accurately represented in the study. Fairness is achieved by member checking, prolonged engagement with the participants, and peer debriefing (Manning, 1997, as cited in Dimockk, 2001).

Ontological authenticity is allowing the participants the opportunity to experience personal growth through "dialogical conversations" that encourage participants "to feel safe in freely expressing responses to the questions guiding the interviews" (Manning, 1997, p. 105, as cited in Dimockk, 2001). Through the question asking, participant answers, and continuous member checking, the participant is given the opportunity to both respond and reflect thus allowing for personal growth to occur over time. This prolonged engagement also allows for a caring and trustful relationship to occur between the participants and the researcher. Ontological authenticity seeks a relationship of equals between the participants and the researchers highlighting important events during the interviews related to the study (Dimockk, 2001).

Educative authenticity "is achieved when participants expand their knowledge about the constructions and perspectives of other stakeholders in the same context" (Dimockk, 2001, p. 3). Member checks and reflective dialog between the participants and the researcher help ensure educative authenticity as well as keeping a "researcher as instrument" statement throughout the duration of the study.

Catalytic authenticity continues to expand the construction of the phenomenon through careful examinations of the decisions and actions taken by the participants (Dimockk, 2001). To ensure catalytic authenticity, I used member checking and provided thick and rich explanations of the participants' experiences. I allowed the research study results to be reviewed by the teacher participants as well as other educators interested in an ethnographic approach to understanding culture.

Risks and Ethical Considerations

There were no risks associated with the participation of this research study. I gained access to the school building through the school district's protocol. Once inside, I let the school administration and teachers know the purpose of the study, research topic, and reasons for observations, interviews, and collection of artifacts. The participants confided deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and values about educational practice and the teaching and learning of their students during their interviews. I respected their rights to accurately represent their ideas and views but with anonymity and confidentiality in both field notes and interview write ups (Kawulich, 2005).

Researcher as Instrument Statement

Understanding different cultures has always been interesting to me. Since I was very young, I had friends of various races, ethnicities, classes, and socioeconomic statuses. I recall learning all about Hanukkah from my friend who was Jewish, eating dried squid like potato chips for lunch with my Chinese friend at school, and spending weekends on a working cattle farm in the summer with a friend whose father used to live there. I attended a very diverse high school; one that enrolled students from the very wealthy part of town as well as those who spoke no English. All of these experiences helped drive my thirst for knowledge about various people, their cultures, and how our differences made us unique and special.

As I grew older, I began to notice both a variety of cultures and the absence of cultures in my higher education institutions and workplaces. These experiences made me think more carefully about my own culture. I was raised in a White, middle-class, two-parent family with many entitlements and advantages. Growing up my family appeared

affluent to an outsider. We lived in a suburban house on the "right" side of town. My sister and I attended an above-average elementary school, played on various sports teams, and had at least one parent working while the other stayed home and often attended our various activities. I was not afraid to go out after dark in our neighborhood or borrow an egg for cookies; neighbor moms fed me an occasional lunch and sent me home for dinner at dusk. My neighborhood friends experienced similar behaviors from my mom.

I am also part of the Italian-American culture, one that carries various judgments. As an Italian-American, my culture focused on food, both the making and eating of it. Food symbolized comfort, stimulated conversation, and showed love. Recipes were passed down verbally from generation to generation and made just like those in the "old world." Italians are often loud. We talk over people and appear interruptive, raise our voices when we get excited, and laugh with our whole bodies.

It appears that given my upbringing and various cultures, I would be able to accomplish many great things in my lifetime so far and indeed, I have. But my cultural symbols of being Caucasian, living with two-parents, white picket fenced neighborhoods, an abundance of food, and laughing out loud do not tell a complete story. There are still certain cultural expectations placed upon me by others that elude me. I am the only one in my family that is receiving an advanced degree. I sometimes struggle with the traditions, customs, and proprietary norms of getting an advanced degree including public speaking, making an argument with supporting evidence, and participating in group work. There are times when I feel like "a fish out of water" without anyone to turn to who has experienced these challenges themselves and can guide me along the appropriate path. When I became an elementary school teacher in a racially and ethnically diverse

classroom setting, I wondered if my students often felt the same way. What then was my role as their teacher? To guide them down the "right path" —my cultural path as I understood it to be? Or help them to understand their own culture(s) so that they may be open to experiencing other people and situations effectively as they grew up?

My interest in culture as a researcher, particularly a cognitive view of culture as it exists in people's heads, stems from two areas. First, there is little (if any) educational research on this view of culture in school systems in the United States. Second, I am disappointed when educators often use the term "culture" without defining it or creating shared meaning around this term with their colleagues. Culture is a complex term and difficult to define, however, this should not be an excuse for the lack of creating meaning surrounding the term or application of field research. It is for these reasons I am conducting this study on culture and how teachers' judgments about various sociocultural identities of their students result in practices in the classroom and, if at all, academic advantages and disadvantages for certain students.

I believe that individual cultures should be understood and celebrated. But this understanding goes deeper than tacos in May and wearing red on Chinese New Year. It comes from deeply understanding one's culture including personal beliefs, attitudes, and values that are incorporated into cultural experiences. It is through careful introspection that an individual can look outward to deeply understanding other cultures.

I believe that cultural understanding is paramount to educational practice. Teachers need and should be encouraged to understand their cultures before embarking on a career in teaching. With such a diverse population of students in our public schools, teachers cannot remain ignorant to the different cultures their students bring to the

classroom. I believe that it is through ignorance that certain students are offered or denied academic opportunities, resulting in a promising education or one that is deficient.

I expected to find that teachers I interview for this study had some individual concept of the term culture but have difficulty defining it aloud. I expected that no one in the field of education has ever asked a teachers' opinion on the concept of culture and that an introspective view may emerge during the study. I expected that the teachers would be reluctant to discuss culture, especially if they are of a dominant sociocultural identity but that this attitude would change when they see this research study places no judgment on their thoughts, actions, beliefs, attitudes, or values. I expected that the teachers wanted to use best educational practices when teaching the students in their classrooms and that they are proud of their students' accomplishments, growth, and abilities. I expected that talking about students' accomplishments and abilities would be easy for the teachers during the interview process.

I was willing and interested to discover more about how other individuals view and think about the concept of culture. What are the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and values about various sociocultural identities of students? Are these beliefs, attitudes, and values similar or different to mine? I hoped that by getting to the root of this understanding, I would be able to find broad and varied views of culture and cultural beliefs that is helpful for the teachers to better understand their students.

I was willing and interested to discover a link, if at all, between culture, judgment, sociocultural identity, academic advantages, and disadvantages. This connection, if it exists, offers educational theory and practice a plethora of information that can be used daily in our increasingly growing diverse student populations in our schools.

Administrators, teachers, and other school leaders can use this information to make appropriate educational decisions for all students, offering each girl and boy a positive chance at educational attainment.

The participant-observer/ethnographic approach taken in my research study is a sound approach because it seeks to find and further understand a concept and conceptual framework surrounding culture. I was not interested in radical change or judgment. My study is only interested in portraying the concept of culture as it is perceived by the participants. The data collected may assist other teachers, administrators, and school personnel in raising awareness about culture and the various aspects and understandings of this term. I bracketed my own experiences while carefully considering those of the teachers I studied. My interviews considered broad yet poignant questions surrounding the construct of culture and led me to a more complete understanding of the individual and shared experiences the teachers had implementing academic opportunities for their students.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to develop an understanding of the study research through a theoretical framework of the components described here and in Chapter 2. Based upon this theoretical framework, appropriate proposed research methods were discussed. Data collection and analysis sheds light on this research topic and provides some pertinent information on participant views of culture and the resulting academic opportunities for students in their classroom.

Chapter 4

Contextual Setting for the Study

In ethnographic research, it is important to provide contextual information about the study to help situate the environment from which the shared and learned patterns of participant beliefs, attitudes, and values are formed (Creswell, 2013). This chapter describes the location of the study beginning with the state, school district, and school environments including information about the physical space and current student population. In addition, I will also introduce each of the teacher participants and provide background information and important characteristics including their race, age, socioeconomic status as well as their reasons for selecting teaching as a profession, their beginning teacher training, employment at previous and the selected school settings, and thoughts about teaching and children in general.

The participant data located here were collected during a one-on-one interview conducted during the summer before the start of the school year. As stated in Chapter 3, the purpose of the first interview was to build participant rapport, obtain biographical information, and inquire about the participants' feelings about teaching in general, and teaching at this particular school location. In addition, I sought some insight into the teachers' thoughts about the previous school year and thoughts about the upcoming school year.

School District and School Data

My study takes place in a school district in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Rich with English and Native American history, Hampton Roads has been home to many people since its European discovery in the 1600s and its establishment as one of the original 13 colonies (Virginia, n.d.). It boasts many agricultural, industrial, and educational opportunities for its residents, fertile soil for farming, multiple military operations, shipbuilding opportunities through many river tributaries to the Atlantic Ocean, and numerous higher education institutions including The College of William and Mary, the nation's second-oldest institution chartered by King William and Queen Mary II of England in 1693 (Virginia, n.d.). Hampton Roads or Coastal Virginia is made up of twelve cities, including Hampton and Newport News as well as the historic municipalities of Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Jamestown that are known as the Historic Triangle (Virginia.gov, 2015). Adding to its interesting history and high level of tourism, the Commonwealth of Virginia is the home of many founding fathers including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, and Woodrow Wilson.

During the 2014-15 school year, the Commonwealth of Virginia enrolled 1,279,773 students in grades Pre-K through 12 (VDOE, 2015b). The demographic makeup of the student population is: 62.65% White, 17.54% Black, 10.26% Hispanic, 2.62% Asian, 0.45 % American-Indian, and 6.33% two or more races (VDOE, 2015b). Approximately 67% of the total student population (K-12) receives free and reduced lunches (Child Nutrition Services, 2012). The Virginia Department of Education

reported 156,910 students received special education services statewide in 2014-15 (VDOE, 2016b).

The school system where my study took place enrolls over 11,000 students in more than a dozen public schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) ([District website], 2015a). The demographic makeup of the student population for the 2015-16 school year is: 61.78% White, 17.67% Black, 10.48% Hispanic, 2.74% Asian, 0.45% American-Indian, and 6.75% two or more races (VDOE, 2016a). These figures are comparable to the student demographics of the state. The Virginia Department of Education reported 1,549 students received special education services for this school district in 2010 (VDOE, 2010). Of this population, approximately 5% of the students in the district are enrolled at the selected school site (hereafter known as "Grammar School"). Grammar School is located near other socio-cultural amenities. Similar to other schools in the district, students and teachers use these amenities in conjunction with their social studies and science lessons to provide students "hands-on" academic opportunities.

School Physical Space

Unlike more modern school buildings, Grammar School is a three-story, square-shaped, brick building. Over time, Grammar School was expanded to include grades Kindergarten through five. Each expansion was added in the style of the original building making Grammar School architecturally interesting and adding amenities including air conditioning, an updated gymnasium floor, and high-speed Internet access for students and staff.

Each classroom in Grammar School's building incorporates old and unique characteristics as well as new conveniences. All three of the participants' classrooms have multiple small bulletin boards and original blackboards that cover an entire wall. One corner of each classroom contains a small sink, drinking fountain, and wooden cabinets for supplies. Another wall almost completely consists of recently installed laminated particleboard covered storage cabinets. Heavy crown molding is present throughout the rooms as well as a freestanding heating/cooling system. Each classroom boasts an entire wall of windows that measure about eight feet in height allowing ample light and pleasant views of the school grounds for students and teachers to enjoy.

Physical space is a coveted topic for the participants. Over the years, principals have assigned classroom spaces based upon their personal definition of teacher teams. A previous principal wanted teacher teams consisting of one teacher from each grade (K through 5) located in close proximity to each other. As a result, each of the four main hallways became a mixture of grade levels and students. This physical organization lasted a number of years, however, the current principal rearranged this environment to create teacher teams by grade level. Now, each hallway contains teachers and students of the same grade level. These changes required some teachers to pack entire classrooms and move over a summer period. The extra work made life difficult for some teachers to prepare for new students in the fall. The exception to the current philosophy is the first grade team: none of these teachers has moved from their classrooms since their original assignments many years and many principals ago. Four first grade teachers are located at the end of each hallway on the first and second floors with the newest fifth first grade teacher assigned to a formerly empty classroom located in the middle of a hallway,

resulting in the only hallway with two first grade classrooms. Therefore, the majority of the first grade teachers are not in close proximity to each other on either the first or second floor of the school building.

The teachers claim that their refusal to move and the subsequent acquiescence of the principal is due to their fierce pride in the environments that they individually have created in their respective classrooms. To all three, the welcoming and congenial environments of their classrooms for their students is much more important than proximity for the teachers. Rather than requiring propinquity for team building, the first grade team meets together, on average, three times per week during the school year to discuss curricular and student matters including a two-hour bi-weekly meeting to plan for Language Arts and mathematics instruction. From these conversations and having observed multiple team meetings, I concluded that personal classroom space takes precedent over proximity and these teachers have not allowed their distance to impede their efforts to create a collaborative team. As one participant stated:

> We get along. We really get along. We like each other as people. We work as, as a team. … And we bring it together. Everybody has a script and we work on it. Like [colleague] is our computer guru. I mean, she knows that computer. And [colleague] is the creative person. And [colleague] is the organized one. We all have a little job and we all help each other. And nobody falls. ... I'm not going to struggle because I know my team has my back. … We are a *team*. (Kitty,[3] personal communication, July, 15, 2015)

[3] The names of the participant teachers are pseudonyms.

School Student Demographics and Academics for First Grade

The following table provides specific information about the 57 first grade students enrolled at Grammar School during the 2015-16 school year by individual participant classroom. Information about student/family socioeconomic income was not available.

Table 1

Student Demographics at Grammar School

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Sex	Females	10	8	11
	Males	8	11	9
Race[4]	White/Caucasian	9	8	8
	Black/African American	3	5	5
	Hispanic	3	3	3
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	1	2	2
Homeless students		0	0	0
Students Receiving Reduced-Price Lunch (by cost based upon familial income)		2	0	1
Students Receiving Free Lunch		3	10	10

According to the participants, the demographics of the student population at Grammar School have changed dramatically over the past ten years. Allie described this change due, in part, to an expansion in the district.

[4] Items in this category may not match total student count as reporting this data is optional to parents/guardians.

> Then we had a new school open up in our district and that took a lot of our affluent children and families away. So it is a more challenging group that we work with. We do have families that don't really want to participate. We have very needy students. Free and reduced lunch [student count] is extremely high and so all of that provides extra challenge and so it definitely makes our job as teachers here at Grammar School, I think, more difficult. (Allie, personal communication, August, 6, 2015)

As seen in Table 1, the student population is quite diverse in the participant first grade classrooms in terms of reported racial makeup but similar in gender and homelessness status.

A recent change at Grammar School is a negative shift in student academic ability. The school principal received a grant from the school district to offer a summer program for English as a Second Language (ESL) students and their families attending Grammar School as well as ESL families and students from two other elementary schools in the district. Grammar School personnel have targeted the Spanish-speaking population as the fastest growing non-English speaking student population in the immediate area. This program sought to assist Spanish-speaking parents and students with the academic and social skills needed for Kindergarten through third grade including reading and mathematics strategies and using computers to play educational games. Each of the participants commented that this particular ESL population as well as the entire current first grade student population has been evaluated as low academically by the Kindergarten teachers on district Language Arts and mathematics standardized assessments.

Although not noted in the first grade demographics (see Table 1), the participants also spoke of the increasing homeless population in the school area that has affected their student population at Grammar School. Mary noted, "I think we're at least 10% homeless [at this school]. … You have kids who have been, by the time they're in first grade, they've gone to six schools. … Some of them are in really sad situations" (personal communication, July, 16, 2015). Grammar School often provides transportation to and from a students' domicile that includes shelters and local hotels for the designated homeless students, even as they move out of the school's zone so as to not interrupt the students' education at least for the remainder of the school year. Continuing to provide transportation and limiting a students' transfer from one school to another is the school district's response to the increasing homeless population in the local area.

Gifted and Special Education Services

Students at Grammar School are able to receive gifted and special education services. According to the school district and state, gifted education services are described as "a differentiated instructional program … that is respectful of the uniqueness of the individual students and conducive to risk-taking and exploration of new ideas" ([District Website], 2015c, para. 1). Students are referred through ability and achievement standardized test scores, observations, teacher and parent rating scales, participation in classroom discussions and activities, and student work products. This referral process occurs in two major ways: on an annual basis through a collective applicant pool taking a particular standardized assessment or ongoing individual student referrals throughout the school year. A committee of school personnel reviews each student's file for evidence of eligibility in a specific content area, such as Language Arts.

Professionals in gifted education note that of the six to ten percent of identified gifted students nationally, students of minority races, low socioeconomic status, and limited English proficiency (LEP) are often not identified to receive gifted education services (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014). The underrepresentation of diversity in gifted education programs that would match the culturally and racially diverse student populations in schools is due, in part, to a lack of federal government funding for gifted programming, decreased state allocations for gifted program funding, and limited teacher qualification requirements in the area of gifted education. Further, the definition of giftedness used by most school systems does not include the potential for giftedness; indicators that would widen the gifted education applicant pool. Instead, school districts use narrow identification procedures including cut-off scores and point systems for assessments taken that exclude students of underrepresented populations who often score lower than their White, middle-class counterparts.

The school district that houses Grammar School includes a provision for such underrepresented populations in the field of gifted education. The eligibility process for culturally diverse, low socioeconomic students includes the administration of an additional culturally unbiased assessment and informal assessments of ability solicited from the ESL teacher(s), special education teacher(s) (if applicable), and general education teacher(s). If eligible, these students are placed in the Emerging Scholars Program. The goals of the Emerging Scholars Program:

> Are to a) nurture high academic potential at an early age; b) nurture high academic potential with the hope that the students will pursue advanced levels of learning on their own; c) develop cluster grouping of Emerging Scholars so that

> cohorts can be developed; d) provide a program through professional development for teachers on culturally responsive teaching, differentiated curriculum that is accelerated and challenging, and scaffolding lessons as needed to meet the unique needs of the underrepresented populations. ([District Website], 2015d, pp. 21-22)

Although this program exists throughout the district, no students in the participating first grade classrooms have been identified as part of the Emerging Scholars Program.

Students found eligible for gifted education services in first grade at Grammar School receive a Differentiated Education Plan (DEP), developed in collaboration between the student's general education teacher and designated gifted education teacher (see Table 2). This plan assists both teachers in modifying curricular components through enrichment, differentiation, and/or acceleration models. Even though students identified for receiving gifted education services at Grammar School receive approximately 95% of instruction in their general education classrooms, these students are required to be pulled out of their general education classrooms once weekly for approximately 30 minutes to work with the gifted education teacher on a modified curriculum based upon their age, grade, academic level, and intellectual needs in either Language Arts, mathematics, or both in a small group format.

Table 2

Identified Gifted Students for Participating Classrooms at Grammar School

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving Gifted Services		3	0	2
Sex	Females	1	0	1
	Males	2	0	1
Race[5]	White/Caucasian	1	0	2
	Black/African American	1	0	0
	Hispanic	1	0	0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0

Special education services at Grammar School are dictated by national, state, and school district regulations. Students receive a variety of services based upon their individual needs and are provided services "in the least restrictive environment in a manner consistent with all applicable federal and state regulations" (VDOE, 2010, para. 3), according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The referral process for special education services are similar to that of gifted education services in that students who are suspected of having a disability complete a screening process initiated by either a school staff member, parent(s), or other individual who knows the student well. Data collected and reviewed include classroom, local, or state assessments and student observations. Additional data from other standardized assessments including vision screenings, hearing screenings,

[5] Items in this category may not match total student count as reporting this data is optional to parents/guardians.

psychological examinations, therapy, etc. may be obtained during the referral process and may assist with a correct and appropriate placement and/or student services. Eligible students receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that is implemented in the school building during school hours.

The majority of the students in first grade at Grammar School have been identified as needing special education services receive speech/language services (see Table 3). The special education teacher administers these services weekly for approximately 30 minutes in a small group format. One first grade student receives special education services for intellectual and learning difficulties.

Table 3

Identified Special Education Students for Participating Classrooms at Grammar School

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving Special Education Services		2	1	3
Sex	Females	0	1	1
	Males	2	0	2
Race[6]	White/Caucasian	0	1	2
	Black/African American	1	0	1
	Hispanic	1	0	0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0
Service(s) Received		Speech (2 students)	Speech (1 student)	Speech (2 students)

Additional Services

Federal and local school district funds help support additional academic educational programs for students in need. With these funds, students are provided "expert teachers, additional instructional resources, and more intensive programs for remediation with acceleration in mind" ([District Website], 2015e, para. 2). Such services at Grammar School include: the Title 1 Program, Literacy Groups, the Reading Recovery® Program, and English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. Table 4 outlines the participating first grade students who receive these services.

[6] Items in this category may not match total student count as reporting this data is optional to parents/guardians.

Table 4

Identified Language Arts and ESL Students for Participating Classrooms at Grammar School

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving Title 1 Services[7]		2	2	2
Sex	Females	1	1	1
	Males	1	1	1
Race	White/Caucasian	1	1	0
	Black/African American	1	0	1
	Hispanic	0	0	0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	1	1
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving Literacy Group Services[8]		6	4	5
Sex	Females	2	1	1
	Males	4	3	4
Race	White/Caucasian	1	1	1
	Black/African American	3	3	1
	Hispanic	0	0	2
	Asian/Pacific Islander	2	0	1
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0

[7] Students can be part of any one reading program and the ESL simultaneously.
[8] Students can be part of any one reading program and the ESL simultaneously.

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving Reading Recovery Program® Services[9]		0	2	2
Sex	Females	0	0	2
	Males	0	2	0
Race	White/Caucasian	0	0	1
	Black/African American	0	0	0
	Hispanic	0	2	1
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0

		Kitty's Class	Mary's Class	Allie's Class
Total students		18	19	20
Total students receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) Services		5	3	4
Sex	Females	1	1	2
	Males	1	2	2
Race	White/Caucasian	1	0	0
	Black/African American	1	0	0
	Hispanic	0	2	3
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	1	1
	Other	0	0	0
	Two or More Races	0	0	0

The Title 1 Program that serves students in the first grade who need additional reading instruction, includes an additional 30 minutes of reading instruction 5 days per week above the mandated 90 minutes of general educational classroom Language Arts instructional period. The goal of this federally-mandated program is to develop fluent

[9] Students can be part of any one reading program and the ESL simultaneously.

readers through additional instruction in "phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary" ([District Website], 2015e, para. 4). Students become eligible for this program through a series of reading assessments in either Kindergarten or the beginning of first grade. The classroom teacher or the school reading specialist completes these assessments and a list of eligible students is compiled based upon this information. The number of students who can participate in the Title 1 Program is fixed; therefore, Grammar School currently has an extended waiting list of students who qualify for Title 1 services but are not receiving them due to limited funding and staffing issues. Currently a small number of students at Grammar School who have been assessed at the Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten level in Language Arts instruction are not receiving any additional services because the enrollment in the Title 1 Program is full and serves as the first step toward any additional reading instruction.

Grammar School has implemented an additional indigenous reading program called Literacy Group to assist students who need additional reading instruction. This small group instructional method helps students who are beginning to make gains above the Title 1 Program in reading achievement but still need additional instruction above and beyond the required Language Arts instructional period. These students meet with the reading specialist daily for approximately 30 minutes. Instruction is based upon the literacy instruction used in the general education classroom but places a greater emphasis on phonics, sight word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

The Reading Recovery® Program "is a research-based, short-term early intervention for first grade students having difficulty with early reading and writing" ([District Website], 2015e, para. 5). This program is designed for students who are just

below the required literacy reading and writing goals for first grade and still require additional instruction. Students work in a small group format, usually 2 or 3 students, with a specially trained teacher for approximately 30 minutes daily. Reading Recovery® is a short program, lasting 12 to 20 weeks during the school year. This fixed duration allows additional students to enter into the program (from Literacy Group, for example) as others transition out and remain in the general education classroom for the entire Language Arts period.

The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program honors students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and "seeks to give non-native English speaking students in particular the tools to succeed in the English-based classroom instruction that they receive daily" ([District Website], 2015b, para. 2). Upon entering the school district, parents/guardians complete a language survey form to indicate the primary language spoken in the home. With this information, the classroom teacher and ESL specialist can proceed with additional assessments offering possible placement into the ESL program. Grammar School employs one ESL specialist who works with any student identified as needing additional English instruction, regardless of native language. Students receive instructional support on assignments and projects given in the general education classroom a few times weekly for approximately 45 minutes in a small group format. The exact schedule is dictated by the student's English language level. For example, the higher the student's language level, the less weekly ESL instruction. Grammar School's ESL specialist works closely with the first grade team as over 10% of all first grade students currently receive ESL instructional services. This year's first graders appear to be categorized as moderately fluent in English and their native language. Grammar

School is responding by identifying as many students as possible for ESL services and working closely with the ESL teacher to address the students' English language challenges.

Portraits of Teacher Participants

The following section outlines the participants in my study and provides and personal information about each individual. During the first interview, I asked biographical questions of the participants including: how they became a teacher, where they attended school, career experiences, length of teaching, and information about their position at Grammar School. Three first grade teachers agreed to participate in this study. They are diverse in their ages, preparation, career experiences, and personality.

Mary

Mary is a Caucasian female in her mid-30s. She attended a North Carolina public university, graduating with a degree in elementary education in 2003. She did not always want to be a teacher and had difficulty deciding on a major in college. Her love for kids, however, propelled her toward the teaching profession and Mary decided to declare education for her major. Education students at her undergraduate university spend a significant amount of time in public school classrooms as part of their degree; Mary explained that she spent "three days a week and about three and a half hours each day beginning in our sophomore year" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). Even with this extensive preparation, however, Mary felt "shocked" during her first year of teaching. In both interviews, Mary spoke of the challenges of teaching students who are identified ESL, transient, lower academically due to being part of a low socioeconomic family, lack of resources for her classroom, and the plethora of assessments given to

students during the school year. In her first year of teaching, she was not prepared to have to contend with so many deficit issues that include lack of academic knowledge, behavioral issues, decreased parent involvement in the schooling process, and so forth. This student demographic was not described to her in the college textbooks she read during her undergraduate years.

Mary taught both Kindergarten and first grade in North Carolina for four years. In 2007, she moved to Virginia and has been teaching first grade for the past thirteen years with the last twelve years at Grammar School. Mary spoke candidly about the student population in North Carolina and Virginia, citing their similarities and differences.

> When I was in North Carolina, where I started, it was a hard place to start teaching. It was 90%+ [students who received] free and reduced lunch; 40% something ESL. It was just a difficult population. But in hindsight, I'm so glad I started there. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Mary spoke of the current student population at Grammar School being similar to that of her previous experiences with the North Carolina student populations, but citing the changes over her tenure.

> When I moved here to this school, I remember my very first year thinking, oh my gosh, every phone number worked. At the beginning of the year I called all the parents just to say, "Hi, hope you're coming to open house. It's this date, this time." And it was, you know, my fifth year teaching and it was the only time I had every single phone number that worked. That was 2008, and it's just slowly

> gone back to what I'm used to [in North Carolina], and [contacting parents easily] doesn't happen like that anymore. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Mary is the current first grade team leader at Grammar School. She was appointed to this position a few years ago by a past school principal. Although she enjoys her position, as a busy mother of two young children, Mary often feels like there are "pieces of the [life and occupational] puzzle [that are always] missing" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). She often has to choose between her parental obligations and those obligations she feels are necessary for her to be a good teacher role model to her colleagues. In speaking about her class last year, Mary said,

> There's always so much you want to do in a perfect world. …You know my kids learned, they were successful but there's always more [as teachers] we can do. But as you know, a mother of little kids, I didn't have time to do the extra above-and-beyond, and I feel like that kinda always weighed on me. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

During my observations and conversations with the other participants, Mary uses her easy-going leadership style, task-oriented and driven motivation, and enthusiasm for the profession to lead her team well and make things work in her classroom. She hopes to work harder this school year to provide additional projects and more differentiated learning activities for her students to relieve some "teacher's guilt" as well as be a model teacher for her colleagues.

One example of a differentiated learning opportunity that Mary employs in her classroom is a piggy bank discipline/reward-consequence system. Each student receives a small Tupperware container with his or her classroom number on it that is kept in his or

her classroom cubbie.[10] When Mary "catches" a student working hard, following directions, or being a model student (behaviorally), they earn a penny; pennies are only given for behaviors that each student has personal control over throughout the school day. If a student is misbehaving or not listening well to directions, pennies are lost. Mary appreciates this discipline system because it works with students' ability to receive direct and consistent feedback on a regular basis. It is also a tangible regulation system that the students easily understand as they count their pennies throughout the day. On Fridays, Mary allows the students to count their banks and either exchange their pennies for larger coins, "cash in" their pennies for prizes/candy, or save their pennies until next week. One popular purchase is lunch with Mary in the classroom.

Mary approaches each school year with enthusiasm, getting her room "ready for a new bunch of kiddos" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). She works hard to create a classroom space that is welcoming, inviting, and functional for both the students and herself. She spoke of:

> Wanting to really create that cohesive great group and make sure everyone gets along and is respectful and teaching some of those kind of character education things at the beginning of the year, because a lot of kids don't have that nowadays. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Mary feels that the classroom space sets the stage for students who learn and work well together, respect each other, and complete a successful school year.

[10] Students are labeled in the classroom by number to protect their identities.

Allie

Allie is a Caucasian female in her early 40s. She completed her undergraduate degree in English education and psychology at a major Mid-western land grant university. She originally planned to teach secondary English and found that after two years, "the secondary level was maybe not where I wanted to be" because she did not prefer teaching older students (personal communication, August 6, 2015). Allie left the education field and briefly worked as an editor and trained adults on various software programs and work publications. After the birth of her son, she became a stay-at-home mother and volunteered in various preschool, camp, and Kindergarten settings before teaching preschool for two years. She received her Master's in Curriculum and Instruction with certification in Kindergarten through eighth grade and taught Kindergarten in a school in this district for one year and first grade for eight years —four years at other schools in the district and four years at Grammar School. She said, "I have immensely enjoyed [teaching first grade] and found that this is really my calling" (personal communication, August 6, 2015).

Allie is the inclusion teacher at Grammar School; she uses her psychology background to teach students who have been identified as needing special education services: that is learning disabilities, high levels of reading support, ESL support, etc. Allie was hired at Grammar School to replace the previous inclusion teacher. She was apprehensive about accepting this position, however, her fears were easily diverted once she began the school year. "[I thought] these are kinda big shoes to fill. To come in … the team was —warm, inviting, accepting, and really helped me" (personal

communication, August 6, 2015). Allie mentioned she remains the inclusion teacher for a variety of reasons.

> I kind of stepped into a class list that was already made and had that population for my first year here. And it went, I think, well, in everybody's opinion. The specialists and I worked well together. We collaborate well. Because of my Master's, and I also have a special needs child at home … I have somewhat of a background in that and I think the patience and can work very well meeting the needs of some of the students. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

When asked whether or not she will remain as the inclusion teacher for years to come, Allie states that she feels okay with this role moving forward. "As a team, we don't ever really talk about it. It's just kind of an unspoken thing. The administration actually picks which students go into which classroom" (personal communication, August 6, 2015).

Allie speaks poignantly about the immense spread of academic ability among the students in her classroom, which is often much greater than that of her colleagues because she teaches the inclusion students. She approaches her job as the inclusion teacher with precision and patience; she reviews each student's assessment scores and makes determinations about the best curricular approach and support structure for each student. She spoke of the challenges she faced last year:

> My room seemed to be kind of the room that had the families that turned over more. … So as a teacher, that can be a challenge because kids are coming in at different times of the year and at different places and you really have to work extra hard to kinda find out where they are and help them out. [Last year] I had the highest reading group and I also had the lowest reading group. And so that

was interesting. When you have a range of, in first grade, a Level A to a Level 30, which is our cap. So I had kids who couldn't read traditional sight words [Level Preprimer] and then kids who are reading third grade level chapter books [Level 30]. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

After observing her classroom for a week, it was clear that Allie has a similar academic situation this school year as well.

Allie spoke of being anxious at the start of a new school year but enjoyed the ability to work with her colleagues to plan and organize the curriculum and materials for the students. She stated:

> [Mary], [another colleague] and I actually came in last week and spent three hours together, and we pulled out the [standards] and the old curriculum guides and pacing guides and we planned out science and social studies for the entire year which was wonderful. We just love having our template and having everything kind of in place and then emailed to the other two members and said, "Does this look okay? What do you think?" We just wanted to do it because last year, we didn't have time to do that. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

Allie also talked about organizing her own files, cabinets, and personal materials to both physically and mentally prepare for the new, and specifically larger ESL population of students.

> I keep thinking, okay, I'm going to have to provide a lot more background knowledge [for these students]. I'm going to have to provide maybe vocabulary. … There are some great Spanish/English picture dictionaries, which I haven't had

in my room for students before, and now I'm thinking, oh, I need to have all of that kind of material in my room. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

Allie stressed that having a variety of supports, such as resources, school personnel, and volunteers in place will help her to alleviate some concerns she may have entering the new school year. "Knowing that [the students] might not have help at home we can help them more [at school]" (personal communication, August 6, 2015).

Allie believes it is important to meet every child at their academic and behavioral level and to approach each child with specific, yet purposeful accommodations.

> Say the child's coming in with a past history of misbehavior. My environment, my classroom is different than their Kindergarten classroom. My personality might be different than their Kindergarten teacher. So I can't really go on what's been reported beforehand. …I think that's why you have to kinda wait without any preconceived notions and just kinda see what's going to work, how the child's going to act in here. It's a different group of kids also, so the environment is going to be completely different. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

And, ultimately, Allie stresses that teaching is about the kids.

> I love having the kids here and you know, hearing their stories and their excitement and first grade is great because the kids want to be here and want to learn and they're so excited about everything. So I look forward to that all the time. … That's why I come to work. … I love teaching. I love having time with the kids. I love seeing them learn. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

Kitty

Kitty is an African-American female in her 50s. She attended a former state teachers' university where she received her undergraduate degree in early childhood and special education. Her first position was in a rural school district in which she traveled to various schools providing special education instruction. "[School district] was very, very rural, so I spent most of my time being lost" (personal communication, July 15, 2015). After a few years, Kitty moved and worked in retail and later at a preschool for handicapped children. All the while, she wished for a teaching position in her Virginia hometown.

A few years later, Kitty was offered a third grade position and then an all-day Kindergarten position in this school district, her hometown. While teaching Kindergarten for seven years, Kitty received her Master's degree in education with emphasis in special education from a private university in the Hampton Roads area. As Kitty's teaching style began to unfold, she was forced into a first grade position by administration who perceived this level to be a better fit. The majority of her Kindergarten and first grade teaching years, amounting to more than two decades, has been at Grammar School. "This is my heart. They can build all the new schools that they want to build. … And I am happy here, so I will retire here" (personal communication, July 15, 2015). In all, Kitty has been teaching for a little over thirty years.

Although Kitty enjoys working with the children (she often refers to them as "my friends"), she discussed at length the negative changes in the teaching profession including increased academic standards for students beginning in Kindergarten, such as,

learning to read which make the occupation increasingly difficult and often frustrating. Kitty noted:

> Teaching is not what it used to be. I mean, there's a lot of things that you have to do. And I'm not a fast worker because whatever I do, I put my all and ... I'm very thorough. So, I'm just tired. I'm just tired. I just am tired of all the stuff that they have us do and all the paperwork that they expect for you to do. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Ultimately, Kitty would like to work with students on an individual basis instead of in a classroom setting, providing increased academic services and assistance for struggling learners. She strives to work with students who may have not received or qualified for school and/or school district academic support programs but are nearing the edge of failing due to socioeconomic status, absenteeism, or deficient parent participation in school-based academic requirements, such as helping their children complete homework.

> I feel for these children. Because this little population that you're looking at, it's not the ESL population. It's mixed. I mean you have Caucasians and you have African-Americans. And they're at the bottom of the barrel. I mean, they're at the bottom of the barrel for a lot of things. … This population is not able to go on field trips because mom and dad, if there is a daddy in the home, they have to work on putting food on the table and putting clothing on their children. And school, as ugly as it sounds, it goes to the wayside. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Kitty spoke only briefly during the first interview about creating a workable classroom space before the upcoming school year. Although she is anxious and excited

to meet and work with her new "friends," the thought of setting up her room is not an enticing activity. "I mean with a passion. I *hate* it" (personal communication, July 15, 2015). Her lack of enthusiasm comes from having acquired an overabundance of materials during her teaching tenure, which requires a prolonged amount of time to set up to her satisfaction.

> I'll start working like in the afternoon and I'll start working and I'll do this and I'll do this and I'll do that. And then, by September 3rd, when the children walk in, I'm exhausted. And then I just put everything in a box and just dash it to the side. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Kitty expresses great care for her students and constantly pushes them to do their best academically and behaviorally. Becoming active in her students' lives helps Kitty remain in contact with students and parents after they leave her classroom.

> I always tell the children that I push. I mean, I'm a pusher. I don't shove, but I do push. And I always say I do it because I care. I care because they're students but eventually, I fall in love [with them]. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Kitty also eats lunch with her students daily, a practice she was required to do in her very first teaching job and one that has remained in her repertoire ever since. She feels this is another way she can learn about her students in a non-academic manner and show them that she cares about them.

Concluding Thoughts

Over the course of the past few years, Grammar School's student population has become more diverse and, arguably, more academically challenging to teach, particularly in the area of Language Arts. Each of the three study participants, although different in

their ages, personal backgrounds, educational preparation, and approaches to teaching students, provide positive classrooms environments that are inviting and exciting places to learn. Each participant wants to ensure that all of the students in their classroom receive appropriate educational services and supports necessary for academic success.

Chapter 5

Study Results

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view… until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.
- Atticus Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The results of this study are interesting, complex, and robust; a tribute to the diverse perspectives of the three teacher participants. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first two sections highlight the participants' view of the teaching profession in general and being a classroom teacher in their current school environment. The participants discuss a shift in the teaching profession from one that imparts knowledge onto students to meeting physical and emotional needs of their student populations. The teachers discuss the current emphasis on standardized assessment in the field of education and its effect on their teaching methods and strategies. Also emphasized in this first section is the importance of teacher teams and how working collaboratively with colleagues ultimately benefits the students.

The second section focuses on how the participants create and maintain their physical classroom spaces, different student behavior management systems, and their curricular and teaching approaches to developmental learning opportunities appropriate for all students. The final two sections of this chapter relate open and honest discussions with the participants on such topics as being acutely aware of the cultural differences between themselves and their students and the dilemma of providing appropriate academic opportunities for all of the students in their classrooms.

The complexity of the study results caused me to rethink my initial strategy of discussing each participant individually as well as pulling apart the concepts of beliefs, attitudes, and values in my analysis. As a result, I present perspectives from each of the participants but with a mixture of conceptual understandings placed under broader headings that all of the participants shared as a group. As such, the results read more organically and less structured; they highlight the interesting and complex nature that the findings provided.

It is important to consider context when reading and drawing conclusions from research data. National data suggests a disconnection between the teachers' cultural background and understanding the cultures of his/her students. Further, my interpretation of various participant comments suggests the community surrounding Grammar School is slow to engage in rethinking their cultural understandings of the school environment based upon the increase in the Hispanic, ESL population. Therefore, the reader should remember that the teacher participants do not share in the same beliefs, attitudes, and values as others at Grammar School and in the surrounding community.

The Teaching Profession

The three teachers expressed a variety of beliefs, values, and attitudes toward their chosen profession of teaching. However, they shared several cultural elements in common. They feel that their role as a professional has become bifurcated and focused in two main areas: teaching academic content and fulfilling the role of caregiver to support the emotional needs of their students. Further, the participants described four elements of their current role as a teacher. First, addressing the needs displayed by their students has catapulted to a primary spot in their daily school life. Second, the participants feel their

teacher preparatory programs have not adequately equipped them with the appropriate skills to maintain the constant expectation of administering and interpreting the numerous standardized student assessments required each year and adjusting their lesson plans accordingly. Third, the participants spoke of the importance of working in tandem with colleagues as a key component to academic success of their students. And finally, they believe in the critical need for families, especially parents, to become a component of every child's learning process.

Meeting the Students' Immediate Needs

"Trainee teachers usually complete their schooling after several years of intensive education, during which they acquire both theoretical and practical tools for classroom work" (Friedman, 2000, p. 598). The transition from the collegiate environment to that of the classroom is often harsh and shocking for most inexperienced teachers, resulting in a "rude awakening from an idealistic dream, and the shattering of anticipations of an enjoyable and satisfying professional career" (p. 598). Although the participants are not new to the teaching profession, each spoke of how the teaching profession has changed in recent years from an environment of "just teaching" for which they focused on academic content only to one that requires addressing the emotional and physical needs of their students before attending to academic learning.

Research indicates that a connection exists between academic achievement and brain development (Waber et al., 2007). "Chronic exposure to poverty" and the related risk factors including, lack of medical care, inadequate housing conditions, lack of proper nutrition, physical and mental abuse, and so forth, "causes the brain to physically change in a detrimental manner" (Jensen, 2009, p. 8). These risk factors make daily living a

struggle and academic learning nearly impossible for many students. Teachers must address the extreme risk these factors have on student learning and continued academic success (Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Deater-Deckard, 2004).

The study participants explained that in recent years they have had to act in a "mother" or "caregiver" role before using their teaching skills each day. Each of these teachers (and many other teachers and staff members at Grammar School) stand in the hallway near the student lockers or just outside their classroom door every morning both to monitor student behavior and greet the students before they enter the classroom. The participants often ask the students if they slept well last night or attended the school breakfast program, as about half of the students in each of their classrooms are eligible. Although the participants know they are unable to alter students' home situations, they offer what positive experiences they can when the students are in school each day. "That's [the students' home situation] hard. I mean, [I] think about what they go home to and it's sad. Some of them are in really sad situations" (Mary, personal communication, July 16, 2015).

Clearly, the teachers believe that addressing their students' most basic needs prior to any consideration of more complex issues, such as their academics, is a priority. They value the health and well-being of their students before academic progress. This claim aligns directly with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, the motivational theory of satisfying an individual's most basic needs before more complex needs can be addressed. Maslow's lower levels of individual physiological, safety, and belonging drives a student up the hierarchy toward acceptance of facts, problem solving, and creativity —that is, learning.

Abraham Maslow, a humanistic psychologist, believed that human beings ultimately strive toward the highest levels of potential by developing their creativity, consciousness, and wisdom (Simons, Irwin, & Drinnien, 1987). This potential is based upon a hierarchical system, and the apex cannot be reached without satisfying the most basic and physiological human needs including air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. The participants mentioned that they assist students with money for meals and with items of clothing, such as mittens, hats, and coats when necessary in order to meet the students' basic needs.

Post 9-11 and the recent epidemic of increased national school violence have forced school administrators and teachers to rethink their plans for maintaining safe school environments. Grammar School regularly practices school safety drills including quarterly fire and tornado drills and monthly intruder lock-down drills. Administrators work with local law enforcement personnel to assist teachers, school staff, and students with proper procedures during these drills. Firefighters and police officers enter the school building during these drills to ensure that all teachers have properly secured their classrooms and that all have exited the school building in a quiet and orderly manner.

During intruder drills, Grammar School teachers are instructed to lock their doors and move all students to a safe, obscure place in the classroom that is as far away from the intruder as possible. In addition, the classroom doors at Grammar School remain locked at all times, the windows on the doors are covered with paper, and all first floor classroom window shades are drawn as to not provide intruder access from the hallway or outside the school building. These precautions are practiced and discussed between

teachers and their students regularly —not to alarm students but, rather, to properly prepare them in the event of an emergency.

Maslow's third stage of belonging consists of an individual forming and maintaining emotionally significant relationships, and feeling accepted; it fulfills the need to love and be loved. The participants employ behaviors including engaging in appropriate physical contact, strengthening interpersonal relations of friendship, acceptance, and love between students and their teacher, and taking the time to talk with students on their physical level. Regardless of the disconnection between their learned beliefs about the teaching role and the harsh reality of their current teaching situation, the participants remain in the teaching profession because they genuinely love children and want to provide them a sense of belonging while in school. Valued above all else, the participants believe that a person should teach because that love satisfies an emotional need of the children that translates into a lifetime of academic and emotional success. "I love teaching. I love having time with the kids. I love seeing them learn" (Allie, personal communication, August 6, 2015). During my classroom observations, Mary showed her love and affection for students by hugging them. To maintain continued relationships, Mary also hugs former students who often visit her classroom before the school day begins to tell her about their studies or extracurricular activities. She takes the time to hug, smile, and wish them individually a good day of learning, regardless of her immediate mood or the work to be done in preparation for her own students.

Most importantly, the participants spoke fondly of the times during the school day when they were able to sit down at the students' physical level and take the time to talk informally with their students in order to get to know them personally. Allie worked over

the summer at Grammar School's ESL program. This effort provided her with an opportunity to meet and work directly with some of the prospective first grade students and their families. In preparation for Grammar School's Open House Night, Mary gave each of her students a "ME" poster to complete, shaped together to form the outline of an "M" and an "E." Students were asked to put pictures, notes, and any documentation of their likes, interests, families, etc. on the poster and bring them back to school to be discussed and displayed. When the children presented their posters in class, the contents permitted lively discussions about the personal lives of each student.

> Now I know a lot of their background. [The poster] helps me make connections with them. They want to come in and tell me, we want to tell each other [things]. You make a connection to something. We bring that up to help our relationships grow. Kids want to know that you care about them. (Mary, personal communication, October 21, 2015)

Kitty has lunch with her students in the cafeteria each day. Sharing the meal was a practice required by one of her formal principals, which she continues.

> [E]ating with my children, that's how I find out that [personal] information. I would not get that information otherwise, but eating with them, they are talking about non-academics. They're talking about their interests. … It gives me a chance to touch their world. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Engaging students in communication about their personal lives and interests helps the participants show that they care for their students and provide a sense of belonging that may be absent in the emotional psyche of some students. In addition, the participants get to know their students on a personal level by showing each student care, compassion, and

love, thus meeting the students' idiosyncratic needs. The personal knowledge helps to break down any sociocultural factors that may cloud the teachers' judgments about individual students and provides an opportunity for them to react to their students as individual human beings.

The next stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is esteem. An individual wants stable, firmly based, levels of respect from others and from themselves (Simons et al., 1987). When these needs are not met, an individual can feel helpless, frustrated, and inferior. The participants try very hard to make students in their classrooms have successful opportunities by positively reinforcing good behavior. Further, they modify the curriculum by using a variety of teaching and learning strategies to provide learning opportunities that positively engage students and respect their need for learning at their personal levels. Students in Mary's class are rewarded with pennies for "helping a student or using good manners" (personal communication, October 21, 2015). Through this penny system, Mary is showing her students she respects their decision to be kind to others. After teaching and practicing a skill in the classroom, Kitty occasionally lines up the students to go outside on the playground. While standing in line, Kitty asks each student to answer a simple math problem or name an object in the classroom that is a shape of a triangle. She provides questions to each child that she knows he or she could answer with small amounts of difficulty while connecting their knowledge to a necessary first grade skill. "I would have asked [a student] a question and it's something pertaining to learning. … I try to get everybody where they're successful. … I want to make learning as clean, as simple, and as pleasant as possible for the children" (personal communication, July 15, 2015).

Valuing the health and well-being of their students before academic progress, thus reintroducing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in current school life, has helped the participants to satisfy basic needs of the students before addressing more complex ones. This process is observed in the behaviors that the teachers show toward their students. Providing clothing, showing affection, and modeling good behavior all contribute toward Maslow's lower levels of individual physiological, safety, and belonging. To facilitate the academic work of their students and continue to supply students with a safe classroom environment where no student feels ostracized because he or she does not have the necessary materials and supplies, the three teachers provide classroom materials in small tubs and labeled at eye level for their students to use daily. Some of these supplies have been purchased by the school, namely, grade-level books and math manipulatives, such as plastic colored links, cubes, and blocks. Other supplies are specifically purchased by the teacher for communal use such as art supplies for specific projects, post-it notes, stickers, etc.

In addition to school- and teacher-provided materials, students use consumable supplies, such as pencils, crayons, and glue sticks. At the beginning of the school year, a list of necessary supplies is sent to parents. However, the teachers recognize some students and families cannot afford all of the supplies on the list. Thus, to avoid embarrassment for children from less-economically secure families, a community tub of pencils, crayons, scissors, markers, and erasers is located in the middle of each student table in every classroom. Any student may to take and use these materials without question. Often I observed students using a favorite pencil or a pair of scissors located in the communal tub instead of their own. The participants respect the students enough to

know that these communal supplies would be used properly, as needed without question, and maintained by the students throughout the school year.

Emphasis on District, State, and National Mandates and Standards

Each of the participants are graduates of baccalaureate teacher training programs and two completed graduate level work in elementary teaching methods, instruction, and pedagogy. Yet even acquiring higher levels of education specifically designed to prepare teachers to teach in a classroom setting, the participants question their preparedness in today's teaching environment. Recent national educational legislation, that is, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as well as new academic standards and assessments from the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and updated Standards of Learning (SOLs) have required classroom teachers to teach higher levels of content knowledge and assess students more often than previously demanded. Increased academic and assessment demands, however, have not been accompanied by the requisite teacher training or resources. Participants now use their limited spare time to strategize with their colleagues and find resources to develop new lessons plans that maintain adequate levels of student learning to meet the formal assessment requirements. Any feedback about the school district and state-regulated assessments that is provided by the participants often falls on deaf ears. As a result, the participants feel they are treated as functionaries in a large district and state educational system.

Although the participants' teacher preparatory programs stressed various teaching theories and methods to use with students, they neglected to address the difficulties many teachers face surrounding the writing and implementation of these plans. Preservice

teacher programs dictate the practice of lesson plan writing. However, upon employment, teachers often find that the school administration or the district dictate specific lesson plans to be used in the classroom to match local or state assessments. This challenge poses two threats for new and veteran teachers. First, teachers' lesson plan writing skills become lax when they are given plans from their superiors. Second, the school district ideals and the daily activities in individual classroom settings may not coincide. Indeed, the district, while directing the use of certain lesson plans, may not provide appropriate materials, guidelines, or feasibility measures such as a few questions on a unit quiz, that can actually be used with the current students in a classroom setting. Therefore, teachers face a disconnection between what is required of them to teach and what actually can be taught on a daily basis. For example, the school district mandated the participants to write verbose lesson plans in response to state and national Language Arts standards for schools with a high proportion of students who have tested below grade level in this subject. As a result, the participants wrote highly detailed lesson plans to meet all of these external requirements but struggled to implement them in the classroom. Mary stated:

> The Language Arts plans that we made, we didn't have time to use because we were doing guided reading [instruction] for 90% of our Language Arts block.[11] So we made these beautiful, wonderful plans that in a perfect world would be great if there were 12 hours a day that we were actually in school and we could do

[11] A block of instruction is a district mandated set time for particular content area instruction to occur each day. For example, the Language Arts block at Grammar School occurs for a 3-hour period each day. Due to scheduling, two of the participants schedule this block in the morning while the third participant divides this period into a morning and afternoon period in order to meet the daily school requirements.

all of it. So it was kind of all for naught. We would only do a portion of the Language Arts plans but we had to make them because it was required. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Another component of lesson plan writing is allowing for adjustments to occur based upon formal and informal assessments of students. As students learn new concepts and skills, teaching methods and materials need to be adjusted to fit their needs. The participants commented on a substantial lack of sufficient time during the school day to adequately assess students, review the results, compile individual student records based upon the test scores, and rewrite academic content to meet students' individual learning needs based upon the assessment results. One example can be described from the state-mandated reading and spelling assessments given to all first grade students. The reading assessments are administered four times during the school year and each first grader takes a weekly spelling test of approximately ten to twelve high-frequency words. The reading assessments must be administered individually and each assessment can take approximately twenty minutes to complete. The spelling tests, however, can be administered in a whole group format from one spelling list taking approximately the same time to complete.

With administrative foresight, the time involved for the individual student reading assessments has been reduced. During the first quarter of the school year, Grammar School's principal recruited the two Reading Recovery teachers and the reading specialist to assist the five first grade teachers with administering and completing the required reading assessments. All of these individuals, including the principal, a former reading

teacher, administered the tests to the first grade students. Allie spoke in detail about this process:

> …our administrator came together to come up with a schedule so that we could knock the tests out a bit quicker. Instead of taking two weeks to do it, most of it could get done within probably three or four days, which was really nice. It was great. … It was kind of like an "all hands on deck." All seven adults would go to one teacher's classroom while the students were being watched and helped and supervised by a teacher assistant. You could test the kids. There were no distractions, and then another day, you'd go to another classroom … until we got to all five classrooms. (personal communication, October 5, 2015)

Allie noted, however, that the additional help only allowed her to complete the assessment process. It did not allow her time during the school day to record the students' test results promptly into the district database. She took this information home and completed the recordkeeping process over the course of the following week, just in time for her to begin the individual student report card process.

The extra assistance administering the tests helped the participants in terms of timesaving, yet other issues arose as byproducts of this process. For example, Kitty questioned the validity and reliability of the students' test results. Validity is "the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure" permitting "appropriate interpretation of scores" (Gay, L.R., 1996, p. 138). Reliability is "the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures" (p. 145). When considering validity, Kitty said, "It's like when [the students] take a test on a computer, are we testing the content or are we testing how well they can use a computer?" (personal communication,

November 3, 2015). Kitty noted test reliability when considering the high rate of speed in which tests are given, possible errors in measurement, and test-retest measures as causes for concern.

> When it comes down to testing the children, I'm going through the motions because it's expected. Sometimes I go fast. Sometimes I've always wondered, how accurate it is because I'm going bam, bam, bam, very quickly. I've got to get it done. You've got to get it done because something else is waiting for me [to do]. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Using information gathered from the assessments is useless if the tests are administered hastily and the results are inaccurate. Further, reporting the validity and reliability of the assessments to their administrator and district personnel is not possible if the tests are not administered in a trustworthy manner, for instance, if they were administered by a single or few highly trained individuals. Further, with others involved in the assessment, knowledge of some of the individual students is lost to their teachers.

> What bothers me is I have to get other people to help me test my children. That bothers me because if someone else tests my children, I'm not getting the information [firsthand] … [How is] it supposed to help me as an instructor …? (Kitty, personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Each of the participants believes student assessments are an increasing source of angst in the current school environment for a variety of reasons. In addition to the inordinate amount of time it takes the teachers to administer the assessments, record the testing results, and adjust their written curriculum to meet the academic needs of the students, the participants agree that administering assessments take away valuable

instruction time. "[The assessment process] takes away so much of that valuable time from teaching, but it also breaks my spirit because it's so stressful" (Mary, personal communication, October 21, 2015). Mary continued to speak poignantly about assessment stress.

> To get all that [testing] done, and what am I going to do when I'm assessing one-on-one? What are the other students going to be doing? Are they actually learning? How am I going to hold them accountable? There are so many pieces to the assessment puzzle that make teachers feel stressed out. It's not just the assessment itself, it's everything that goes along with it. (personal communication, October 21, 2015)

In addition, the participants at Grammar School fret over outside perceptions of their students' academic progress based upon the assessment results that are publically reported by the school district annually. They believe that links exist among the changing student demographics —the increased Hispanic, homeless, and special education student populations, the overall lower academic ability in students in their classrooms, and lower standardized assessment scores.

> My neighbors or taxpayers or people who live in [Schooltown], I don't think they realize how hard this school works. … I think everybody in this community thinks that [this town] is affluent and everybody's doing great [academically]. You know, how can they not be doing well? I don't think people realize the huge population of transient, homeless [students]. … We deal with that every day. (Allie, personal communication, August 6, 2015)

In recent years, Grammar School has not enrolled a large enough Hispanic or special education student population and, therefore, has not been required to report many of the state standardized assessment scores for these students. However, as mentioned before, with the construction of a new elementary school and the subsequent redistricting, students from wealthier families have left Grammar School, while more Hispanic students recently have been enrolled. The new state mandate regarding these students reads, "A subgroup or proficiency gap group in a school or a division must include at least 30 students for the corresponding annual measurable objective to factor in accountability decisions" (VDOE, 2015a, p. 3). This year, the participants will be required to report scores for their ELL and special education student populations at Grammar School because these groups will meet the mandate subgroup/proficiency gap group requirements. "[Reporting of the scores] hasn't counted but it's going to start. And it's a population that isn't always as successful as we need them to be on the test scores" (Mary, personal communication, July 16, 2015). Allie continued,

> We have a great group of teachers who are all working hard and we're all doing everything we possibly can, but we just can't meet the goals because we're faced with, I think, more challenges than a lot of other [schools]. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

The increased challenges due to additional assessment requirements and changing student demographics have led the participants to question their teacher training program preparation in terms of assessment and lesson plan writing as well as their overall ability to meet the demanding role of a teacher in today's classroom environment.

Working with Others

As the African proverb states, "It takes a village to raise a child." A necessary component of the academic teaching of children in schools are the teachers and other school personnel such as reading specialists, volunteers, classroom aids, etc., who work with and assist students every day. Despite being located in different parts of the Grammar School building, the participants spoke highly of their team members and their successful collegiality. Working in tandem with colleagues is a key component of academic success of their students. Synonymous with Schein's (1992) view of organizational culture, the participants agree that the accumulated and shared skills of each of the team members help to promote both collegiality and overall team functioning, which translate into increased learning for the first grade students. The first grade team members (and additional school personnel who work with them) utilize their individual skills to increase the group's capacity. This positive team collaboration, they believe, helps them prepare for and teach each of their students.

The three participants as part of the first grade team at Grammar School approach teaching very differently. "Our teaching styles are very different, but when it comes to us working together, we use each other's strengths and work really, really well together" (Mary, personal communication, July 16, 2015). Even with their differences, it is about "little puzzle pieces that all fit really well together" (Mary, personal communication, July 16, 2015). Quite possibly, their collegiality stems from each team member making an effort to learn and care about each other. "We get along. We really get along. We like each other as people. We work well as a team" (Kitty, personal communication, July 15, 2015).

The participants know personal information regarding each other's families and celebrate special events like birthdays and baby showers together, outside of their school context. While attending school team meetings with these individuals, I experienced firsthand an inviting team atmosphere. Coming to Grammar School four years ago, Allie also felt the warm team atmosphere of the group. "The team was just readily, warm, inviting, accepting, and really helped me" (personal communication, August 6, 2015). This aspect of being part of a positive team atmosphere is a very important component of the teaching profession to all of the participants, especially Kitty. "They're positive. They're wonderful. And I think [having a good team] is what teaching is all about. You cannot be an island by yourself. You have to have each other" (personal communication, July 15, 2015). Being part of a team helps each participant feel emotionally and professionally supported. This concept, applied to the participants instead of the students, aligns directly with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory area of esteem. Knowing that their team members understand them personally, helps each participant feel comfortable about sharing the challenges they are facing in their classroom, getting advice, and making changes that ultimately will help their students.

Similar to the relationships among team members, the relationships between the classroom teachers and other school personnel are based upon open communication and constant collaboration. Team members communicate regularly, checking up on daily progress of the students with whom they work and ensuring each adult is working towards the students' academic goals. The participants work closely with Grammar School's ESL teacher and reading specialists and share the created Language Arts and mathematics lesson plans with these teachers on a weekly basis. Mary notes, "And [the

ESL and reading teachers] will reinforce what we're doing, … and they're great about doing it. 'Oh you're doing American symbols this week?' or 'You're doing cause and effect, okay, I'll bring that into my lesson this week'" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). The additional academic reinforcement from a variety of teachers assists lower level and ESL students with their learning. Mary continues, "Bringing everybody on board and just staying in communication about the kids and their needs and what's relevant at the time. … So things like that I think when we're all on the same page, that helps those kids the most" (personal communication, July 16, 2015).

Further, the participants rely heavily on district-employed classroom aids and outside volunteers from various social organizations, such as literacy groups, local colleges/universities, and retirement homes, to assist them with various forms of academic support for students. These supports include monitoring student work, teaching small groups of children a particular skill, such as a noun is a person, place, or thing, checking homework, and playing games with students to reinforce skills previously taught in the classroom. "I also know I can have more volunteers come in and kind of help the students one-on-one in the classroom. … So I want to have volunteers in place that can help with what normally would be homework and [the students] can practice here at school" (Allie, personal communication, August 6, 2015).

Not only do the participants have positive relationships with each other, other staff members, and local volunteers, there is also a positive relationship between the participants and Grammar School's administration, especially the school principal. As noted, the principal assisted the participants with recent assessments, which helped to maintain consistency and promptness during a very laborious few weeks. Further, during

my observation periods I regularly saw the principal attend the first grade team meetings, provide input on lesson planning and scheduling conflicts that arose, and enter the first grade classrooms to say, "Hello" and "Good morning" to the teachers. Through these actions, the principal is modeling aspects of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs by creating and maintaining an environmental school culture that satisfies the participants' emotional needs and creating a sense of belongingness that strengthens everyone's ability to focus on teaching children.

The increased reliance upon aids and volunteers at Grammar School is due, in part, to the increased ESL/Hispanic population and identified academically struggling students. "I had two students before who didn't have help at home. This year, I know I am probably going to have five or six [out of a class of twenty]" (Allie, personal communication, August 6, 2015). Approximately, one-third of the parents of this year's first grade students do not speak English as their first language and, as a result, the participants suspect that some students do not receive adequate academic support at home, especially help with their homework due to this language barrier. When the parents do not speak English, they cannot read directions, instructions, or books with their children (in English). Thus, homework and additional practice is not always completed at home. The students then need additional help during school hours from individuals who speak English and have first-hand knowledge of school norms to further this part of academic instruction. Kitty often contacts her students' parents to inform them of their child's progress, both positive and negative. However, she notes, "I would call [the parents] and I would say, "So-and-so had a hard time with this. Could you

please help them?" And I think having so many ESL children, [the parents] don't speak English, I just couldn't do that [this year]" (personal communication, July 15, 2015).

The participants agree, however, that parents remain an essential part of the teaching and learning process. They note all students benefit from parental assistance at home, no matter the duration or native language. Students who receive additional academic help at home make greater academic progress in school than those who do not receive any home assistance. Dufur, Parcel, and Troutman (2013) found that capital in the form of a social partnership between schools and families, positively affects academic achievement of students. Using data collected from the National Longitudinal Education Study, Dufur et al. (2013), noted the social capital from each context is important; however, capital from the family is more important than that derived from school. Kitty noted,

> You can tell when parents aren't helping [the students] and you can tell when parents are. That little girl who I was speaking of earlier, she couldn't write, and every day I would ask her, and I tell her, I'd say, "You know what? If you don't work at it, if you don't work at it at home, it's not a secret." It's really obvious. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Kitty also noted, "I always tell parents, children can't do this by themselves. School is hard" (personal communication, November 3, 2015). She sums up the parent-student relationship concerning academics well:

> Children are pretty honest. When you say, "Is mom helping you?" they'll say [shakes head yes] or they'll say [shakes head no]. I'm real big to say [to students], "I can tell mommy's helping you." Or "I can tell daddy's helping you."

> Hopefully, to encourage them to continue to ask for parents to help. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

The Classroom Teacher

Each of the participants discussed elements of being a classroom teacher, namely, shaping their classroom environments to meet the academic needs of their students, maintaining order in their classrooms through a variety of student behavior management systems, and using a various curricular and teaching approaches to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

Classroom Environments

Each participant believes classroom environments should provide maximum learning and efficiency for both the students and teacher. During the summer interviews, I asked the participants to comment on their classroom space preparations leading up to student arrival in the fall. This preparation included careful planning of furniture arrangement, readily accessible material placement, and a review of curricular materials for use at the beginning weeks of the school year and in preparation for lesson plan writing and instruction. Allie stated,

> As the end of [August] gets closer, there's obviously more time in the classroom, getting the room so that it looks ready. And then we start looking at the beginning of the year stuff and pulling out the files from last year and the year before and seeing what works – just getting stuff ready. (personal communication, August 8, 2015)

A neat and orderly classroom sets a positive tone for the new school year. Mary commented that when considering her summer classroom preparations, "I want the kids

to feel welcome, I just want my space to be inviting and be as functional as it can be" (personal communication, July 16, 2015).

Preparing the physical classroom space before student arrival is imperative as this process is impossible to start and difficult to maintain once the students are in the classroom. The majority of the school day is spent administering instruction and assessments and the participants struggle to find even a brief amount of time to put away used materials and get out new ones. Often this task is accomplished when students are out of the classroom for art or music, special area instruction, or during non-contracted time before or after school. After leading her class to art, for example, Mary often scurried up the stairs to get back to her classroom to prepare materials for the next academic period. She did not want to waste valuable instruction time having her students wait while she located the next worksheet or project. Time, she often commented, is her biggest enemy: "After thirty-one days of school, I need a teacher workday. All my clutter has come back and I need time to put it away" (Mary, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Maintaining Behavioral Structure and Order

Although each of the participants approach behavior plans and discipline procedures differently, they all agree maintaining behavioral order in the classroom is a priority. The participants expect the students to behave while in school. This belief upholds the school's cultural norm: positive student behavior is expected and achievable. First, it allows the collective group of students to function and learn in the classroom together. When addressed at the very beginning of the school year, good student

behavior establishes a positive classroom atmosphere, conducive for teaching and learning.

> Behavior is something I focus on initially [at the beginning of the school year]. We get the behavior down because I tell them, I said, "You know what? I cannot teach in chaos. I cannot teach when you don't listen. And you can't learn if I don't teach and you can't learn if you don't listen." (Kitty, personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Second, and perhaps more importantly in the current public school environment, behavior management provides teachable moments in character education: being kind, sharing, respecting others, and so forth. Teaching character education in public schools is not a recent phenomenon and can be found in early 1800s school historical records. Then, schools taught students character and good citizenship through strict discipline methods, and good examples of hard work, patriotism, honesty, thriftiness, altruism, and courage (Sojourner, 2012). Good character "makes us morally inclined to do the right thing and to do our best work in all areas of our lives" (p. 3).

During the 1960s and early 1970s, however, confidence in teaching character education lapsed. Many believed espousing basic values taught in character education lessons in a public school setting were inappropriate and a prohibited endorsement of religious practice. By the mid-1970s, the public viewed character education as non-existent due to rising drug use in teens, cheating, school vandalism, theft, harassment, and bullying incidents. Many believed these factors were based on the influx of immigrants into the United States, attributing to the degradation of the familial structure, failure to

attend to family values at home, and misguided parenting strategies (Helwig, Turiel, & Nucci, 1997).

Even in an environment of high-level of resistance to the idea of teaching virtue and morality in public settings, scholars such as Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) made character education a priority again by writing curriculum based upon discussions of moral dilemmas. This curriculum was adopted by public school systems and a resurgence of character education commenced. Grammar School subscribes to the *Character Counts!* initiative, a 1987 project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. *Character Counts!* promotes the six pillars of character education including trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Character counts!, 2015). Banners are hung in the main hallway of the school and embedded in the school's motto "I will always do my best for myself and others. I will be safe, respectful, responsible, and hardworking." All Grammar School students recite this pledge every morning.

Mary and Kitty discussed some negative changes they have seen in student behavior over time that have required them to reconsider their own behavioral management approaches and to increase character education lessons into their classrooms. Mary stated,

> [The teacher] wants to create that cohesive group and make sure everyone gets along and is respectful and teaching some of those character education things at the beginning of the year because a lot of kids don't have that nowadays. [The students] don't know how to treat each other. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Kitty noted,

> I'm just noticing that [the students are] just not as nice to each other. They're not as tolerant of others and their differences. …When I was a child many, many years ago, … my father always told me that I could not dislike a person for something they can't control. I could not dislike a person because of the color of their skin or because they wore glasses because you can't control that. … There are so many things [the students] just don't bite their tongues when it comes down to saying things like that, that we would never say. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Both Mary and Kitty value positive, respectful behavior among students and want to teach their students to uphold this value. Mary uses behavior management techniques to promote classroom unity. Kitty recognized a niche to fill when identifying a cultural difference in how her students are treating each other and her own childhood upbringing. Her classroom behavior management stems from the teaching of tolerance of others as taught to her by her father.

Each of the participants ascribes to a different behavior management system that they believe promotes both classroom structure and order. The systems originate from posters hung in each classroom, which delineate the rules that students need to follow or obey each day. Each classroom contains a poster; in two of the classrooms these rules are teacher-authored while in the third classroom the teacher bought the poster in a store. The posters are predetermined and pre-printed on large paper without student input. The third classroom also contains small cartoon-like plaques hung in various places around the room with different classroom rules such as "Be kind." Two of the teachers use the

structure of classroom rules to maintain a teacher-centered, formal classroom environment by using one, very large teacher-driven rules poster. The third participant offers a more casual approach to rules; gentle reminders scattered around the classroom allowing students to see the rules at every turn.

Allie. Allie posts her classroom rules on one large poster that she created. She discusses her rules with students at the beginning of the school year. These rules encourage students to be good listeners, quietly walk in the school hallways, obey adult directions, and be safe. During my classroom observations, Allie continually reminded students of these rules in some variation; she discusses them orally during daily whole group instruction or communicates them in her morning written message to students a few times per week. Her approach to behavior management aims to help students build internal values that enable them to monitor their own behavior regardless of outside influences. "It's really just about making choices and making sure that the students understand that they are not a bad student or a bad person, but that sometimes the choices they make aren't necessarily good choices" (Allie, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

A bulletin board in her classroom shows sailboats labeled with each student's number.[12] Students begin each school day with their boat on the green section of the board. The green section translates to "smooth sailing" and shows the student is using appropriate behavior inside the classroom, during field trips, on the school playground, and in other classrooms and school building spaces such as the cafeteria or auditorium. After three warnings, redirections, or reminders by Allie due to behavioral infractions,

[12] Allie uses a number system instead of student names to provide students anonymity.

the student is asked to move his or her boat to the yellow or "rough waters" section of the board. Allie has the students move their individual sailboat to establish an action, which represents a consequence for the negative behavior. If a student on the yellow section of the board receives three more warnings, redirections, or reminders by Allie, he or she must then move their boat to the red section for "sinking sailboats."

> If a student is struggling [behaviorally], I do have them move their boat from green to yellow. That just means that they need to stop and think about what they're doing. It's cautionary. How can they make better choices if somebody else might not be doing the right thing? How can they make a better choice next time? (Allie, personal communication, November 5, 2015)

Allie keeps track of student behavioral infractions in a small notebook on her table. Minor infractions are an important teachable moment for Allie. Rather than making a public display in front of the whole class, she takes students aside who have misbehaved in minor ways. Individually then she can help the student contemplate the negative behaviors.

> I'll follow up with the student later and just say to them, "I saw you doing this. Can you tell me why you were doing that? Is there a different way you could have handled that situation?" … It just gives them time to think about [their behavior and say], "Oh yeah, maybe I shouldn't have done this. I should have used my words and been kind to someone else instead of trying to hurt their feelings." (Allie, personal communication, November 5, 2015)

Discussions can also occur in a whole group setting (such as morning meeting time) when Allie notices that multiple students are exhibiting similar behavioral issues, such as

tattling on their classmates to the teacher. Allie believes these conversations offer all students a chance to reflect and redirect their individual behaviors toward a more positive group atmosphere and continue group conversations surrounding issues and topics of Grammar School's character education program.

Major infractions, although rare, have occurred in past years in Allie's classroom. If a student's boat was moved to the red level, a serious behavior has occurred: a student has hit another student or left the classroom or playground without adult supervision. This behavior prompts Allie to document the infraction, contact the parents, talk with the student, and notify school administrators. Regardless of their sailboat status by the end of the school day, each student begins a new day on the green section of the board. Allie feels the students respond well to this system, as she has not had many minor behavioral infractions or issues in her classroom, at least, since the school year began. Many students improve their behavior as the school year continues because they feel personal embarrassment when asked to move their sailboat to another section of the board. In general, however, Allie notes that many of her students are behaviorally "good" but need occasional reminders about behaviors that are deemed inappropriate in a public school setting.

Mary. Mary's coin behavior management system as described in Chapter 4 offers her students a tangible way to make good behavior a habitual practice. She hopes the increased amount of coins in their individual piggy banks will lead students toward an internal drive to behave well in her classroom. This system is one of the more tangible reminders of good behavior in her classroom. Mary's room has multiple reminders that are strategically placed throughout the classroom for students to see on a daily basis. For

instance, a small plaque with cartoon pictures of young children near the sink reminds students to be respectful, responsible, and kind.

Even though Mary's personal attitude is laid-back and flexible, she stresses the importance of respect: amongst her and her students, her and her colleagues, and between students. "When a student speaks to you in such a disrespectful way, it makes your blood pressure go crazy and it's hard to take" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). During the summer interview, Mary spoke specifically about an incoming first grade student who was known school-wide as being very disrespectful of adults while just in Kindergarten. She was concerned that this student may be placed in her classroom and become a challenge to manage throughout the school year.

> She is very rude, and disrespectful, apathetic, and mean. And for someone who's so little to already have all of those characteristics; she will be a challenge. And if she is in my room, [it will be important to] find a balance right away. (personal communication, July 16, 2015)

Regardless of her behavior, Mary's sense of caring for this student remains evident and significant. "You know, I will love her but she's gonna know that these are the rules and expectations of the classroom" (personal communication, July 16, 2015). Forming a partnership with this child's mother to ensure stability and coherence between behavior management at school and at home would have been Mary's top priority come fall. In the end, this student was placed in another first grade classroom and Mary continued with her coin behavior management system that is working quite well this year.

Kitty. The behavior management structure Kitty creates in her classroom is constructed from her personal desire for fairness between her and her students. She

creates rules and expectations of her students that she also follows. "These are the rules of the room. I have to follow them as well. … Like if we don't chew gum, I don't chew gum" (personal communication, July 15, 2015).

Although a formal poster of classroom rules such as "Be safe" and "Always listen to the teacher" is predominantly displayed on her bulletin board, Kitty uses teachable moments to discuss behavior infractions and modifications. For example, after modeling how to play a card game with a student, Kitty gave the cards to her and asked that she select another student to play. After a time, Kitty heard the two students arguing about what cards they needed to set up the game. She interrupted the two students and mentioned to them so that the whole class could hear that part of playing the game was not arguing about the card distribution, as this is not what she modeled as appropriate playing rules. Instead, the students needed to find a way to divide the cards in an equal and fair manner as she instructed.

Methods and Curricular Approaches for Teaching Students

These three teachers have come to expect that the students in their classrooms have a wide range of academic abilities and thus, they seek to adjust their teaching and learning methods used in the classroom accordingly. As noted previously, the Kindergarten teachers at Grammar School commented the current group of first grade students are academically lower than previous groups. This translates into three components: students not having the requisite background knowledge to be successful in first grade due to language or other socioeconomic barriers; students entering first grade without first mastering Kindergarten benchmarks, therefore, putting them at an academic disadvantage during this school year; and students lacking the ability to make and retain

connections between first grade concepts as they are taught in class. In previous years, many of the students who were identified in one or more of these three categories were also labeled as ESL. The ESL label, therefore, became the main reason for the academic deficiencies identified in these students. This year, however, the reasons for the teachers' concerns are more complex. Kitty noted,

> I feel for these children. Because this little population that you're looking at [that are struggling academically], it's not the ESL population. … It's mixed. I mean you have Caucasians and you have African-Americans. And they're at the bottom of the barrel. They're at the bottom of the barrel for a lot of things. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Kitty is referring to students who lack the requisite background knowledge to be successful first graders. As noted, the issues relate to academics but also to a broader conceptual understanding of school culture. Students lack both the "book smarts" as well as the ability to fully understand the culture of school: how to behave appropriately, to come each day ready and able to learn, to have the necessary supplies to learn, and possess the ability to grasp concepts easily as they are taught in class. In other words, the students "at the bottom of the barrel" need the teachers to attend to their basic, individual physiological, safety, and sense of belonging needs before getting to the academic learning.

Mary addressed the challenge she and her colleagues face when teaching first grade students who have not yet mastered Kindergarten skills when she spoke of the size of her current student reading groups. In years past, the size of her groups has been relatively constant: five students each in four reading groups with two of the groups

below grade level, one group at grade level, and one group above grade level. This year, however, many of her groups have four students with the largest reading group composed of six students being her lowest group academically.

> Eleven of my nineteen kids are barely on grade level or below. That's how they came to first grade. It's my job to get them ready for second grade. I think it's very typical. That's the way this population is now [at this school]. (personal communication, October 21, 2015)

The participants note that many of their students are missing key academic skills, such as knowing the alphabet and being able to count to 100. They did not learn these skills in preschool and Kindergarten, which generally provides the foundation for first grade. Allie noted,

> I have two students who are English[-speaking] students. English is their first language and yet they came to me in first grade not knowing the alphabet, the letters of the alphabet, or any of the sounds that the letters make. That is unusual. Normally, kids will come and maybe know 24 of the letters and just have trouble with two or maybe reverse 'b' and a 'd' or maybe know all but a few sounds. (personal communication, November 5, 2015)

Allie attributes some of the gaps in academic achievement for her students to inconsistency of school attendance. This is due, in part, to the transiency of some of her students' families.

> I have one student who has no preschool and no Kindergarten background. I have another student who went to three different Kindergartens and then stopped at spring break and never went back. That really has been interesting because it

> shows huge gaps in what they might know or what their background knowledge is compared to a typical student who has come from Grammar School's Kindergarten to our classrooms in first grade. (personal communication, November 5, 2015)

Allie also notes that students who are struggling academically could be first-born children and their parents are unaware of the academic expectations of first grade. Grammar School, like many schools, continually helps to educate parents on what is expected academically in each grade level by inviting them to attend the school's Open House, reading nights, and other academically-based programs for students and families throughout the school year. Parents, however, must be both willing and able to attend these events to obtain this information.

Kitty strategically places her academically struggling students at a table near her reading table where she sits for the majority of the school day.

> I had two old friends who —they were workers. They were like worker little bees, but they struggled with everything that I gave them. And, in my little mind, I'm thinking, "Okay, what? I've got to help these children." But I'm just one person, so I need their location [to change]. So my desk, my table where I always sit, and their little table was right there [together], because they needed a lot of extra help. (Kitty, personal communication, July15, 2015)

Kitty also notes that about half of the students in her classroom this year are not learning various reading, writing, and mathematic skills in the same manner previous classes have. In the past, Kitty has found her students will grasp essential first grade skills the first or second time they are introduced, leaving the remainder of the school

year open to applying those skills toward an understanding of a new skill or a second grade skill. Her students this year often need skills repeated in a variety of ways before internalizing and applying them toward new skills. For example, Kitty has been working with her students using capital letters at the beginning of sentences when they write in their journals. So far this school year, she has taught this skill twice, modeled it in her examples for the students, pointed out capital letters in various books the students are reading, discussed capitalizing proper nouns, and referred students to a poster in her classroom that they can use as a writing reminder. Kitty also uses various games to teach and reinforce academic skills. She stated,

> I tried to come up with games to work on skills that I feel the children struggle with. … When it's a new game, I try to do it with a small group. … I will start with my children who catch on very quickly and then I will have average little friends and I have my low children who will probably need to play it more and more and more. And then we play it in the classroom [as a whole group]. … [Playing the game] is not necessarily to reinforce [the skill], it's actually to teach it. I try many different things and then they're not getting it, I'm thinking maybe I can go a different way. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Kitty finds teaching the game to her higher performing students first and then to the entire class, is an easier and efficient way to introduce the game to all of her students. She may also use the higher leveled students as her "guinea pigs" to test the game and work out any misunderstandings or misinterpretations about the rules and game play before teaching it to the whole class. This may be because Kitty knows that the higher leveled students are not necessarily learning the skills of the game, rather, they are more

often simply learning the process of playing the game. Therefore, Kitty uses this strategy to see if the game is an effective tool for the majority of her students to learn a particular academic skill. After teaching the game to the whole class, Kitty can see who has successfully mastered the skill and who has not. The students who need extra practice and/or teaching are offered an opportunity to play the game again, usually with Kitty or another adult. This process appears not meant to embarrass the lower leveled children; rather, it is a procedural tool Kitty uses to differentiate the students who understand and have mastered the skill and those who need extra work.

Kitty is not the only participant who uses a variety of teaching and learning methods and strategies to teach her students. All three participants share the belief that multiple teaching and learning strategies are an effective way to teach students. Each participant uses whole and small group instruction for reading, writing, and mathematics. Whole group instruction dominating general elementary educational practice has been well documented in the literature (Zigmond & Baker, 1990). However, teachers have incorporated small group instruction in their classrooms to better meet the increasing needs of those students with reading difficulties (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; Maheady, 1997). Yet, the debate between whole group and small group instruction continues as researchers carefully study factors such as the feasibility of providing whole group instruction, group size, the role of the teacher in the small group format, etc. As a result, many teachers implement both whole group and small group instructional practices in their classrooms.

Allie and Mary spend much of their small group reading instructional time having their low reading groups review phonics skills. This process is accomplished by having

their students recite the alphabet each day, say the sound each alphabet letter makes, and point to a corresponding picture that begins with the same letter. Thus the students repeat: "Ā"; "Ă"; "apple". The three teachers all use a plethora of flash cards to help students identify letters, pictures of various objects seen on standardized assessments, high-frequency sight words, and math facts. The participants strive to help the low reading first graders learn the skills that they should have already acquired in Kindergarten. I watched each participant model writing strategies in individual student daily journals (notebooks that each student has to practice writing skills), emphasizing such skills as capitalization and punctuation. Finally, each teacher often reads a book to the class of students. During the reading, they model reading fluency, emotional emphasis, and vocabulary acquisition. Each stops to ask students to define possible unknown words; "contented" is another word for "happy." They also help students understand the storyline by pointing out various aspects of the pictures in the book. In the end, Allie comments, "you do everything that you can do and hope that it works" (personal communication, August 6, 2015).

Learning is a Journey

Each of the participants concurs that learning should be a developmentally appropriate process for each student. Even in our high-stakes assessment environment, the teachers take special care to recognize the means of knowledge acquisition and the learning rates of each of their students. They all reject the thinking that all children should or do learn at the same rate. Kitty remarks, "Admit it, everything has a moment. Everything has a time. And I think, once you get over that hurdle, the child will be A-Okay" (personal communication, July 15, 2015).

Approaching academic student learning as a journey considers the developmental milestones of each child individually. These milestones are often part of a preservice teacher training program or educational psychology course required by those entering the educational field. Teachers can draw from various child developmental milestone charts including those from the medical field, related to the physical or emotional health of the child, or based upon psychological needs such as those created by Piaget or Erikson. Regardless of which formal milestone references are used, the participants believe a child is constantly changing, growing, and learning and his/her own rate. In other words, developmental milestones are only guides that provide parameters for when a child may perform, learn, or master a skill. These milestones are not absolute and can vary from one child to another. As such, the participants believe teachers and school administrators should remember the varying degrees of child development when designating curriculum, instruction, and assessments for students. Kitty noted,

> We [as educators] wonder why children aren't catching on. Because developmentally they are not there. Will they get there? Yes, they will. We're thinking if you shove it down their throat, they're going to get it. Some of the children will catch it, no matter what. But you have a lot of little strugglers who have no clue and then it's very discouraging. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

I asked Mary about students changing to different small reading groups based upon their developmental readiness. She said, "On any given day or week I can move a student if I think it's going to be beneficial to them, which happens often. … sometimes kids have those bursts —those light bulbs come on and they get it" (personal

communication, October 21, 2015). Or the opposite happens and Mary must hold a student within a particular reading group so that he/she can move at a slower, more appropriate pace.

When considering the generic assessments given to all students as mandated by the school district, Allie approaches child development through the eyes of an inclusion teacher. She stated,

> … all assessments are not made for all students so it's really frustrating to know that a student you have is never going to be where another student is and it would be better if you can show growth for that child rather than showing that they didn't pass the assessment. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

The following sections highlight responses from the participants on particular areas of successful student learning. For each of these areas, one participant is highlighted; however, all of the participants felt similarly about what successful student learning looked like in their classrooms. Successful student learning is defined by the participants as becoming independent, having confidence in one's abilities, learning and maintaining resilience, and is based upon appropriate academic challenge in the classroom.

Becoming independent. In her second interview, Kitty talked about one student who began the school year making excuses for her lack of academic ability because she was not receiving any help at home from her parents. Over time, Kitty discussed with the student how she could become more proactive in her own learning process. Kitty showed the girl how to make her own flash cards and practice her math skills at home. By

November, the student began to be more independent and had started to take responsibility for own her learning.

> That little girl isn't doing anything at home with her [math] facts. … I told her, "You have to start working." And I thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. The one thing I noticed was that she didn't blame her mom or dad [again]. She's going to have to own it [her learning] herself. She's going to have to do it. (personal communication, November 3, 2015)

Having confidence. When asked, Mary's primary goal of teaching her students is to instill a sense of confidence in their abilities. Self-confidence, to her, results from a student who engages in the learning process in a manner equal to or just above their current academic abilities. Over the course of her tenure, Mary has believed that confident students are those who continue through their educational careers knowing they are able to learn. This concept, she believes, is far more important than meeting a district or statewide assessment benchmark. She noted,

> I want them to be confident, successful learners. I want them to want to learn. I don't want them to be apathetic, lazy kids. That's my biggest goal. I want them to try, to get excited when they do something the right way and to build confidence. (personal communication, October 21, 2015)

Learning resilience. Given the socioeconomic obstacles that many of their students face, which make navigating a predominantly White, middle-class-based public educational system difficult, the teachers hope to instill some sense of resilience in their students. Resilience is an ability to recover from misfortune or changes out of their control, like parental divorce or moving out of their home. Resilience can also be a

willingness to take a risk by learning something new, even if the initial result is failure. For first grade students, academic resilience often comes in the form of a trying new skill, such as adding two two-digit numbers together, and being able and willing to not get the process correct the first time. Students with resilience seek help when they fail and emotionally recover quickly to try again. Mary commented,

> I want them [the students] to try and take risks. It's okay if you do something wrong, we can fix it. That's why you're here [at school]. Let's fix it, you're here to learn. Taking risks is I think how we learn. But it's hard. (personal communication, October 21, 2015)

Appropriate academic challenge. As with all of the participants, Allie seeks to provide appropriate rigor and challenge to her student lessons. This process involves both understanding the level of academic ability of each student as well as planning the lessons in a tiered fashion or providing alternative learning opportunities for those students who are below the standard or learning goal, those at the level of the standard or learning goal, and those above the standard or learning goal. Lesson planning in this manner is difficult for the teacher to construct, however, Allie notes that tailoring the learning for the student when appropriate, yields better overall learning results.

> I want to extend the learning [for some students] and sometimes that's just by modifying a lesson. I might have some kids writing simple sentences. Then my higher group of kids, I say, "Okay, you need to write two sentences. Tell me what you're doing when you're here [in the writing process] and what you would like to do after you finish that," or whatever. I do try to extend in the quality and the

quantity expected from those students. (Allie, personal communication, November 5, 2015)

Their World, Not Mine

Collectively, the participants recognize that the lives of their students, outside of school hours, are often remarkably different from their own. Throughout their tenure, each participant as an educator has come to terms with the fact that their students' lives are not within their sphere of control. However, as shown throughout this chapter, the participants have found ways to provide for and manage various aspects of their group of students during school hours.

According to Egalite (2016), children from the lower economic rungs of our society lack support that others experience.

> Parents who are struggling economically simply don't have the time or the wherewithal to check homework. … Working multiple jobs or inconvenient shifts makes it hard to dedicate time for family dinners, enforce a consistent bedtime, read to infants and toddlers (and school-aged children), or invest in music lessons or sports clubs. (para.12)

Mary tries to answer at least part of what is missing. She believes that her students need to be loved and cared for everyday as they may not get this type of support at home. Emotional support from her own parents was, and continues to be, a common occurrence in Mary's life. In her opinion, the minimal or lack of emotional support that she perceives of her students may be due to different cultural parenting styles or to increased stressors such as poverty and homelessness. As a result, Mary sees a daily hug and a

kind word as vital emotional support for some of her students. During my observations in her classroom, I saw Mary perform this task often and with great enthusiasm.

Allie worries about the transient population of students at Grammar School and, in particular, her students. This situation causes her some angst as she continues to prepare her curriculum and teaching strategies throughout the school year. Allie's goal, as is the goal of all of the participants, is to help all of her students reach first grade academic benchmarks in preparation for second grade and beyond. Allie noted,

> Our [school] population is very diverse and we have a high percentage of homeless students and low socioeconomic students, so we have people who tend to move a little bit more frequently. And my room seemed to be the kind of room that had the families that turned over more. So as a teacher, that can be a challenge and I don't want to say that was a low point but it's just a little more challenging because kids are coming in at different times of the year and at different places [academically] and you really have to work extra hard to find out where they are and help them out. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

Kitty also spoke of difficult home life when referencing phone calls, conferences, and home visits with the parents/guardians of her students. When she is able to contact a students' parent or guardian, she has learned many of her students come from single-parent households, have mothers with multiple part-time jobs to support their families, and are homeless. Kitty said,

> When looking at a student's profile, one was homeless and she live[s] in a hotel. The other one was a [child of a] single parent. Her mom worked like a beaver but

she didn't have the time to actually put into helping her children [academically]. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

Learning of these personal family circumstances helps Kitty contextualize her students' worlds, however, she admitted that it makes her job as teacher even more challenging as she has to contend with daily circumstances beyond her control.

In addition to working with a changing demographic student population, each participant finds it increasingly difficult to communicate with some of their families due to a language barrier. The increasing ESL population at Grammar School, which consists mainly of Hispanic people who speak Spanish, limits the amount and type of communication many of the teachers, including the participants of this study, have with their students' families. Although the participants know some Spanish phrases, for example, "Hello," "How are you?" and "Thank you very much," none of the participants speak Spanish fluently. The participants are very concerned about this challenge, and its remedy is complicated. Becoming fluent in a foreign language takes time, money, and dedication. The participants are willing and eager to learn Spanish to help their students, but lack the time to begin this journey because of the immediate need for this knowledge to help them work successfully with their current students and families.

The Hispanic population at Grammar School has noticeably increased during the past few years. As a result, the school district secured a grant to offer this past summer a reading, writing, and mathematics program for Hispanic parents and rising first grade students. The grant stipulated two schools (Grammar School and another elementary school within the district) to collaborate and invite all identified Hispanic parents and students to attend this program at the Grammar School location. Approximately one-

third of identified parents and students participated in this program. Grammar School teachers and teachers from the other elementary school worked in partnership to simulate the teaching of small reading groups, math groups, and guided writing for these students and parents. Parents and students learned components of reading, writing, and mathematics such as using pictures as clues for text, sounding out new words in English, and practicing basic math facts with flashcards in a side-by-side format with their children. Allie spoke of the program more specifically:

> If we have a student come to the reading table, we would practice on white boards with sight words, writing words that they commonly or frequently see in reading or around in the [classroom] environment. … Then it would be reading it [the book] a couple of times together and then having the student turn and read to an adult and then taking out their journal and maybe writing a sentence from the book. Later on, it would be doing some type of math activity. (personal communication, August 6, 2015)

This summer program served multiple purposes: it exposed Hispanic parents and students to the English language, gave them opportunities to meet and learn from certified teachers, and offered them insight into the structure of first grade reading, writing, and mathematics instruction that their children would experience during the upcoming school year. As successful as this program was, however, not all Hispanic parents and students attended, as attendance was optional, and based upon such factors as transportation and daytime availability.

Labeling students with a sociocultural variable such as "English as a Second Language Learner," assists the participants in identifying appropriate academic

opportunities for these students. This label entitles students additional help with English skills such as speaking, reading, and writing as well as small group instruction multiple times during the school week by the ESL teacher. The participants have labeled ESL students as "a defense for their beliefs and behaviors" (Canduri, 2013, p. 38). The label provides identified ESL students the academic help and justifies for the participants any curricular or teaching adjustments, additional resources, or strategies used when working with these students.

As helpful as the ESL label is to the participants and identified students, it also comes with the possibility of additional negative implications. For example, the participants noted that their identified ESL students need additional teaching assistance and some modifications for general assessments (such as reading the directions aloud). Even with this assessment modification, Kitty stated that her ESL students' assessment results may not be an accurate account of their level of knowledge due to language and cultural barriers. Unfortunately, when administering standardized assessments from the state or school district, offering the students verbal clues or a different way to show their acquired knowledge, such as drawing a picture instead of writing a sentence, would invalidate the assessment even though it would provide a more accurate representation of student knowledge. Kitty explained,

> In order to see if a child truly understands, I really think you have to use a variety of techniques, variety of questions, a variety of things just to see [what the student knows]. ... I have some ESL children, and when you are testing them, if you allowed them to show you in another way or there was option, sometimes you'll be amazed at what they can do or what they understand, versus everybody has to

take the same test, and it has to look the same way. (personal communication, November 3, 2105)

In this instance, knowing a student is labeled ESL *a priori* is helpful but the teacher could interpret this marker in a negative manner (Paliokosta & Blanford, 2010). The participants continue to struggle with acquiring an accurate evaluation of various concepts understood by their ESL students. When able, the participants seek additional ways to test what their students know.

Using one's beliefs, attitudes, and values about culturally diverse students can help teachers obtain appropriate opportunities for their students. For example, performing well in K-12 schooling and being able to attend college was an important and valued conversation in Mary's home environment. As a result, she believes in instilling higher education values on her students – even in the first grade. To Mary, the educational institution for which students strive is immaterial; what matters is that they seek advanced learning opportunities throughout the course of their lifetime. To support this belief, Mary named each of her reading groups after a different local college/university. After introducing these names to the students at the beginning of the school year, a lengthy conversation ensued. Students told stories they knew about various components of a college, mentioning tidbits like: "I have watched their basketball team on TV." or "My dad went to college there." Students who were unable to contribute to this portion of the conversation learned about the colleges/universities by listening to Mary and the other students. Mary said that at Open House, some of the parents commented their children were talking about going to college when the discussion was not mentioned previously in their home environment. Mary took these comments as a

personal win. Students who had not been exposed to the concept of higher education were learning about it and discussing, with their families, the possibility of attending a college someday.

Like Kitty and Mary, Allie has looked beyond the ESL label and encouraged appropriate learning opportunities for a Korean student in her class. She placed this student into a reading group of students focused on learning English letters, letter sounds, and frequently used words. While the non-ESL students are learning basic English skills, the Korean student receives additional English speaking and writing support by being a member of this group. Allie stated,

> Well, they're learning the skills, and [the Korean student is] just learning the language. He actually has many of the skills, and it's interesting. Orally, he can understand directions, and on paper he can understand and write things. His oral language, his communication is not quite there yet, but it's nice to have him with the kids who are trying to learn the skills. It's given him a review in English, which is nice. … He's learning English along with them, and I think that's been kind of nice. He doesn't feel so excluded or left out while he learns a new language. (personal communication, November 5, 2015)

During other times in the classroom, the Korean student is able to understand simple written and oral directions as well as the daily classroom schedule and routines. Allie is interpreting his ESL label as needing some academic support in the English language but monitoring and watching him to ensure he is comfortable understanding the classroom daily schedule. So far, this student is successful with both remedial English language and needs less routine classroom supports than when he first arrived at Grammar School.

What About the *Other* Students?

Aside from the identified ESL population, a substantial student population attending Grammar School is performing below grade level in many academic subjects for a variety of reasons. These students do not always receive the academic supports they need to be successful. Often, these students are identified under an institutional label of needing the Reading Recovery® Program support, special education services, or math tutorials, and are served appropriately. When a student receives multiple labels, however, the process of getting the needed academic opportunities becomes more complicated. A student who qualifies under multiple labels often puzzles educators. Which label best fits this student? Is the student able to receive multiple services or academic opportunities if he/she is labeled in a variety of ways? Often the result is that one label trumps another, causing a student to receive some, but not all, of the academic services he/she needs.

Additionally, the participants face two other dilemmas when seeking, enrolling, and obtaining academic opportunities for their non-ESL students. What happens when a student does not meet the requirements for a labeled service or opportunity but clearly needs some additional academic support to allow him/her to gain the requisite knowledge and skills? This breach can occur for two reasons: when a particular score on an assessment is required for services and is not met by the student or the school cannot get the requisite parent permission form completed as required for the service. Students will not receive a service if the obligations for that service are not met. Finally, what if the resource is not available due to over-enrollment? It is this final question that puts the participants in a conundrum. A service, such as the Reading Recovery® Program, has a limited student enrollment due to funding. Therefore, the participants can request a

student participate, however, he or she may not qualify if those enrolling students find another student more worthy of the service. Kitty related,

> But because we have so much in place for our ESL population, this little population here struggles. And I see this little population here, when it's time for us to take those [standardized assessments], they're not going to make it. And it's not because they couldn't. It's because we didn't put the [academic supports] in place. We didn't put the things in place that they needed. (personal communication, July 15, 2015)

The students at Grammar School who are entitled to receive various academic supports and services do, however, some students who need additional support do not get the resources they need to be successful. Two questions emerge: What happens to students who receive the academic supports and resources they need to acquire adequate capital and thrive academically? and If studied over time, would the students who receive the academic supports and services they needed show evidence of cumulative advantage?

Bourdieu (1973) argued that individuals possess the ability to obtain and transform (go from one form to another or acquire additional capital from another source) capital either given to them or inherited by their social class membership. Extending his theories toward scholastic achievement, some students at Grammar School are able to obtain academic capital regardless of socioeconomic status if they are labeled appropriately and then served. This increase in capital could be linked to academic cumulative advantage over time. All of the participants note the ESL population needing only language services, fits neatly into this institutional progression of resource allocation and do benefit from the services they receive. But as Bourdieu argued, capital is only

gained by transmission to "worthy" individuals by those at the top of the cultural structure. This conceptualization maintains the hierarchal configuration of a culture and allocation of resources by those who have, those who have been given, and those who have not. It is also difficult to determine who should receive capital if different forms or variations are needed, such as when a student has multiple academic issues or challenges. What concerns Kitty and her colleagues are those students who need but are not given academic resources and supports due to an institutional barrier. For example, a student has received multiple labels and thus confuses educators as to which label should take precedence. Further, the student could be left out from receiving a service because the service is full or the requirements to obtain the service are not met. As a result of being left out of certain academic programs, these students risk losing academic capital and become students who are at a cumulative academic disadvantage each school year.

According to Coleman et al. (1966), those who score the highest academically in the lower grades, regardless of socioeconomic and ethnic status, continue to improve as time progresses and the children mature. In other words, the academic cumulative advantage for these students increases over time. Therefore, if the teachers and school administrators as gatekeepers to resources and services to all students who qualify do, in fact, afford the students these services, the likelihood of continued academic success for these students is positive. When this system fails, unfortunately, so can the student.

Summary

Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and Bourdieu's discussion of capital, this chapter addresses the participants' attempt to meet the emotional and academic needs of their students given the current educational environment of

standardized assessments and high-level curricular teaching and learning methods. The diverse, yet similar, perspectives of the three teacher participants show satisfying students' basic physical and emotional needs through an understanding of the culture assists with the preparation and delivery of appropriate academic opportunities for all of the students in their classrooms.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Each of the participants in this study created a classroom environment that aligned with her personal cultural views and exhibited behaviors that mirrored aspects of these cultures toward their students. Unlike other studies, this study results offered insight into the individual teacher participants' beliefs, attitudes, and values about culture from their own perspectives. I was not interested in the cultural views of the school staff, administration, or students. In addition, my interpretations of answers to my questions and the participant behaviors in the classroom fit the anthropological, business, and school organizational perspectives of culture and interestingly aligned with Maslow's conceptual hierarchical theory of individual needs. Also included are many instances where the teacher participants made judgments about students, considered issues of entitlement, and discovered some students possessed a cumulative advantage or disadvantage based upon access to particular academic opportunities and services. Absent in this study was a direct alignment with Bourdieu's theories of habitus and social class. However, Bourdieu's theory of capital did indirectly relate to the students' ability to be academically successful within the existing structures of the academic opportunities and services offered, the classroom environment, and the school building.

This chapter provides concluding thoughts about definitions and theories of culture previously introduced. I discuss teacher culture in the context of addressing student needs and possessing an openness toward particular student groups, namely the

Hispanic ESL student population at Grammar School. Also, I introduce the concepts of cultural lag and transformative learners that emerged from the study results. Finally, I offer recommendations for research and leadership in practice.

Revisiting Cultural Definitions and Theories

As noted in Chapter 2, the sociocultural anthropological definition of culture seeks to examine how individuals "organize, govern, and create meaning" through the exhibition of socially relevant behavioral patterns and practices (American Anthropological Association, 2015). Arguably, the concept of culture begins with an individual's understanding of himself is based upon various personal beliefs, attitudes, and values. The beliefs, attitudes, and values one holds are dependent upon an abstract compilation of identifiers from components of group affiliations including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, traditions, symbols, experiences, relationships and environments. These identifiers form a cognitive representation that exhibits itself in an individual's observable behaviors. Therefore, culture is observed in both individual and group contexts.

Each of the participants in this study have different personal cultural representations due to their past histories, environments, schooling experiences, and the like. However, as a collective group, the participants belong to the first grade teacher culture at Grammar School. As a result of this affiliation, the participants agreed this culture alters to some degree with every new incoming class of students. Although the participants exhibited similar behavioral patterns including employing classroom management techniques and using a variety of and often similar curricular approaches to

teaching their students, they have found educating their students at Grammar School is remarkably different from past years.

For example, the participants value an individual becoming educated. Educating all of the students in their classrooms with knowledge from various disciplines allows each student to become engaged in the learning process and optimistically have the tools they need to become lifelong learners. However, the participants have come to realize the process of learning is, and will continue to be, an increasingly complex task for many students to ascertain and attain. The culture of a first grade teacher at Grammar School includes both older interpretations as well as new understandings. Older examples still employed include being a teacher who believes in using various curricular methods, strategies, and learning opportunities to engage her students in the process of learning every day.

A newer understanding of first grade culture at Grammar School includes valuing the health and wellbeing of their students, a process formerly taken for granted. The learning process, as the participants were taught in their preservice programs and employed in the beginning of their teaching careers, is rapidly becoming outdated. The participants have had to shift their focus from teaching and learning to meeting the socioemotional needs of their students found in the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. Further, additional research conducted on the brain and child development as pertinent to current educational literature, as well as changing student demographics at Grammar School, have modified the participant's daily focus toward one of students' more immediate needs before teaching academic components. The teachers are now required to create a new set of beliefs, attitudes, and values and make

different judgments that better represent the needs of the student population they now teach. Indeed, the value of student learning and becoming a life-long learner remains but the belief that this process is straight-forward and follows the regimented form acquired during their preservice teacher days, is over.

Further, the participants have had to change their attitudes about both students and teaching students to incorporate the diverse population represented in their classrooms today. The participants must inquire on a deeper level of understanding of the constructs of race, class, socioeconomic status, and personal attributes, thus modifying their habitus beliefs about their students before making any new assumptions. They also must take into consideration a student's capital or how a student is able to perform given the academic and cultural structures of the classroom and school building. As a group, the participants are beginning to modify any past, possibly inaccurate information within these social constructs to formulate new attitudes and activate new behavioral responses in order to increase the academic cumulative advantage for all students.

In accordance with the business perspective of culture, Mary, Allie, and Kitty spoke at length of the importance of working with their colleagues in a team environment. According to Schein (1992), organizational culture is the ability for individuals to behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively function as a group to create shared beliefs, attitudes, and values that provide a sense of organizational identity, including the ability to solve problems. Even though the teachers' classrooms are located in different parts of the school building, they make a conscious effort to meet as a group bi-weekly and share ideas about and solutions to curricular and student matters including materials used in learning mathematics or a behavior management system for a student

having difficulty following the classroom rules. The participants believe collaboration is one component that enables student success. Each participant makes a conscious effort to attend these meetings and be prepared to contribute information to the group. They value this time together and often lament that "the meeting is over too quickly" or "they wish there was more time in the school day/week to meet together and talk about students."

Finally, the definition of school culture infuses traditions and beliefs that provide standards of behavior based upon the core values of the school building (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). As noted, Grammar School implements the character education program *Character Counts!* that subscribes to the values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship toward others. The values of *Character Counts!* are similar to the values of each of the participants. In addition, the participants believe that increasing character education lessons in their classrooms has assisted students with additional information and skills and aided in creating a positive classroom environment.

Using Culture to Understand Student Needs

Mary, Allie, and Kitty have recognized that educating the current students in their classrooms requires getting to know their students personally and incorporating this personal knowledge into creating a classroom environment where the students feel safe and protected, which consciously or not, is reflective of the primary components of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The process of forming personal relationships with students takes time, but according to Mary, Allie, and Kitty, is time well spent. Further, supporting students' physical and emotional needs also allows for ample learning opportunities to occur in a positive classroom setting.

With the adoption of Goals 2000, NCLB, ESSA, and the CCSS as well as updated SOLs, teachers have been forced to increase the amount of assessments given to their students each year. Arguably, this shift has altered the mentality of many educators in schools: students are viewed as numbers and percentages rather than individual human beings. Unlike many of their colleagues, the participants in this study continue to value and maintain a personal component to the educational process. I believe this happens for two main reasons. First, the participants were trained in a different educational era; one that valued students as human beings who are best served by teaching to their strengths and interests while making learning fun. Teachers of past years were not as concerned about high-stakes assessments as they are today. Second, the participants have altered their cultural understandings in such a positive manner that they are genuinely curious and interested in learning about their students as people who think, act, and learn differently. The participants have found academic success in teaching their diverse populations of students through individual and small group methods and strategies. They use student assessment results to supplement this process rather than drive it.

Before conducting this research, I expected culture to be the driving force behind the teacher participants' perceptions of which students receive various academic opportunities and the reasons behind these decisions. I expected the participants would form or had formed negative cultural judgments and biases about the abilities of various students in their classrooms. As a result, students would receive academic opportunities and services because of their deficits or challenges, directly related to negative cultural undertones.

Arguably, culture plays a role in this research study but not necessarily as intended. The participants spoke of the daily challenges of teaching a culturally-diverse student population; how the academic resources were allocated among students who needed them and the negative result or academic disadvantage for students who do not obtain necessary resources for their current and future learning trajectories. Instead of using negative cultural judgments and biases to formulate a student's academic need, the participants used an emerging understanding of a student's cultural background to drive the need for an academic opportunity or resource. For example, the teachers determined that a student did not require reading interventions even though he is Hispanic and comes from a lower socioeconomic class. The participants took various aspects of the students' culture into account, such as his ability to read in his native tongue but not in English, as a sign that this student needs only ESL services. As a result, the student's need for specific resources and opportunities became a foundational and positive contribution to a student's overall learning process instead of being a negative label or bias against the student's ability to learn. This appropriate academic service gave the student positive capital to be on a path of cumulative advantage.

Mary, Allie, and Kitty have recognized that obtaining a deeper understanding of their students' cultures will assist them in creating and providing appropriate learning opportunities used in their classrooms. They understand that the students in their classrooms often come from cultures different from their own. However, this understanding is still inchoate. Thus, the participants are often unsure and ill-informed about meeting their students' needs. Observations of student behaviors and conversations with their students offer valuable insight into the participants' thoughts and actions about

various cultures and cultural backgrounds represented in their students. This collected information allows the participants to understand, to some degree, what the students need and how to address them appropriately. For example, the participants have learned that students coming from poverty often lack parental emotional support, educational resources such as pencils and crayons to complete their homework, and can be malnourished; all problems that make learning difficult. Although these aspects are not true for all students of poverty, beginning with this cultural frame of reference helps the participants to activate a mindset that may prove helpful for the student. Over time, as the participants learn more about the individual students they have categorized in this manner, they will adjust their thinking, make new judgments, and offer more opportunities and resources as needed. The participants are eager to seize any information that is helpful for their students; a drive that arises from themselves and their team. The participants believe that tertiary information about a student's culture is not a sufficient way of considering which academic resources or opportunities are appropriate for a student. Unfortunately, their preservice teaching program and ongoing professional development at Grammar School have not adequately equipped them with pertinent information their student population has demanded. Sharing information amongst team members has become a crucial part of the cultural understanding process.

The results of Mary, Allie, and Kitty's understanding of their students' cultures have presented a gap in the academic opportunities and resources offered at Grammar School. My study results indicate that the discrepancy is not in whether or not students are receiving academic opportunities and resources but the amount and degree of opportunity and resources that are available to the students who need them. The

participants work hard to identify students for additional reading services, for example. However, they become frustrated when students who would qualify for additional reading support are not granted that opportunity in a timely manner or at all. As a result, the participants are faced with additional challenges in the classroom, namely, providing a higher than average level of academic support for all of their students, including those who are not able to receive any formal program support. At the same time, the participants are also providing higher than average levels of physical and emotional support for their students.

One conclusion drawn from this challenge is that the participants have had to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and values about the concept of classroom management. These adjustments raise new questions: How are the participants spending their time each day? Are they exhausting themselves with students who have physical and emotional needs before getting to the teaching and learning process? And what about the students who the participants believe are culturally advantaged and have the necessary support to begin the learning process when they get to school each morning? Are these students able to get adequate and appropriate learning opportunities or must they wait while the teacher attends to other students? What does this do for their learning trajectories? To what extent does this new reality of a homogenous classroom require an even newer management system?

The classroom management systems and components of the character education program implemented by the participants in their classrooms, ideally serve to increase classroom efficiency. These types of classroom management systems are commonly taught in preservice teacher programs and revisited during teacher staff meetings and

school district professional development opportunities. Through the information gleaned from these programs, the participants provide students with skills to address their behaviors in a positive way, resulting in a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. In both classroom managements systems, the focus is on the student. What these programs fail to address, however, is how the teacher should manage her time during the school day or provide insight into how a teacher can shift from the role of mother or caregiver to one of instructor. The participants have realized that as their student population at Grammar School has changed, so too must their previously understood concept of classroom management. How the teachers will acquire this information has yet to be determined. Knowing of a need for this information may provide the participants a reason to approach their school leaders for resources to begin to unpack this challenge.

Openness Toward Grammar School's ESL Student Population

Absent from the study results is evidence of Bourdieu's theories of habitus and social class. Present in the study is the diverse student population at Grammar School including ESL and homeless students, who often lack capital due to their language and economic disadvantages. Arguably, these students are then placed at an academic disadvantage. The teacher participants are left to find information, opportunities, and resources for these students to increase their academic advantages.

Noteworthy were behaviors each participant exhibited when working with their identified ESL students. The participants described this population of students as challenging, mainly because of a communication barrier that exists between the students and the teachers. However, each participant showed willingness and openness toward

working with these students. Mary, Allie, and Kitty helped the ESL teacher identify students and families that would benefit from the summer program offered at Grammar School. The participants continue to work with the ESL teacher by helping to prepare lessons for her weekly pull-out program that match the content being studied in the classroom. Finally, the participants have purchased classroom resources students can use, such as Spanish to English dictionaries, with their own funds. The participants have helped support this growing population of students at Grammar School even through the challenges. Mary, Allie, and Kitty remain open to working with these students and helping them to succeed academically.

Cultural Lag

Sociologist William Ogburn (1922/1966) first coined the term *cultural lag* when referencing social problems that resulted from cultural materials that is, objects people create and give meaning to, taking time to catch up with technological innovations (Tatham-Maye, Zefi, & Netzel. n.d., para. 4). This term can be applied to my study results when considering evidence demonstrating a difference between the recognition of different academic services for students resulting from the change in student demographics in the school district and at Grammar School. The participants have begun to adjust to the changing student demographics at Grammar School differently than the school administration and district personnel. Therefore, the change in student population within a short period of time has led to a lag between the suitability and allocation of the academic opportunities and services afforded to students.

Acquiring necessary academic school resources for students is a goal of the school district, Grammar School's administrators, and the participants. However, these

groups of individuals differ in their approach of creating and allocating academic opportunities and services for students. District and school administrators rely upon federal and state mandates of academic services for students. For example, the Reading Recovery® Program, ESL, and special education services are all designed and funded by federal education mandates. As a result, these services offer only a limited number of qualified students a routine curriculum and only for a specific duration of time. School district and administrators adhere to the strict time limits and number constraints when assisting teachers in the selection of students for these academic resources in schools.

Although the participants understand the limitations imposed on school district and school administrators in regards to academic resources for students, they have adopted a different viewpoint based upon their experiences with the diverse cultural representations of students in their classrooms. As the participants seek to understand their students on a personal level, they have acquired additional information not necessarily realized by school district and Grammar School administrators. The teachers recognize that the academic resources in place, including the Reading Recovery® Program, ESL, and special education services, may need to be adjusted and reinterpreted for, and reallocated to more students than has been historically subsidized.

Even though Mary, Allie, and Kitty help other school staff members identify students who need additional resources and services, they remain frustrated when students who need resources and services are unable to get the requisite academic support. Completing applicable assessments and documentation does adhere to the school administration guidelines for resource acquisition, however, the participants argue additional students are always "in the queue" and unable to receive services. In addition,

Mary, Allie, and Kitty have not received additional professional development resources such as cultural/multicultural training, various reading teaching strategies, and understanding the physical, emotional, and academic needs of individuals qualifying for special education services, to assist these students properly. The participants noted they often lack general and curricular knowledge to undertake this process.

Further, a language barrier created between the participants and ESL students inadvertently leaves these students at a resource or service disadvantage. Mary, Allie, and Kitty admit they use the Internet, current book materials, and each other to begin to eradicate these challenges. Pending an increase in state or school district resources, each of the participants continue to seek more reliable and applicable knowledge on how to best meet the academic needs of their students. However, the implicit cultural lag between the normative, historical, and broadcasted directives and support from the district, state, and federal administrations and the emergent needs of their students continue to frustrate the academic progress of many of their disadvantaged students.

Teachers as Transformative Learners

> *Our understandings and beliefs are more dependable when they produce interpretations and opinions that are more justifiable or true than would be those predicated upon other understandings or beliefs.*
>
> – Jack Mezirow, 2000, p. 4

Learning is a process of using new or revised information to guide future actions. According to Mezirow (2000), learning emphasizes "contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions, and validating meaning by assessing reasons" (p. 3). Justification for what we know is dependent upon biographical, historical, and cultural contexts. As adults, the learning process transcends one's understanding and

interpretation of the world to a higher level of awareness and understanding, creating a new connection between what we know and new information gathered.

Transformative learning theory is a comprehensive means in which adult learners examine current beliefs, assumptions, and values in relation to newly acquired knowledge that has shifted individual views based upon new ideas, values, and expectations (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1994, 2000). Mezirow (2000) states:

> Transformative learning refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified. We become critically reflective of those beliefs that become problematic. … Frames of reference may be highly individualistic or shared as a paradigm. Transformational learning is a way of problem solving by defining a problem or by redefining or reframing the problem. (p. 20)

Transformative learning theory encourages an individual to make meaning or create an interpretation by being more aware of one's tacit assumptions and their own and others' expectations. This meaning-making process allows an individual to create personal relevance of the various situations he or she experiences.

The study participants appear to be in the process of becoming cultural transformative learners. Each of the participants are thinking about and beginning to rethink acquired knowledge regarding their students' cultural backgrounds. This new orientation is due, in part, to the increased cultural diversity among their students. The high level of value placed upon getting to know their students on a personal level is one clue that they are critically reflecting on their understanding of teaching, students, and

student support. Using this information about their students, the participants are also beginning to consider their own personal cultural knowledge and personal cultural frames of reference.

Combining the known with new, learned cultural knowledge about themselves and their students is offering the participants a means to examine their current beliefs, assumptions, and values in relation to newly acquired information. This process is addressing the "problem" at Grammar School: an increased influx of culturally-diverse students and lack of support and services for teachers to address these challenges in the classroom. The participants have begun to shift older views based upon new ideas, values, and expectations gleaned from interactions with their students. They have also sought new knowledge about various cultures and engaged in many conversations with each other about these topics and challenges. Many of the participants' preconceived judgments and views of entitlement have begun to shift as a result of engaging in this transformative learning process. For example, the participants use standard assessments as well as many informal assessments in their teaching processes to engage students' thinking and understanding. Assessing students in this manner addresses the notion of inaccuracies of teacher perceptions and judgments about student understandings based upon a single assessment. By allowing the students to complete multiple assessments on the same topic, the participants are able to get a more accurate representation of student knowledge and make better judgments about future academic opportunities and teaching and learning strategies. Further, new knowledge gained about their students begins to shift the concept of entitlement toward one of purposefully matching the academic opportunity with the student.

The concepts of cumulative advantage (Merton, 1968) and disadvantage discussed in Chapter 2 aligns training, location, and available resources with particular individuals resulting in an accumulative advantage (or disadvantage) through opportunities over time. Arguably students in each of the participants' classrooms who receive various academic opportunities and services (based upon need) will gain an advantage over those students who do not. Those students who, for a variety of reasons, do not receive opportunities or services may amass academic disadvantages over time. However, after completing this study, the concepts of cumulative advantage and disadvantage remain important to consider when studying teacher participants in heterogeneous classroom settings and in the context of diverse student populations in schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

Defining culture is a difficult and complex task, often riddled with emotion, personal bias, and deep-rooted individual beliefs, attitudes, and values. Understanding one's own culture from an abstract cognitive perspective is missing in educational literature about understanding various cultures and multiculturalism in schools. This concept is important in my study as I set out to investigate teachers within heterogeneous schools and became imperative due to the changing student demographics of Grammar School. Surprisingly, the participants had taken some time to understand their own cultural perspectives before learning about those of their students.

My first research recommendation is continued research regarding an educator's ability to understand their own cultural perspectives resulting from their familial upbringing, various group affiliations, experiences, education, and relationships with others. An individual who understands her own cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs has

taken the time to consider all of these factors about herself and can use this information when interacting with individuals from other cultures.

Additional research on how teachers understand, modify, and use their cultural views can be used to further study how, if at all, teachers are open to deeply understanding, relating to, and communicating with diverse student populations in their classrooms. Arguably, the participants in my study had begun this process before I arrived and remain open and willing to learn more about themselves as well as their students. The participants have placed an emphasis on becoming deeply aware of the various cultures represented by their students in order to support a rich learning environment for everyone in the classroom.

The concepts of understanding one's own culture, being open to other cultures, and having a willingness toward understanding various cultures of our heterogeneous student population needs to be addressed in preservice teacher training programs on a universal scale. I recommend that preservice teachers be required to complete multiple courses on understanding and contextualizing culture in order to use this information to best serve the students they are teaching. Embedded in this coursework is a component of personal cultural analysis that will allow the preservice teachers to unpack their own cultures, noting the complexity of this term. Further, preservice teachers will infuse this knowledge into their core curriculum coursework and practicum experiences, affording them tangible and meaningful ways to assign aspects of culture and multiculturalism into their teaching methods and practices.

As student populations continue to change in schools, existing teachers need updated professional development opportunities that address complex cultural and

multicultural issues and topics. Similar to the preservice teacher training described, I recommend that current teachers, staff, and administrators be required to attend ongoing district- and school-level professional development at various times during their tenures. I recommend district-level training address district-wide student demographics and learning and assessment needs, allowing school personnel to understand larger implications of the diverse student population in all of their schools. At the school-level, I recommend each principal taking a careful and poignant approach toward educating his/her teachers and staff on the teaching and learning needs of the student population specific to their school. Such topics could include: reading strategies for ESL students, using mathematic manipulatives to allow all students to show their work, and teaching students in a small group format to provide more individualized teaching and learning opportunities. Creating a professional development system for current teachers that addresses both district and school cultural and multicultural issues, offers teachers, staff, and administrators opportunities to incorporate larger theories with contextual applications.

There may exist a possible connection between an educator's cultural perspectives and learned information from teaching different groups of students each year, attending professional development opportunities on culture, or studying various cultures of the students they teach through informal Internet research on various cultural topics or formal collegiate coursework on cultural theories and applications. The participants in my study have taught different student groups each year of their tenure as well as used the Internet to learn about various student cultures and cultural behaviors. However, topics of culture

or multiculturalism were and remain absent from both the participants' preservice or other teacher coursework or professional development opportunities at Grammar School.

McGeehan (1982) and Garmon (1996) observed that being favorably disposed to various cultures and cultural understandings permits an individual to remain favorable to new information and continued learning on these topics. My study indicates that the participants show favorable attitudes toward learning about various cultures without prior formal training, resulting in favorable relationships and learning opportunities afforded to their students. But this study's sample size is small and may not be representative of a majority of teachers currently in preservice teaching programs or public school classrooms. Further research on this topic could confirm or discredit research conducted by aforementioned researchers on a new or veteran teacher's openness to diverse student populations in their classrooms and what, if any, affects this level of openness has on their students.

Educational research is limited on the effect, if any, that cultural self-awareness and self-reflection on the part of the teacher has on the learning process of a heterogeneous population of students. Continued research places emphasis on developing skills of critical consciousness and self-reflection about culture and multiculturalism with preservice teachers currently enrolled in teacher education programs (Danielewicz, 2001; Gay, G., 2000; Gay, G., & Kirkland, K., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Palmer, 1998; Schön, 1983; Valli, 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). My participants, however, are far removed from their preservice teacher program and have shown to use cultural self-awareness and self-reflection to better understand themselves and their students. Information on preservice teachers' abilities to use cultural self-

awareness and self-reflection is helpful but additional research on the current teachers who use these practices as well as how, if at all, this process bridges any gaps between teacher-student relationships would also be useful. Further, continued teacher reflection and conversations about cultures and cultural differences can only increase overall awareness on the topic and allow educators additional information to use in the classroom teaching process. As student populations continue to change in our schools, additional research on these topics may provide insight for all novice and current teachers to understand the diverse needs of the children he or she is teaching.

Data indicate that our current United States teacher population remains homogeneous (White, middle-class, women) while the student population grows increasingly diverse. An interpretation of these statistics shows a disconnection between the teachers' cultural background and understanding the cultures of her students. This interpretation is also noted in the community surrounding Grammar School and their sluggish ability to accept and address the different learning needs of their current student population, namely, the growing Hispanic ESL population. In this study, the teacher participants are heterogeneous (two White teachers and one African-American teacher). Was the openness the participants exhibited in this study toward learning about their heterogeneous students, especially in the context of working with Hispanic students in their classrooms, the result of the ethnic mix of teachers? Did this diverse teacher sample support distinct viewpoints of this student population, adding to the openness of teaching these students? Here, the educational literature is scant and further studies may provide insight into understanding the cultural relationships and levels of understanding about cultures that can exist between teachers and students.

Another possible explanation of participant openness, stems from the high levels of teamwork, collegiality, and collaboration found in this participant sample. Does working together well as a group provide the support to make this challenge (or any other) seem possible? Working in a team atmosphere is a popular educational teaching strategy used with students. Team-based learning (Koles, Stolfi, Borges, Nelson, & Paremelee, 2010; Levine et al., 2004; Zgheib, Simaan, & Sabra, 2010), flipped classrooms (Hake, 1998), cooperative learning (Slavin, 1982), and problem based learning (Stepien & Gallagher, 1993) are all effective team learning strategies that provide students an effective means toward working and learning from their peers. Research about teacher team learning in the form of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004), has also proven to be an effective means of learning for teachers. The participants in my study met both formally but more often, informally, not as a learning community but as colleagues trying to write curriculum and solve student problems. Additional research on informal teacher teamwork and collaboration may provide great insight into how teachers work together and their ultimate rate of success in this type of an atmosphere.

Finally, I recommend reproducing this research study in other schools, grade levels, school districts, and geographic locations (rural, suburban, urban, and different states). I also recommend exploring the same issues with teacher participants in different grade levels or in a mixed grade level teacher team. Expanding the participant samples and locations of this research will confirm or contradict the results found, offering a wider body of educational research worthy of learning.

Recommendations for Practice

This dissertation began with a review of the differing demographics between teachers and students in the current public school systems in the United States. Also discussed were the changing demographics of students at Grammar School and how the participants have begun to adjust their teaching and learning strategies to appropriately meet the academic needs of their students. But many teachers, including the participants, find they are not adequately prepared to face diverse student populations in their classrooms and need better training and preparation for this task. Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) discusses multiple ways to address teaching preparation that includes high levels of skillful teaching; useful with all student populations including those that are diverse. As indicated, differences in the cultural backgrounds of students and teachers could lead toward the deficit thinking (on the part of the teacher) about various students' possible learning opportunities. This, however, was not the finding of this study. The study participants were engaged in many culturally responsive teaching practices but were eager and willing to acquire more. The findings of Villegas and Lucas (2002) among others may provide the study participants and other teachers and school personnel at Grammar School with additional leadership resources to continue to address these challenges in their school environment.

Teacher Preparedness That Increases All Student Learning

Darling-Hammond's (1998) indicators for skillful teaching, although dated, remain applicable in today's diverse classrooms. She argues, "at its root, achieving high levels of student understanding requires immensely skillful teaching —and schools that are organized to support teachers' continuous learning" (para. 1). Teachers need to

understand the subjects they teach on a foundational level. This allows the teacher to help students make connections between the content and everyday life; discussing cultural differences that arise, various student experiences, and approaches to learning. This process is best accomplished when teachers are able to study, do, and reflect. Darling-Hammond argues educational preparatory programs must provide ample opportunities for research, inquiry, trying, testing, and reflecting through evaluation (para. 8).

In order to accomplish such a large task, many educational programs that extend beyond the traditional four-year undergraduate degree. These programs allow preservice teachers an opportunity to have ample time to focus extensively on preparing to teach; linking coursework with practice. Extending teacher preparation programs allows novice teachers to become more experienced, thus empowering them "with a greater understanding of complex situations" (para. 12), such as culturally diverse student populations. Additional time in school classrooms also allows preservice teachers the ability to apply their own knowledge and understanding about culture and multiculturalism with their students.

Preparing and Maintaining a Culturally Responsive Teacher Workforce

Many preservice teachers anticipate working with students of different and varying backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences and claim their coursework raises awareness of these issues. However, much of the teacher preparation coursework fails to fully prepare new teachers for teaching and communicating with students from diverse backgrounds (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Earlier research has shown that preservice teachers who are White, middle class, females, often hold stereotypes about urban

students (Schultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996), have little understanding of racism or discrimination (Avery & Walker, 1993; King, 1991; Su, 1996, 1997), embrace individualism and believe everyone can achieve the "American Dream" (McIntyre, 1997), and use colorblindness to get past fear (Valli, 1995). Roughly half of the 50 states require that a multicultural education course be included in teacher preparatory programs (Evans, Torrey, & Newton, 1997) but often these courses are optional (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These earlier studies indicate preservice teachers have had a limited vision of teaching diverse student populations in schools.

The cultural gap that stems from the preservice teacher population also applies to those teachers presently teaching in schools. Many current teachers also have had difficulty understanding and teaching diverse populations of students. According to Prawat (1992), this challenge results from two teaching models acquired during their preservice training and overwhelmingly used in classroom instruction. The transmission and absorptionist models focus only on the learning process of the student. Although dated but still applicable for consideration, the models do not include any reflection of the cultural differences between the teacher and the student. In other words, how a teacher perceives a particular student in her class is irrelevant; therefore, cultural or multicultural training that may have occurred during preservice schooling, may be being ignored.

In both the transmission and absorptionist models, students "are passive recipients of information teachers possess and carefully 'deposit' in them" (Tatto, 1996, p. 156). Teachers utilizing these models assume student learning and approaches to learning are fixed, regardless of students' neurological, maturational, and cultural levels. Teacher-

perceived student learning differences help to categorize and classify students but do not aid the teachers' understanding of how students are making sense of the learning in the classroom (Prawat, 1992).

Northouse (2010) devotes an entire chapter on the relationship between cultural influences and the leadership process. He argues that in our current world of interconnectedness and globalization, it is impossible to lead without understanding different cultures. To become an effective teacher or leader in a school, one must "become competent in cross-cultural awareness and practice" (p. 335). Northouse's definition of cultural competence refers to a collective understanding of our own cultures as well as the cultures of others. This understanding creates a starting point for culturally responsive teacher preparatory programs and ongoing teacher professional development opportunities.

Culturally Responsive Educators

Preparing and maintaining a teacher workforce that is culturally responsive to the diverse population of students is, and remains, a perplexing endeavor for leaders in the field of education. Educators have sought a "one-size-fits-all" preparatory and ongoing professional development curriculum that fills this need, however, this approach is not sufficient. A successful cultural curriculum should focus on pertinent and relevant information on multiple diverse cultural issues. In addition, leaders must help to support and create a vision that systematically infuses a curriculum with cultural definitions, concepts, and learning experiences directly related to coursework and fieldwork.

One approach for a cultural responsive curriculum for preservice and current teachers can be found in a six-characteristic approach by Villegas and Lucas (2002). The characteristics include:

- being socially conscious, recognizing "that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that those ways are influenced by one's location in the social order;"
- having affirming "views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to overcome;"
- seeing "himself or herself as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students;"
- understanding "how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction;"
- knowing "about the lives of his or her students;" and
- using "his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar" (p. 21).

The participants and other teachers and school personnel at Grammar School can incorporate some or all of these characteristics into continued professional development opportunities. Although there is no single way to teach in a culturally responsive manner, teachers at Grammar School can begin to unpack and understand culturally responsive teaching by creating strategies based upon the characteristics previously mentioned. The

teachers could practice aspects of the characteristics in their own classrooms, be observed by their colleagues and administrators, and reflect on how the implementation of the characteristics can remain intact or be modified based upon the diverse student population in their school. Having a collective vision and commitment toward preparing students for a multicultural society also affords all teachers (preservice and veteran) the beginning tools to approach this complex yet necessary task.

Summary

"As teacher educators, we bring our philosophies, strengths, and limitations into our teaching" (Gorski, 2009, p. 309). Having a shared definition of culture through open conversation about cultural similarities and differences in people and diverse populations of students, can assist educators in understanding student learning processes and academic needs that are related to personal attributes, class, or socioeconomic status. Teachers and school administrators can address substantial bias that places some students on different academic learning paths, thus becoming more open to the possibility of students achieving academic advancement or reaching their full learning potential.

Teaching is a complex process. A teacher in present day school environments must be equipped to teach content knowledge to a wide variety of learners using multiple methods, strategies, and approaches. Individuals coexisting in an environment where many varying beliefs, attitudes, and values are present make this process more difficult. Arguably, culturally responsive teaching requires sophisticated pedagogical knowledge in addition to a highly developed understanding of various cultures. This approach to teacher training and current teacher professional development can assist with this challenge, helping teachers combat cultural lag and become transformative educators.

Appendix A

The following include proposed emails to the director of research studies and the teachers from the public school district.

Dear _____,

I am enrolled in a doctoral program in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership at The College of William and Mary. As part of this degree, I am conducting an independent research project that I hope can offer insight into school cultures. The focus of this research project is an investigation of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and values about students in their classrooms and how academic opportunities result for various students. The data collected will be evaluated to understand culture as a component of educational practices and teaching students in general.

I would like to interview first grade teachers individually during two separate times for about one hour each. Before the first interview I will send the general questions that I wish to ask attached to an email to facilitate preparing for the interview. Additionally, I am asking permission to observe the teachers in their classrooms as well as to collect artifacts/documents of student work products (student names excluded) from the teachers that they believe exhibit aspects of culture and academic opportunities available to students. All interview data collected will remain confidential and neither the school and its location nor any teacher, student, or staff member will be identified by name in my dissertation or in subsequent publication. To show my appreciation for their participation, I would like to offer the participants a small gift. Because this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative research design, questions for the interview will be open-ended and may differ from person to person depending on their responses.

I am hoping to conduct the first interviews before school begins and the second interview during the fall of school year (2015) after the observations.

Again thank you very much for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at phendricks@email.wm.edu or 757.621.4565.

Respectfully,

Paige Hendricks

This research project has been approved by The College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Date

Dear _____ (interested research participant name):

My name is Paige Hendricks and I am a doctoral candidate at The College of William and Mary and a former elementary teacher. As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting an independent research project to complete my dissertation requirement. The focus of my research project is an investigation of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and values about students in their classrooms and how academic opportunities are distributed to and utilized by students. The data collected will be evaluated to understand culture as a component of educational practices and teaching students in general.

As a first grade teacher, I am asking that you participate in my study. My hope is that you will be willing to help me in my research. The study will include one initial interview to be scheduled before the school year begins. I am asking to interview you individually for approximately one hour. I will be in contact with you to schedule this interview at your convenience. The time and location of the interview can also be completed at your convenience. The study also will involve me conducting observations in your classroom, followed by an additional interview (also an hour) to further clarify and seek information about your experiences in your classroom.

Before the first interview I will send an email with an attachment of the areas that I would like to address; having an idea of what I would like to discuss should help you prepare for the interview. In addition to observing you teaching in your classroom, I would also like to collect artifacts/documents/pictures of student work products (student names excluded) from you that you believe exhibit aspects of culture and academic opportunities available to students.

Attached is a participant consent form; I ask that you review the conditions and sign the document prior to the first interview. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

All interview data collected will remain confidential. I will ask you to select a name by which I can identify your data, but that will permit me to ensure your anonymity in my notes, the dissertation, and any subsequent publications. To show my appreciation for your participation, I would like to offer you a small gift at after the second interview process is complete.

I thank you very much for considering your participation in my research. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at phendricks@email.wm.edu or 757.621.4565. I hope that you decided to participate.

Respectfully yours,

Paige Hendricks

This research project has been approved by The College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Email sent- changed to be more informal:

Hello!

I hope you are having a wonderful summer break so far. My name is Paige Hendricks and I am a doctoral candidate at The College of William and Mary and a former elementary teacher. As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting an independent research project to complete my dissertation requirement. The focus of my research project is an investigation of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and values about students in their classrooms and how academic opportunities are distributed to and utilized by students. The data collected will be evaluated to understand culture as a component of educational practices and teaching students in general.

As a first grade teacher, I am asking that you participate in my study. My hope is that you will be willing to help me in my research. The study will include one initial interview to be scheduled before the school year begins, for approximately one hour, some observation time in your classroom in the upcoming fall, and a second interview. For the first interview, please let me know a few dates and times in the next few weeks that are convenient for you. We can also determine a location that is convenient for you- the principal, [Name], offered [School site] as a possible interview site.

Before the first interview I will send an email with an attachment of the areas that I would like to address; having an idea of what I would like to discuss should help you prepare for the interview.

Attached to this email is a participant consent form; I ask that you review the conditions and sign the document prior to the first interview. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

All interview data collected will remain confidential. I will ask you to select a name by which I can identify your data, but that will permit me to ensure your anonymity in my notes, the dissertation, and any subsequent publications. To show my appreciation for your participation, I would like to offer you a small gift after the second interview process is complete.

I thank you very much for considering your participation in my research. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at phendricks@email.wm.edu or 757.621.4565. I hope that you decided to participate.

Respectfully yours,

Paige Hendricks

This research project has been approved by The College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of Study: Different Faces in Our Classrooms: Teachers' Cultural Perspectives of Heterogeneous School Environments

WHAT DO I HOPE TO LEARN FROM YOU?

This investigation, entitled Different Faces in Our Classrooms: Teachers' Cultural Perspectives of Heterogeneous School Environments is designed to explore teacher beliefs, attitudes, and values about students in their classrooms and how academic opportunities are distributed to and utilized by students.

WHY IS YOUR PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT TO ME?

Studying your beliefs, attitudes, and values about students in your classrooms will help me to understand culture as a component of educational practices and teaching students in general.

WHAT WILL I REQUEST FROM YOU?

- I will ask you to participate individually first audio recorded interview in person that will take approximately an hour, scheduled at your convenience during the summer months.
- Once the first interview is completed, I will request that you allow me to analyze it as part of the data for this study.
- I will ask that you allow me to observe your classroom for the duration of one week during school hours. During this observation time, I will not interfere with the teaching and learning going on in the classroom at any time. After class, I may ask you clarifying questions to further understand the content or learning strategy that you used.
- I will ask that you participate individually in an hour-long second audio recorded in person interview approximately, again scheduled at your convenience after school hours. Questions in the second interview will be more specific and based upon your responses in the first interview and the observations.
- Following each interview, I will provide the transcription of the interview containing the information you shared. I will request that you confirm that the interview transcript accurately reflects your beliefs, attitudes, and values.
- Children's work artifacts, as offered by you (during the first or second interview), will be examined as part of the study. I will ask that you to describe the artifacts collected relate to your beliefs, attitudes, and values of your students and classroom organization. I will ask that these descriptions be audio recorded. I will ask to take photographs of these artifacts (as needed), removing any indications of students' names.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Please know that:

- The confidentiality of your personally identifying information will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.
- There are no foreseeable known risks and/or discomforts (including physical injury, psychological, social or economic harm, discomfort, or inconvenience) by participating in this study.
- Your name and other identifying information will be known only to me as the researcher through the information that you provide. Neither your name nor any other personally identifying information will be used in any presentation or published work.
- The audio recordings of the two interviews, observation notes, and the photographs of any artifacts collected as described above will be kept securely and then erased after a two year period from the time of the completion of the study.
- A $20 gift card will be provided to you upon the completion of the second interview as a courtesy for participating in the study.
- You may refuse to answer any questions during the interviews if you so choose. You may also terminate your participation in the study at any time. (To do so, simply inform me of your intention.) Neither of these actions will incur a penalty of any type.
- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decline to participate, this decision will not endanger your future relationship with the College of William & Mary or any other agencies involved in this study.
- A summary of the results of the study will be sent to you electronically by email once they are complete.

HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US?

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the researcher, Paige Hendricks (phendricks@email.wm.edu; 757-621-4565) at The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Dr. Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 (tjward@wm.edu) or Dr. Ray McCoy at 757-221-2783 (rwmcco@wm.edu), chairs of the two William & Mary committees that supervise the treatment of study participants, or Dr. Dorothy Finnegan (definn@wm.edu; 757-253-6593) at The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia), the professor who is supervising this study.

By checking the "I agree to participate" response below, then signing and dating this form, you will indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study, and confirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

☐ I agree to participate.

☐ I don't agree to participate.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

SIGNATURES:

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Questions for Interview #1:

1. Please provide some background into your teaching career and experiences. How long have you been teaching? Where, when and in what area(s) did you receive your teaching degree? What grade level(s) and subject(s) have you taught/are teaching? Why did you become a teacher? Have you taught elsewhere? Where and how long? What grades?

2. How long have you been at *** School? How long have you worked with your colleagues in first grade? Please identify by role and describe the relationship you have with your colleagues. Are there certain things you do together in school? What are some things you do separately from your colleagues?

3. As you think about the entire school year, what are some highlights you look forward to? Were you pleased with the outcomes? Why? What are some activities/events that happen that you may not look forward to? Why not?

4. It's summer now and you have just closed a school year only to open another one in a few weeks. How do you prepare for the upcoming school year? **or** What are some tasks you are addressing during the summer? **or** What thoughts are you having about the upcoming school year? Do you plan to change anything that you did last year? What? Why? How?

5. In preparation for the upcoming school year: As you think about the entire school year, what are some highlights you look forward to? What are some activities/events that you may not be looking forward to? Why not?

6. Would you describe what you will do to your classroom to make it reflect your teaching aims and objectives at the beginning of the school year?

7. What do you anticipate your class of students to look like (i.e., academically, ethnically, racially, etc.)? What skills and issues do you believe they will bring to your class? What skills might they be missing? [Probe: if they mention ethnicity, social class, etc.]

Questions for Interview #2

1. Review of Interview #1 if needed: Would you describe what you will do to your classroom to make it reflect your teaching aims and objectives at the beginning of the school year? What do you anticipate your class of students to look like? What skills and issues do you believe they will bring to your class? [Probe: if they mention ethnicity, social class, etc.]

2. The students at *** School have access to many special area teachers including an art teacher, gym teacher, librarian, etc. that they interact with on a regular basis. How do you interact with these individuals? Do you also use the spaces (library, gym, etc.) in the school building? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Tell me about what your classroom looks like during the beginning of the school day (i.e., morning meeting, children moving about/working, etc.)? Do you have any classroom rituals you do everyday? If so, what are they?

4. Would you describe your classroom during reading instruction? What are some teaching strategies you use during this time?

5. Would you describe your classroom during mathematics instruction? What are some teaching strategies you use during this time?

6. What classroom management techniques do you use with your students? How do you maintain discipline? For the class as a whole and for individual students?

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how you approach your teaching and your classroom? How would you define culture?

Appendix D

School:

Teacher Name:

Date:

Subject/Content Area (if applicable):

Theoretical Component	**Behavior(s)**	**Symbol(s)**
Beliefs		
Attitudes		
Values		
Classroom organization		
Classroom management		
Behavior modification(s)		
Deliver of curricular content		

Appendix E

Analysis Codes

Behaviors
Classroom management
Classroom organization
Behavior modification
Curriculum delivery
Toward team members[13]

Symbols
Classroom artifacts
Words used in addressing students
    In general (whole class/group)
    Sub-groups
    Individuals

Beliefs
Abilities of children
Role of teacher

Attitudes
Toward children
Toward minority children
Toward majority children
Toward team members

Values
Purpose of education
Purpose of first grade
Purpose of particular academic subject

Academic Programs
General (applicable to all students)
Content area specific
Gifted education services
Special education services
For minority students/families

[13] Codes in italics were added during the analysis process.

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