

**WHY CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND
WHY NOW?: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the role culturally responsive teaching (CRT) plays in providing equitable education for students. CRT has been defined by various scholars in the field, and the overlapping purpose is that the experience in the classroom must be reflective of the lived experiences outside the classroom with the goal of equity at the forefront. This research paints a clear picture of what CRT is and explores the position policy and law have on the ability to implement a culturally responsive practice. Many people ask the questions of why CRT and why now? The current student enrollment demographics in the United States does not reflect a White majority anymore; our student enrollment reflects a more diverse population of students that is composed of more students of color, including African American and Latinx students, which have historically been viewed as minority groups. District wide curriculum, school wide practice, and school environments should be in alignment and reflective of diverse groups of students and no longer just apply to White students. This review of current literature further supports CRT providing student-centered education while using cultural differences as leverage for all students to reach a high standard of success. Implications are provided for educators in K-12, policy makers or curriculum designers, and higher education teacher licensure program.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching, student enrollment, policy, teacher preparation programs

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Introduction

Classroom teachers wear many hats during the school day. Responsibilities range from teaching academic content, to maintaining classroom management, to preparing lesson plans for each content area, to provide support to students emotionally and socially. Arguably, all these duties have a unified goal of providing equitable and accessible education to students in a classroom. This may seem like a simple task at first glance, however when considering the diversity of students today teachers need to be able to provide an equitable education for every student as America's cultural and societal norms have changed over the last twenty years. Nieto (2000) speaks on these changing demographics in the new century and the urgency for teachers needing to be able to teach to diverse classrooms. There is more urgency than ever as demographics continue to change and it's too often that students of color are doing poorly in academics. This supports the notion that it is necessary for teachers to be equipped with the skills, tools, and resources to teach a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom, along with being able to implement the principles that support being a culturally responsive teacher into practice (Samuels, 2018). While this is not an entirely new concept, many people struggle to support the idea of placing culture at the center of classrooms. With diversity increasing as fast as it, teachers have no choice but to prioritize the cultural needs of students as part of daily instruction if all children, regardless of race, can succeed.

When discussing the need for culture to be a central element of teaching, culturally responsive teaching is a teaching practice that is often mentioned. The phrase *culturally responsive teaching*¹ was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1994. Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Ladson-Billings (1995a) as a part of a, "pedagogy that

¹ The term *culturally responsive teaching* will also be used as the acronym CRT.

rests on three criteria or prepositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain a cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p.160). Other emerging leaders in the field, like Gay (2002), define culturally responsive teaching as, “using cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse student as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p.106). The common understanding between how Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Gay (2002) phrase culturally responsive teaching is that students will be more engaged and achieve success at higher rates when there is congruency between the cultural factors at home and those in the classroom. It also serves as a practice to bridge the gap between what students experience at home and what students experience at home in terms of speech and language (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) and sociolinguistics’ argue that, “if student’s home language is incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience academic success” (p.159). CRT has the potential to meaningfully prioritize the cultural needs of students in the classroom if it’s done purposefully and authentically to provide opportunities to connect with students and families, while also leveling the playing field for every student in striving for an equitable education. By implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, all cultural identities of our students will be prioritized, not just the White, middle-class suburban student that has historically achieved academic success in our education system.

A starting point in understanding what it means to be culturally responsive is to start by unpacking what the term “culture” means. The important thing to realize is that culture is individual to each student, and culture should not be seen as a blanket term that

fits entire groups of people as this can further perpetuate stereotyping. Culture should rather be understood as elements of individual people like how people interact, personal values, religious affiliation, country of origin, language, race, the environment they grew up in, family structure, and overall factors that have shaped each person into being who they are. Every person has a cultural background, even White people. Beyond just understanding and recognizing cultural diversity within a classroom, Gay (2002) argues that a part of being a culturally responsive teacher is, “acquiring detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups (e.g., African, Asian, Latino, and Native American)” (p.107). In other words, it takes more than recognizing that students in a classroom come from different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds; it takes true knowledge and understanding of ethnic groups to provide access to education that aligns with those cultural values, and therefore avoid continuing stereotypical views of culture (Vavrus, 2008).

Given the realities and the need for being prepared to teach diverse classrooms, an important question to explore is how to prepare teachers to educate this growing culturally and linguistically diverse generation of students. How should teacher education programs prepare teachers? It’s difficult to ‘blame’ teachers for being ill-prepared to teach a diverse classroom in a culturally responsive way when teacher preparation programs should be held accountable for doing so. The push for having social justice in higher education curriculum is happening right now, and the education world needs to act quickly if teachers want to prepare students to impact society in meaningful ways.

Culture is important, necessary, and history is at a point in time where it is time to accept the idea that culture is not bad, but rather to be seen in a positive, advantageous

light. In a study researching how urban educators understand culture, teachers often viewed culture, “as a serious problem that gets in the way of education” (Smith & Smith, p.344). If urban teachers are viewing culture with a negative connotation, then how can we expect students of diverse classroom with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to receive an equitable or in this case even an equal education? The attitudes teachers carry about students will impact their students’ academic outcomes, and all teachers need to carry a mutual respect for the lives of all students (Smith & Smith, 2009). Culture makes each individual who they are and how they interact in the world – it only makes sense to provide education for students that prioritizes this cultural individuality. How teachers view culture in general, understand their own culture, and view or understand the differences in students’ cultural backgrounds are incredibly important aspects to teaching in any district (Smith & Smith, 2009; Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) highlights an important consideration that when a teacher can extend this lens of understanding cultural differences this can translate into appropriately planning for student differences in terms of how students can access the content, student interactions, communication, and connection (Smith & Smith, 2009). This supports the idea that many elements of culture have a negative connotation attached, bias against certain groups of people, or racist ideals in our society, however when it gets broken down every single person has a cultural background that has played a role in shaping them into the individual they are. Accounting for these cultural differences will only help students achieve academic success, not hurt them. Teacher preparation programs need to place culture at the center of curriculum just as K-12 schools do; being culturally responsive has immense value in reference to equity and if it’s embedded appropriately in classrooms, then all of our

students could have a fair chance at receiving an education appropriate to them individually.

When thinking about culture in society in a larger context outside of the classroom, it remains a relevant and timely topic. Recent media surrounding social movements like *Black Lives Matter* have brought important attention to how systemic racism affects people of color daily placing specific attention to police brutality. Furthermore, the murder of George Floyd has served as a catalyst in the education world for placing discussions of culture and race front and center in decisions regarding curriculum, equity, and teaching practice. Movements like *BLM*² are demanding rights for people of color, and similarly the education system in this country should be evaluating how we can provide equitable education that gives every student of color the skills, tools, and experience in a classroom that is reflective of their cultural identities, not just similar to the identity of their teacher, similar to the majority of their classroom, and certainly not just for the White, middle-class student.

Culturally responsive teaching fits right into this much larger social, political, and historical context that demands equitable education, specifically for people of marginalized and minority identities. To preface CRT, a brief historical breakdown of how culturally responsive teaching evolved from *multicultural education* is needed. Multicultural education emerged amid the Civil Rights Movement as activists, “demanded educational institutions to cease their racist and oppressive practices” (Harmon, p. 17). The push for colleges to have courses that outline the truths of history was made apparent during these times, and eventually made its way into K-12 curriculum (Harmon, 2012). Additionally, there was an emergence of the notion that cultural and

² *Black Lives Matter* will be noted as the acronym BLM.

ethnic differences can be used to improve education as well as the importance of educating students of ethnic groups. It should also be understood that while the 1960's provided some of the foundational pedagogy of CRT through the emergence of multicultural education, exploring the historical roots of enslaved African Americans through 1861 can aid in understanding where these deeply seeded racist ideologies stemmed from. There was a mindset that the White folk is superior, stemming from the racial inferiority White slave owners felt when enslaved African Americans could become literate post Emancipation Proclamation of 1861 (Harmon, 2012). This is when the notion that darker skinned individuals were not deserving of the same education as White people. This is not saying that this equates to teachers automatically have racist and deficit views of African American students inherently, but it does provide more context to where the deficit views of non-White students came from and how the American education system began with these views at its base. This partially explains why inequities still exist today.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995b) argues that, "these inequities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which the discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p.47). Unfortunately, many people turn a blind-eye to the social and political changes needed in society. Ladson-Billings (2006) notes this can be seen largely in the achievement gap in school which refers to, "the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White student" (p.1). Furthermore, the same achievement gap also exists outside of standardized test scores when comparing, "dropout rate and relative numbers of students who take advanced placement examinations; enroll in honors, advanced

placement, and ‘gifted’ classes; and are admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs” (Ladson-Billings, p.4). Cultural deficit theory have posited the widening of the achievement gap. A clear divide in the success of students exists, so it is important to understand the factors that have contributed to why this achievement gap still exists and furthermore, what measures are needed to be taken for all students to achieve individual success.

The purpose of this research is to examine the role culturally responsive teaching plays in providing equitable education for students and to explore teacher readiness in teacher preparation programs. In this this research I will introduce the concept of culturally responsive teaching, its’ definition, its’ origins, and its’ history; demonstrate the notion changing demographics of student population is an influential factor in the need to shift teaching practices; how federal and state legislation effect curriculum decisions in public schools; and finally examine what efforts teacher preparation programs are making and the future direction of culturally responsive practices. Culture serves as the central theme throughout each section of this research, as well as demonstrating what is means to teach with culture in mind and the purpose behind this. Through unpacking some of the reasons for placing culture at the center of discussions in education, greater changes in higher education teacher preparation programs can be made in order to better educate and prepare student teachers to teach diverse classrooms ensuring that every student’s education is made a priority.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

A part of teaching in a culturally responsive way is knowing how to use the foundational elements of CRT, which were previously mentioned as achievement of

students, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness in practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The principle of academic achievement strives to hold all our students to high expectations and rests on the fundamental belief that every student is capable of and can achieve a high standard of education. Academic achievement in practice could look like a teacher observing an African American student's strength of social power, and then using it advantageously to encourage this student to transform meaningful issues into the form of leadership. It's about taking the strength of a student that could be perceived as a 'troublesome behavior' and using it as leverage in guiding that student towards success (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). It can also be explained by viewing students in an asset-based light rather than deficit-based ideology, where the capabilities of each student are used in a positive light in the classroom to aid in reaching success. Using what the student exhibits as strengths should be used to the student's advantage often, and this can only be done through if a teacher views every student for what they can do opposed to what they cannot do.

Cultural competence refers to a teacher's understanding of their own cultural identity, their own biases, the role of culture in education, and how these three elements should honor and affirm students' cultural identities. Ladson-Billings (1995a) states that, "culturally relevant teachers utilize student's culture as a vehicle for learning" (p.161). Incorporating the kind of music students listen to or using the languages they speak in a content area, like in English Language Arts, brings an aspect of a student's home-life into their school-life. This creates the idea that school and culture can occur synonymously as one to work in the student's favor. Having a student actively use their native language in an advantageous way to 'code' English is a part of using a student's competence and

strength in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Language is an asset and by acknowledging this, students would be encouraged to use their skills in other languages to further their own learning and knowledge in a culturally responsive environment. Knowledge of various cultural backgrounds, community interactions, and student engagement outside of school is, of course, needed to truly understand the extent of how culture impacts learning. This can also lend itself to showcasing that culture and community through social interaction affirms an asset-based ideology that supports students of all cultural identities (Vavrus, 2008). The notion of a classroom being a community of learning is deeply embedded into the practice of a culturally responsive teacher.

Sociopolitical awareness refers to students evaluating systemic inequities and their role in these inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). When a teacher has students engage, discuss, or analyze community related issues, it is reflective of the notion that students can create more of a sociopolitical awareness through critically engaging with what and who surrounds them. This could look like a teacher having students evaluate the texts for outdated knowledge, with the help of their teaching modeling it, to encourage students not to automatically adhere to everything that is told to them, but rather be critical of what or who they engage with. It's also embedding a critical lens of the norms and values that exist within society into everyday plans, lessons, and activities. It is not a one-time-lesson that 'covers' this notion, but an endless stream of opportunity for students to empower themselves to make meaningful differences in the community that surrounds them (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Teachers are encouraged to attend events where their students commonly gather, like church, sporting events, or community service acts (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Culturally responsive teaching goes beyond the four walls of the classroom and creates a bond between students and teachers that encourages a community of learning beyond common core state standards. CRT sets the tone that teachers value the community their students belong to, and furthermore that community adds value to each student and the space for learning (Summer, 1995a). Becoming engaged in the community through food drives, community led-initiatives, social movements, or empowering students to use their voice to speak out against injustices they may encounter is a part of CRT. A welcoming and caring school environment and community that fosters the notion that culture can aid in students reaching their goals, rather than the notion that culture limits a student's ability to achieve highly and is not valued as part of a student's identity (Vavrus, 2008).

As previously mentioned, other scholars in the field define what culturally responsive teaching is, consists of, or demonstrates. While Ladson-Billings' uses three tenets of CRT in her definition, Brown (2007) outlines the frameworks of Gay (2002), who identifies five elements of culturally responsive teachers as developing knowledge of cultural diversity, using culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating a learning community, cross-cultural communications, and congruity in classroom instruction (Brown, p.59). Additionally, Brown (2007) also outlines the frameworks of Villegas and Lucas (2002), who identify six tenets that build upon Gay (2002) while adding in factors of, "having affirming views of students from CLD³ backgrounds," "see themselves as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change..." and "know about the lives of their students" (Brown, p.59). It's important to understand that while

³ CLD is an acronym for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

there are different variations of how scholars categorize the tenets, there is a clear understanding that culturally responsive teaching calls for student-centered learning that aligns students cultural background and home life with classroom instruction to reach individual success for each student.

Gloria Ladson-Billings' novel *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* also provides a number of examples of practices that align with being culturally responsive based on the stories of eight exemplary teachers within the study. To reiterate part of the "Preface" of this book, this does not offer solutions to the problem of education for African American students, but rather uses personal experience and teacher experience to showcase effective teaching of African American students. Below is a table that reflects some of the most important practices of a culturally responsive teacher derived from this book.⁴

Table 1
The Basics of Culturally Relevant Teaching

<i>The Basics of Culturally Relevant Teaching</i>
1. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices Have High Self-Esteem and a High Regard for Others.
2. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices See Themselves as Part of the Community, See Teaching as Giving Back to the Community, and Encourage Their Students to Do the Same.
3. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices See Teaching as an Art and Themselves as Artists.
4. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices Believe that All Students Can Succeed.
5. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices Help Students Make Connections Between Their Community, National, and Global Identities.
6. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices See Teaching as "Digging Knowledge

⁴ This chart was created using the conclusions within Chapter 3: Seeking Color, Seeking Culture and Chapter 4: We Are Family from *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Out” of Students.
7. Teachers with Culturally Relevant Practices Encourage a Community of Learners.
8. Culturally Relevant Teaching Encourages Student to Learn Collaboratively and Expects Them to Teach Each Other and Take Responsibility for Each Other.

Note. Adapted from *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*.

Changing Demographics

It’s necessary to understand that America is no longer a society where the majority is held largely by a White population, but rather that we live in a diverse society that consists of vastly different culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse people. A growing diverse society therefore leads to the discussion of a growingly diverse groups of student enrollment in public schools. Orfield & Frankenberg (2014) bring attention to a statistic stating, “the 43 years from 1968 to 2011 brought a 28% decline in White enrollment, a 19% increase in the Black enrollment, and a 495% increase in the number of Latino students” (p. 720). Reflecting over 20 years ago, in 1990 about 70% of students were White, and in today’s society only one out of two students are White (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). On a national scale, the Latinx population of students has increased from, “5.3 million to more than 12.8 million and now making up almost a quarter of students age 5-17 population” (Mordechay & Orfield, p.197). Statistics like these speak volumes to how largely our current student enrollment is changing and furthermore, how demographic changes at this scale should inform and shape curriculum and instructional choices for these now widely diverse classrooms. For example, the West has historically reflected a majority White population at the time of *Brown*, however the percentage of White and Latinx populations are almost equal within public-school enrollment showing

that 40.2% are White and 41.4% are Latinx. In the South, a region that has been traditionally majority Black population, now has just about equal populations of students in public school enrollment of Latinx and Black students with Latinx students accounting for 25.3% of students and Black students accounting for 24.1% of students (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

With the reality of rapidly changing student enrollment, it's urgent that teachers understand culture well enough to make adjustments in their pedagogical decisions that will allow students from all cultural identities to reason with the material through this community of learning that is established with CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The material we teach students must be accessible for students from every cultural background, and of course must be accessible at their present level of educational performance. It's about reaching that balance where students from all backgrounds can understand and make connections with the material to allow them to expand their educational horizons with more success at a higher standard. Our diverse student enrollment should serve as a primary reason to align curriculum with culture in order to achieve a higher level of success among students of color and Latinx populations with these populations of students no longer being as much of a minority than they historically have been.

For example, when looking locally at a public school district, Saugus, Massachusetts, comparatively from the 2020-2021 school year to the 2010-2011 school year, the district saw a 13.1% increase in Hispanic⁵ groups of students. Additionally, this caused a shift in the population of White students to go from 83.9% to 65.2% in the

⁵ The term "Hispanic" is being used in reference to the charts provided by DESE. Hispanic individuals are people who are Spanish-speaking or come from Spanish-speaking communities. The term Latinx is a more inclusive commonly used term now, however I am using Hispanic in this section to maintain alignment with the charts provided.

district. View the figures below to compare the enrollment data over the past 10 years in the Saugus Public School District. ⁶

Table 2

Enrollment Data by Race/Ethnicity (2020-21) in Saugus, MA.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2020-21)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	5.3	9.3
Asian	5.2	7.2
Hispanic	20.6	22.3
Native American	0.8	0.2
White	65.2	56.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.3	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	2.6	4.1

Note. Adapted from Enrollment Data under District Profiles on DESE website.

Table 3

Enrollment Data by Race/Ethnicity (2010-11) in Saugus, MA.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2010-11)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	3.4	8.2
Asian	3.7	5.5
Hispanic	7.7	15.4
Native American	0.2	0.2
White	83.9	68.0
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	1.0	2.4

Note. Adapted from Enrollment Data under District Profiles on DESE website.

When looking at another local public school district, Beverly, Massachusetts, an increase in the Hispanic population of students increased by 50% from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2020-2021 school year. Even though many students attending public school in Beverly are among the White population of students, there should still be attention called to any significant changes within student demographics, especially as large as an increase as 50%. In these examples, the significant increase in the Hispanic

⁶ These charts were located from the Massachusetts's Department of Education's School and District Profiles.

population of students should demonstrates the need for instruction to be in alignment and reflective of the current student population.⁷

Table 4

Enrollment Data by Race/Ethnicity (2020-11) in Beverly, MA.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2020-21)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	3.6	9.3
Asian	2.5	7.2
Hispanic	15.0	22.3
Native American	0.1	0.2
White	74.8	56.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	3.9	4.1

Note. Adapted from Enrollment Data under District Profiles on DESE website.

Table 5

Enrollment Data by Race/Ethnicity (2010-11) in Beverly, MA.

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2010-11)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	2.4	8.2
Asian	1.9	5.5
Hispanic	7.3	15.4
Native American	0.0	0.2
White	86.1	68.0
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	2.2	2.4

Note. Adapted from Enrollment Data under District Profiles on DESE website.

The need for curriculum and practice to be reflective of all groups of students, especially the Latinx⁸ population that has been showing these significant increases, is needed for academic success. Across just a 10-year difference, school demographics in the suburbs are seeing similar changes in diversity that have been typically reflected in urban districts. Mordechay & Orfield (2017) use the work of Frey, Berube, Singer, &

⁷ These charts were located from the Massachusetts's Department of Education's School and District Profiles.

⁸ Latinx refers to individuals with any Latin American ancestry, but excludes Spain. Latinx opposed to Latino or Latina provides a more inclusive term for individuals who may not identify with the suffixes for -o and -a.

Wilson (2009) to note that, “since the 1990’s...suburban schools have seen an increase of almost 3.5 million in their student population, almost all of which can be accounted for by the enrollment change of minority students” (p.197). An increase in diversity among the school enrollment in suburbs supports the idea that diversity no longer solely exists among the city and furthermore, that the pedagogy must be reflective of the current student demographics (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017).

With diverse student enrollment placing diversity, race, and ethnicity in relation to education on the table for discussion, it has been shown to elicit a strong opposition from both political parties, but more often from conservative states. It isn’t to say that only conservative states pose this opposition, as liberal states have shown opposition as well, but it does bring a political divide into the conversation. Because this political divide associated with race and curriculum exists, the education students receive in some content areas, like history or social studies, is likely to vary from state to state especially considering each state has their own standards to follow. It should be noted that the term *Critical Race Theory*⁹ swarming the media with its association to race-based curriculum is a legal term that has made its way into the media and into discussions regarding school curriculum. There has been significant opposition from states, as well as individual districts across the country, for using critical race theory in public schooling and to what extent. Although culturally responsive teaching may be associated with the term critical race theory and coincidentally has the same acronym of CRT, the terms are different and it should remain clear that the focus of this research is about a practice of teaching that uses diversity to create equitable education for students, not the legal term used to

⁹ Critical Race Theory refers to the legal term that examines the intersection of race and law or legal structures in the United States.

examine race and legal structures in America. For those who are in opposition of critical race theory being taught in public school, it's necessary to know the difference between these two terms that seem to be used interchangeably because one of the goals of this research is to gain a better understanding of how CRT can be used to produce more successful students and it is not possible to do if there is a constant connection to critical race theory.

Gay (2013) expands on the importance of diversity in the classroom, as teachers' beliefs and attitudes about diversity and ethnic, racial, or gender differences directly impacts student success. Additionally, opposition for using CRT as a teaching practice does exist and this can be explained due to two main reasons: doubt in the logic or soundness of the practice, and difficulty with implementation. Doubt in the validity of CRT may stem from the notion that race is a taboo topic, and by using students ethnic and racial difficulties, race is therefore at the center of discussion that many are uncomfortable or ignorant to. Gay (2013) refers to Taba's (1962) explanation of "the folklore of school culture" that can be attributed to why teachers and districts resist changing their traditional ways of teaching. Teachers are looked at as individuals having it all together where they have all the knowledge needed to teach students, however this has created the notion that teachers don't have anything to learn or explore in their teaching practice (Taba, 1962), which can be viewed as a barrier to learning new, perhaps more equitable and student-centered teaching methods, like CRT. Lack of resources and funding are also likely among the reasons for difficulty with implementation due to historically common stereotypical or inaccurate representations of ethnic groups among resources, curriculum, and textbooks that would therefore need to be updated or replaced

(Gay, 2013). Because CRT challenges the teaching practice that what we traditionally and historically are familiar with, we see opposition from teachers and districts who may be uncomfortable with changing their ways in general not specifically having to do with CRT, lack the proper knowledge of culture and race, struggle to implement CRT due to lacking knowledge, or may not see the need to use culture as a vehicle for student success (Gay, 2013). With this opposition widely present, the responsibility of decision-making lies in the hands of policymakers and officials at the local, state, and federal levels.

Our federal agencies, like the United States Department of Education, leave the decision making up to state-led agencies and officials for public school per that state. Federal policy in education in the United States is limited, therefore leaving many of the decisions to be made regarding curriculum and other major considerations at the state and local level. Public schools at the local level respond accordingly to the state guidelines, acts, and laws that have been implemented by each state. This is largely due to the 10th amendment which states, “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, not prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (Constitute, n.d.). In other words, State and the people in each state have the power in making decisions on matters that are not outlined in the Constitution. Those powers within the Constitution remain in the power of the federal government. The specific concern for this is that all educational decisions on curriculum, equity, materials, etc. are in the hands of states that are politically different which largely impacts how states implement curriculum and the content within the curriculum.

The Impact of Legislation

When reflecting on how education curriculum or initiatives are implemented at the state and federal level, it's crucial to view how the role of policy and law impacts implementation of curriculum in schools, districts, and states. Some of the most well-known and foundational federal court cases have shaped present day education, in addition to the tightly woven aspects of social, historical, and political movements in American history. Reflecting to where 'equal' education for African American students began with one of the most widely known and influential supreme court cases, *Brown vs. Board of Education*. In 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* made one of the most impactful decisions in American history to rule segregated schools unconstitutional (Russo, 1994). The ruling supported the notion that racial segregation therefore would, "deprive children of the minority group of equal education opportunities" (Russo, p.298). In addition, this court case ruling determined the "separate but equal" Jim Crow laws to no longer be equal in schools and therefore, unconstitutional.

Dating back to 1872, it was believed that African American students did not need math or science in their curriculum, but rather needed to be taught life skills because this push for educating African Americans would simply phase out (Harmon, 2012). Furthermore, African American students were viewed as not being capable of thinking abstractly or critically, and textbooks did not reflect accurate illustrations of African Americans (Harmon, 2012). *Brown* and the desegregation of schools served as a precursor and catalyst for the decade to follow, especially in the 1960's where social movements that aligned with civil rights movements were heavily prevalent and where access to equal education for African Americans persisted (Russo, 1994). *Brown's* decision in 1954 was centered around African American students gaining equal access to

education, however when looking at the growing Latinx population of students Orfield & Frankenberg (2014) now raise the concern for this entire group of students that are now facing similar challenges in terms of access and equity.

A part of the *Brown* decision ruling segregation in schools to be unconstitutional was the underlying notion that race plays a factor in educational outcomes and success in America. Segregation was giving White students the upper hand that was lawful through *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) in “separate but equal” education until it was overturned in *Brown*. What was viewed as ‘equal’ was not the whole truth, as White students received education that was, “superior with respect to such factors as teacher training, pupil-teacher ratios, and physical plant facilities” (Russo, p. 298). It cannot go unnoticed that *Brown* served as a foundational supreme court decision that primarily aimed to give African American students the opportunity to receive the education that they needed, and in fact, still do need. Based on the growing gap in achievement rate when comparing White students to African American and Latinx students, the achievement difference between these groups of students remains present (Ladson-Billings, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001), so it’s imperative that we continue to investigate how to give students of color the equal education that *Brown* sought after in the 50’s. Ladson-Billings (2006) demonstrates that, “the gap between Black and Latina/o fourth graders and their White counterparts in reading scaled scores was more than 26 points (Education Commission of the States, 2005)” (p.4). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2006) notes that, “in eighth-grade, the gap was more than 23 points and...mathematics the gap was more than 26 points (Education Commission of the States, 2005)” (p.4). The question that should be raised is have we upheld the educational goals of *Brown*?

At the federal level, the most recent and only Act that went into effect by law was No Child Left Behind (NCLB)¹⁰ Act during the Bush Administration in 2001. Kim & Sunderman (2005) outline that the primary goal of this Act to, “close ‘the achievement gap between high and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers’” (NCLB, 2001, Sec. 1001 [3]). Bush delivered a speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)¹¹ outlining his administration’s purpose for creating NCLB and that the underlying mission of NCLB was widely supported by the notion that educational reform should take place through the implementation of standards and accountability. The idea behind NCLB was also grounded in having a federal level form of accountability to higher the standards for students to meet to increase student achievement (Goertz, 2005). Adequate yearly progress (AYP) served as an essential mechanism for measuring school performances and academic achievement to ensure that every school and every student reached the same academic standard for the 2013-2014 year (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). NCLB also required schools to meet a certain level of proficiency on subjects of ELA and Mathematics state level test scores, otherwise noted as annual measurable outcomes (AMO) (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). If schools did not meet targets for each subgroup of students, schools would be considered ‘failing,’ and therefore interventions would need to be put in place (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Among many reasons that describe NCLB’s failure is that our current education system placed the success of students in the hands of standards and test scores (Orfield &

¹⁰ The acronym NCLB will be used in place of No Child Left Behind.

¹¹ The acronym NAACP will be used in place of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Frankenberg, 2014; Superfine, 2005). A foundational element of NCLB was to increase the implementation of standards to predict student success, while simultaneously affirming the notion that a score of a test holds more value than the brilliantly creative minds of our youth. One of the outcome-based goals that NLCB sought after was for, “100% of students will score at the ‘proficient’ level on state tests by the year 2014” (Darling-Hammond, p. 249). It is widely known that this mission had statistical flaws as it is not possible to achieve this level on a norm-referenced state level test, and furthermore impossible to achieve in the time frame established (Darling-Hammond, 2007). With this notion of higher student accountability unfortunately came with a large number of students who dropped out of school because of graduation requirements requiring students to pass these tests. Furthermore, from this implementation Massachusetts schools that increased scores also saw the highest dropout rates, therefore continuing to widen the gap between students at the top achieving high test score and students at the bottom who dropped out for various reasons, likely including inability to pass state level tests (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Wheelock, 2003).

It should also be noted that while one of the goals of NCLB was to mandate yearly progress towards reaching proficiency by 2014, NCLB did not provide or consider the resources that would be needed to strive for this goal. Implementing such a lofty goal without additional federal or state support to enable this progress left many already under-resourced schools unable for this to be possible (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Goertz (2005) refers to Mathis (2005) in discussing the associated cost that came along with implementing NCLB, which made it more difficult to implement given the administrative cost and the cost of teaching to standards. States simply did not have the budget or

capacity to fund this standardized school reform, and the cost of teaching to standards needed states to spend from 20% to 40% more when resources were already sparse (Goertz, 2005; Mathis, 2005).

In addition to the statistical impossibility, subgroups of students that this act was trying to target, like students with disabilities and students who were not proficient in English, were not receiving equitable education and instead were receiving ‘equal’ education to peers despite having vastly different learning needs compared to peers sitting beside them. This made implementation at the state level challenging because NCLB required all students to take state-level standardized test using the same set of standards scored against regardless of the student’s current performance levels and needs (Goertz, 2005). Students with disabilities were being scored against the same standards that students without disabilities were being scored against and were not allowed to receive the modifications they would need in order to access the material on that test. NCLB prohibited out-of-level testing, which would be the test that a student would take if they needed significant modifications to access the material from a different entry point. While this issue was ‘addressed’ in 2003 and students were able to use alternative assessment, states were still held to a one percent limit on students in the district to take state level tests with alternative achievement standards and be scored as ‘proficient’ or ‘advanced.’ The one percent limit was put in place to ‘accommodate’ students after significant backlash while also aiming to, “discourage states from holding students to lower standards” (Goertz, p. 81). The population of students considered to be ELL’s¹² who were among the limited English proficiency¹³ (LEP) subgroup also did not receive

¹² The acronym ELL refers to English Language Learner students. ELL will be used in place of English Language Learner. Note that the acronym MLL, multilanguage learner, is a more accepted term to use.

¹³ LEP will be used as an acronym in place of ‘limited English proficiency.’

equitable education under NCLB policies. The annual proficiency goal also applied to the LEP subgroup, and the law did not truly allow this subgroup to be able to meet this goal. Darling-Hammond (2007) and Goertz (2005) outline the notion that once students reached English proficiency in this group they would be moved out of this subgroup, and their spot would be replaced with more students considered to have LEP. While one student may be testing out of the subgroup, several more would be added, so it was a consistent cycle that made it nearly impossible to make progress towards that proficiency standard under the subgroup structures.

It is clear that the standardization movement stripped teachers of the ability to meet individual cultural needs with the immense pressures put on them to prepare their students to pass these tests that would determine their 'success' in the public school system. Assessing students in culturally responsive ways is not a one-size-fits all method, and how NCLB implied this through measurement of student and school performance under NCLB. Mean proficiency levels on state level states and strict regulations were placed on different groups of students which caused opposition from schools, educators, and parents in the notion that differences in student's background, including the 'subgroups' they belong to under NCLB, were expected to perform in the same way given the same tools, which does not account for equitable education (Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Goertz, 2005). Equitable education allows for individualized education for each student keeping in mind all parts of the student, not just what the standards are telling you to teach. The absence of economic and political policy consideration and sole focus of standardization to be the 'saving grace' for educational reform was perhaps not the approach that should have been implemented on a federal level, as the outcomes from

NCLB after 15 years were not promising for historically disadvantaged groups of students (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

Kim and Sunderman (2005) place emphasis on research completed by Kane and Staiger (2002) that found little support for use of accountability on subgroups as an increase in minority student achievement was not seen, and opposingly increased the failure rates in schools with larger Black or Latinx populations of students. While closing the achievement gap among students of color and White students was a main goal NCLB sought after, studies like Kane and Staiger (2002) suggest outcomes from the measurements used did the opposite and were failing large groups of students in public school.

Achinstein & Ogawa (2012) carried out a study examining how teachers of color engage in being culturally responsive and how school policy may affect the ways teachers could engage in culturally responsive teaching. The study was carried out through a case study of 21 new teachers of color over five years in California. Several teachers in the study reported opposing views on standardized testing measures. One teacher, Linh, voiced her views on what she saw her role of being a teacher as and she described it as an, “agent for change in this society,” (p.24) followed by sharing the challenges she faced in navigating accountability and standardized testing while being culturally responsive. To paraphrase, Linh shared that the values of NCLB being instilled in her school did not allow for culturally responsive teaching to exist or be supported. Another teacher in the study, Alexandria, reported similar views on how the push for standardized testing, “undermined her ability to teach and assess her students’ academic performance in culturally responsive ways” (Achinstein & Ogawa, p.25). Teachers indicated they value

culturally responsive teaching as a practice and would have liked to implement it, or more directly use it. It's evident that teachers of color were faced with the dilemma of cutting back on cultural considerations in the classrooms to meet school policy of accountability established through NCLB. Consequently, this left a large portion of students behind by not prioritizing individual needs of students.

From 2002-2015 NCLB was the governing federal law in place for public school systems and given the challenges teachers faced in implementing culturally responsive teaching practice in combination with the mandates outlined by NCLB, our students' education remained a casualty of this challenge. There is a clear discrepancy in the foundational values of NCLB compared to the values of culturally responsive teaching and the purpose it serves for students of color, Latinx students, and students of cultures that have not been represented in the education system. NCLB furthered this divide between who achieves and who does not in the public school system, and furthermore continued to prioritize our White student's success, while watching groups of students of color fall further and further behind.

Previous research has shown an advantage to having this alignment between racial and cultural identities of teachers and students. For example, Milner's (2016) study examined the teaching practices of a black, male teacher in response to student's cultural needs. Observations were done in order to observe Mr. Jackson's teaching methods in practice, and more specifically his ability to validate students' cultural experiences as an intentional method to employ CRT practices. Three main conclusions were revealed from this observational study: teachers must value the identity of themselves and students; teaching is a social context that can be influenced by several factors; there is value in the,

“interrelated nature of the mind and heart,” (p. 429) related to student experience. These conclusions from Milner (2016) align with the culturally responsive pedagogy that rests of the belief that all students are capable of achieving academic success when teachers align instruction with the cultural elements they bring to the classroom and that teachers’ racial and cultural identities impact learning just like students’ racial and cultural identities do.

Given the importance of the alignment of cultural identities between teachers and students, all of this relates back to who is attending higher education are and what is higher education doing to prepare students to enter the teaching field with the necessary skills. In terms of the education field, it is therefore necessary to refer to the demographic breakdown of students in Schools of Education, as well as the faculty and staff teaching in Schools of Education, as influential and important pieces of information. While it by no means takes away from the value, expertise, knowledge, and skills these professors and faculty have and bring to the field, we still need to question if teachers are fully prepared to teach a diverse group of students given the statistics of cultural differences between the teacher and student populations. How or who is this being carried out by, and under what guidelines? These questions must be analyzed at the higher education level, as accredited colleges and universities are essentially responsible for how the next class of licensed teachers use their role as teachers. Higher education has an immense amount of influence in the curriculum taught, transfer of knowledge, and implementation of skills of students in teacher preparation or licensure programs. Starting with what teacher preparation or licensure programs need to do to ensure that teachers are entering the field of education equipped with skills and knowledge to teach students of various

cultural identities is imperative for the appropriate implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Diversity and culture have significant value in the world of education, and higher education is an influential place for where future teachers can cultivate and establish this fundamental value of culture through the lens of a culturally responsive teaching practice.

Higher Education

Higher education is an opportunity for those seeking a college degree to customize their education in a way that fits their needs and educational goals, and this is arguably what makes higher education so specialized from state to state, or even from country to country. This is part of the exploration that students take on post-high school in order to determine which institution and program best fits their needs and goals. The relevancy of this is that each state is asking their programs, and in this case teacher licensure programs, to achieve certain standards or work towards reaching a certain goal that the field of education needs. It is the responsibility of the institution to implement initiatives and programs that align with the state's agenda, but also continue to align with the university's mission. For example, in this state of Massachusetts the state is asking Salem State University to increase the number of students of color in the teacher licensure program, and therefore to increase the number of teachers of color in the workforce. Institutions across the state have hundreds of students apply to their respective schools of education with the aspirations of becoming a classroom teacher, and each institution holds a large responsibility in preparing future teachers to enter the workforce equipped with the knowledge, skill, and field experience that prepares them to teach to the strengths of each student.

It's widely known that many of these applicants to schools of education will be White, and likely to be female based on the historical trends of the teacher workforce, and the present demographics upholds this notion, as well. These two factors of the teacher workforce are not a secret, and it is likely that if any person were to reflect on their own experiences as a student, the majority of people can attest to being taught by White, female teachers and professors during their schooling. While this should not be perceived negatively or discount the knowledge and expertise of these professionals, it does simply generate the question of *why? Why do students of color not want to become teachers?* Only about 20% of the workforce is represented by teachers of color, while the population of students of color is just over 50% across the United States (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; McFarland et al., 2018). The focus on diversifying teacher workforce is not new, and it has been researched for decades to examine the factors that serve as barriers for students of color, and furthermore to research the general question of *why do students of color not want to become teachers, or feel unable to do so?* Oakley, Stowell, & Logan (2009) in Carter Andrews et al., (2019) discuss how the workforce post *Brown* (1954) changed vastly as, "...38,000 African American teachers in southern and border states lost their jobs within 10 years of the decisions," (p.7) contributing to the substantial shift in the population of White teachers that then flooded the field.

Gordan (1994) argues that this continued trend of Whiteness in education can be partly attributed to more competitive salary in other careers, prestige, and social mobility along with the notion that students of color don't have the same access and success in teacher education as others in the field. Given the notion that culture not only belongs in the classroom, but that it is advantageous to the learning of students of color, it's

necessary to back pedal to the root of why the majority of teachers entering the field are White. In addition to this, if there is a need for the race of teacher and students to be in alignment, how can this alignment occur if the demographics of teachers entering the field are majority White? The statistics of the teacher population do not align with the statistics of the student population making it challenging for that alignment to even be present in the field. Gordan (1994) attempts to use the experience of teachers of color to categorize the reasons for this based on the experiences of 140 teachers of color in this study. The theme of responses from within Gordan (1994) of the 140 teachers of color in Cincinnati, Ohio; Seattle, Washington; and Long Beach, California were generated from the question *why do you think students of color are not going into teacher?* Among seventeen themes emerged from this question, and some of the most prominent themes of responses were lack of adequate preparation to 'keep up,' teachers not being prepared for diversity, lack of support in college, lack of academic encouragement, absence of role models, racism, lack of respect from students, and low pay. The factors previously mentioned essentially served as barriers for these people of color to within their programs, and in their place of work. It is a two-fold responsibility that lies upon higher education teacher licensure programs and school districts to first be aware of these experiences, and second to actively create initiatives and policy that support teachers of color in removing the barriers that have been placed in front of them. Similar findings based on experiences of teachers of color were also found in the research of Carter Andrews et al. (2019) and Kohli (2019).

Fast forward twenty five years to the work of Carter Andrews et al. (2019), the remaining agenda of diversifying the teaching workforce remains similarly to how the

same agenda to close the achievement gap remains. This research urges stakeholders, policy makers, and leaders in higher education to examine three main narratives that have contributed to the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce in U.S. schools. The effects of historical legislation and policy on teachers of color, the toxic environment imposing negative implications on recruitment and retention of students of color in teacher licensure programs, and lack of pedagogy of teachers of color within K-12 were examined. Legislation and policy pre and post *Brown* have impacted the workforce significantly, and it is the responsibility of federal, state, and local policy makers to shift their support of anti-Black practices to the support of anti-oppressive practice that shed light on injustice from American history to present times. Another explanation of this is the notion that students of color in teacher licensure programs face factors that essentially push them out, as these factors are a barrier. Barriers such as passing required state exams for licensure are a financial burden, but also that these standardized tests are inherently more challenging for those who are not White to pass them (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Similarly to Gordan (1994), students of color are still facing racism, linguicism, lack of support, and this assumption that the ‘playing field’ is even. The playing field is not even. Additionally, challenges with retention of students of color in preservice programs have been attributed to feeling disrespected, de-professionalized, and the need to ‘prove’ themselves to parents in their in-service experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). This repeated racist and toxic climate within teacher licensure programs and school districts reported by teachers of color speaks loudly as to what kind of changes are needed.

Kohli (2019) affirms the notion some teacher education programs have poorly prepared students of color. Based on this research, toxic and racist school climates are

one of the harsh and relevant realities that school districts have, and this can be partly attributed to the racialized structures of schools that exist. In addition to repeated racist climates, the curriculum itself tends to be blind to experiences and perspectives of teachers of color, and this furthermore extends to the notion that teachers of color are up against another barrier that has been placed in front of them pushing them out of education. It is a complex and deeply rooted issue of racism that exists within school systems, curriculum, standardized testing, and the education system in general. Within this study teachers of color shared examples from their experiences in their teacher program when they, “felt (a) the pedagogy of their classes did not reflect their vision of education, (b) the racial climate was emotionally debilitating, and (c) the racial climate of their field placement, and a lack of support to navigate it, pushed them out of their program” (Kohli, p.43). From this research it is known that students of color are experiencing these push-out factors firsthand, and again, it remains the responsibility of institutions to create specific initiatives and policy to keep students of color in teacher licensure programs.

To connect theory to practice, Salem State University is taking several initiatives that align with this mission of diversifying the teacher workforce through methods of recruitment and retention of students of color. This initiative is called Educator Scholars of Color Program, which is a four-fold initiative that focuses on increasing the number of future teachers of color in the field of elementary and secondary education, as research suggests that this is impactful on student success in the early and elementary grade levels. The first component is to provide scholarship aid to assist in removing the expense barrier within the program and the second is access to one-on-one advising and

mentoring support for academic and professional needs or goals as often as needed. Both are supported in the research that has shown finances and lack of support to be central barriers impeding the ability of students of color to either stay in their program or in the field as a teacher. There is also a community of learning aspect that allows students to meet to talk about common problems/challenges, play games together, have fun, and offer advice where it is needed. The final component focuses solely on student of color recruitment, where a faculty member from SSU goes out into the field to discuss our teacher licensure program and this program for students of color with the goal to spread knowledge of our program. Many of the elements of this initiative can serve as impactful ways to *keep* students of color in the teacher licensure program while removing known and researched barriers students of color in education may face.

Given these tumultuous barriers for students of color in teacher licensure programs, the overarching question formulated is *what changes need to be made within the workforce and higher education?* Carter Andrews et al. (2019) suggests to include current teachers of color in the recruitment process of new hires, place more focus on anti-oppression courses in licensure programs, examine policies that interfere with a diverse workforce, give opportunity for teachers to collaborate through creating communities, and to recognize historically marginalized teachers. In addition to these suggestions, the implementation of CRT must be intentional across all individuals at the higher education level, including students and staff, in order to continue the implementation of a critical sociopolitical consciousness. Carter Andrews et al. (2019) emphasizes the need for CRT elements to be understood and implemented throughout teacher preparation programs from the student and staff perspective in a consistent and

intentional manner to ensure racial competency knowledge is taught to students within the program. If the faculty and staff are not knowledgeable in racial competency, it is then more challenging for the students to then have a robust knowledge of race and culture as both serve as elements of being culturally responsive.

Furthermore, the absence of social justice-oriented teacher's education program that was reported in Kohli (2019) suggests justice and equity is not at the center of all teacher preparation programs is alarming in a sense. Social justice frameworks serve as a vital component in the education world to encourage sociopolitical awareness, and also to society as a whole to challenge the injustices that surround us. Teaching is viewed as an opportunity to serve as an agent in social change, and it's important to note that several teachers in this study reported that they attended justice-oriented programs that positively impacted their teaching practice. A teacher also reported that her program focused heavily on culturally responsive teaching (Kohli, 2019).

To connect theory to practice again, showcasing a second initiative that SSU has taken on is a group called Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Group. The major goals of this group are to create a strategic plan that will outline how the School of Education will meet the goals of students of color to ensure a high level of accountability for the goals they seek to meet, and also to increase racial/cultural competence through Professional Learning Committee's. PLC's ¹⁴ with the central goal to increase racial and cultural competence involve faculty and staff learning how to better teach students of color in the program, and also how to better teach to students in the program who will teach students of color in the future, so it addresses two parts. Racial competence serves as one of the most important factors of culturally responsive teaching, and it is part of the

¹⁴ PLC is an acronym for Profession Learning Committee.

responsibility of faculty and staff in higher education to educate future teachers through this lens of racial competence. Faculty and staff through prior educational experience, prior research, or professional development must also to be racially competent, as all teachers at every level of education should utilize the practice of CRT. Carter Andrews et al. (2019) adds that professional development should also be centered around learning pedagogies of teachers of color, which can serve as a way for teachers to sustain their student's culture. Kohli (2019) paraphrases Gist (2014) noting that professional development can be useful in combination with the efforts by the institution to, "reduce racism, facilitate positive racial climates, and be culturally responsive to teachers of Color" (p. 47).

Implications

For the current and future educators, one of the goals of this research was to provide a better understanding of culturally responsive teachers and the role CRT can serve in providing equitable education for the growingly diverse population of students we are seeing in America. Through having a space where CRT is clearly defined with examples in practice, it is the hope that educators will be more aware of the principles underlying CRT and the impact they may have on students of color. The change in student demographics demonstrated the need for a teaching practice and curriculum to be alignment with students' cultural identities (Kieran & Anderson, 2018; Brown, 2007). This can aid in providing a more unified understanding of what CRT aims to provide for all students, and furthermore create a more positive connotation associated with cultural elements in providing education that affirms student identities in a non-stereotypical way. One of the purposes of providing a more unified understanding of CRT is so that the

implementation of CRT can remain meaningful, purposeful, and above all, accurate. CRT will look different for different classroom, as it adds to the notion that student-centered learning is individualized and not to be viewed as one-size-fits all approach. We are at a point in history where culture and racial differences cannot be ignored in schools, and it is vitally important that cultural considerations are at the forefront of lesson and activity planning in order to move towards equitable education. The goal of equitable education is individual to each student, so it is therefore necessary for students to receive an education that aligns with the cultural norms outside the classroom in order for the implementation of CRT to have a meaningful impact.

It is secondarily important to recognize the value of culture and the asset-based ideology that should be associated with it. To begin understanding culture as an asset to student profiles, it is recommended for teachers at all levels of education to take time for self-reflection to reflect on what makes up your own cultural background in order to be aware of what culture means to you, and then to extend this lens to students' cultural backgrounds (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Samuels, 2018). This kind of self-reflection work allows teachers to better understand themselves, and to also be able to better understand what makes each student exactly who they are. Additionally, the classroom should be as authentic to cultural perspectives and therefore be reflective of the true lived experiences of students outside of the classroom consistently, while not resorting to using stereotypical views of those cultural groups (Vavrus, 2008). Reflection is encouraged as a part of unpacking pre-conceived notions and biases, and for limiting the biases teachers hold from being projecting or passed on to our classrooms. Self-reflection allows for individuals to identify biases, have a better understanding of how their own experiences

impact attitudes, and then design more meaningful instruction that support students of color (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kieran & Anderson, 2018). Additionally, reflection allows teachers to extend their understanding of their own beliefs and attitudes in affirming the notion that students culture is positive, advantageous, or as an asset (Kieran & Anderson, 2018). Being aware and knowledgeable of students' backgrounds allows teachers to design instruction that aligns with students' strengths, skills, and culture giving students an authentic education (Kieran & Anderson, 2018). This is not something that can be 'achieved' in one lesson, but rather to be viewed as a practice or approach to teaching that is consistent within the pedagogical choices made daily. Educators often view their classrooms as a second home for students, and with the use of culturally responsive pedagogy, classrooms can be truly reflective of this.

For the individuals involved in curriculum decisions, policy making, and funding or budget discussion at all levels of education, decisions should be made with consideration to a culturally responsive teaching practice. As previously mentioned, culturally responsive teaching is the epitome of student-centered teaching, and using research within the field can aid in creating strong governing policy and law that are effective for student success. Furthermore, using the research on the achievement gap, culturally responsive teaching, and the pedagogy CRT rests on would allow policy makers and curriculum decisions to be made with culture at the forefront. Vavrus (2008) outlines the notion that, "schools can use multicultural frames of reference to help determine policies and practices" (p. 50). With this being said, every decision that impacts students' needs to be made through a lens that applies to each group of students. The combination of policy, law, and curriculum have great potential to make a

meaningful difference regarding what is implemented in districts and how it is taught to students. The last attempt at making a federally unified law for all states to follow was NCLB, and it's imperative that officials at the local, state, and federal levels use the lessons learned from NCLB in combination with the wealth of research to create a more realistic and strategic plan to provide the equitable education our students deserve. States like Massachusetts have already begun providing meaningful content supporting the use of CRT in schools publicly on the DESE website, which is a step taken at the state-level that moves us in a positive direction. Starting at the local and state level to increase knowledge and awareness of CRT is needed before entering the discussion of unified implementation. This can serve as a method in preventing an entire nation from an overwhelming agenda that is bartered by budgets, funding, and a political divide that collectively make change challenging. Our students cannot afford another failed attempt like NCLB, and by creating a more individualized agenda for each state and local district, we can move towards change.

For the higher education community, it is widely known that students apply to teacher preparation programs to fulfill their aspirations of being teachers. While some may put more effort into searching for a program that aligns with their educational goals and needs, the pedagogy should remain universal within the state in preparing pre-service teachers for the workforce. There are several recommendations that will be proposed for the higher education community. The first is to either build programs or restructure programs with using culturally responsive pedagogy at its' foundation. Culturally responsive pedagogy will shape future teachers to teach through a lens and practice that authentically aligns with the diverse student population, opposed to being an arm's length

distance away. Without this pedagogy at its' foundation, programs remain stagnant in the past where the focus has been teaching through a lens that has only applied to those who are White. Furthermore, using culturally responsive pedagogy would no longer allow us to ignore or turn a blind-eye to the lived experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. It would allow teachers to prepare inclusive means of instruction and lessons that align with our student's culture and lives, while also advocating for increased representation throughout the curriculum that has historically left out people of color.

The second is that through building or restructuring current programs on this pedagogy, teacher licensure programs should include elements that increase racial and cultural competency in combination with a social-justice oriented curriculum, as both can be central elements for staff and students that are striving to be more culturally responsive (Kohli, 2019; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Staff and faculty must be educated on race and culture for the transfer of knowledge to accurately be taught to students within the program. Without racial and cultural competency, teachers may not be fully prepared to teach to every student's strength. Increasing racial competency is a foundational component of culturally responsive teaching, and for those students who did not receive this as a part of their education growing up, it's especially necessary to begin building this awareness throughout their time in a teacher licensure program. These programs are what shape future teachers' philosophy, practice, and beliefs, so it is crucial in striving for equitable education that the policy, curriculum, and staff evaluate who their program is serving best, the policy and curriculum in place that allows this, and what they can do to use culturally responsive pedagogy at the base of all instruction to align with providing culturally responsive education.

The third is the recommendation to analyze current demographics of licensure programs and engage in initiatives that diversify the program to serve as a means of diversifying the teacher workforce. Given the known barriers students of color face in teacher preparation programs, it is important to carefully design initiatives and programs that would allow students of color to stay in the program, and not be pushed out by factors that have been researched (Kohli, 2019). It is one step to diversify a program, however it is a more important step to have a proactive system in place that allows students of color to equally access the program. Recruitment and retention can serve as the two focuses for diversifying a program, and furthermore to implement programs and policy that will allow students of color to flourish.

With increased understanding of CRT's student-centered practice of teaching, more and more educators will be able to see the value in a practice that aligns with student's culture. With this alignment of culture and school, students have an opportunity to connect with the material more meaningfully, while showcasing that their strengths, abilities, and culture serve them advantageously in a school setting. Engaging in self-reflection activities will allow teachers to gain a better understanding of their own cultural background, and therefore be able to extend an understanding for the cultural parts of each student. It is not a simple task to do, however when the long-term goal is to provide equitable education a practice like CRT may be the vehicle for students of color to reach their full potential. Higher education can play a significant role in ensuring that pre-service teachers engage with a culturally responsive practice by instilling those same principle in their own teacher licensure program. The knowledge and skills gained during pre-service are essential and will influence the pedagogical choices teachers make,

therefore it's necessary to build programs using a culturally responsive pedagogy to support the notion that students at all levels of education deserve equitable education, and that every student is deserving of achieving a high standard of academic success. With the correct balance of education and resources made available to current and future teachers in both teacher preparation programs and the field, a culturally responsive teaching practice can provide equitable education that aligns and honors cultural identities while simultaneously giving each student the kind of education that highlights the brilliant parts of themselves that already exist.

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