Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy
and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships

Kisha Frye

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Jodie L. Brinkmann, Chair
Carol S. Cash
Marceline R. Catlett
Ted S. Price

February 13, 2024

Keywords: cultural competency, critical consciousness, culturally responsive pedagogy,
culturally responsive teaching, Standards of Learning (SOL)
Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships

Kisha Frye

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom.

This qualitative study design, conducted in an urban public-school division in central Virginia, employed a teacher interview protocol questionnaire featuring open-ended questions. The primary objective was to investigate how middle school teachers utilize and incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to build and maintain positive relationships with students, families, and peers.

The resulting findings indicated teachers established cultural awareness and diversity to build and maintain relationships, communicated effectively through conferencing and discussions with their students, and communicated effectively through emails and in-person with their students’ families. Teachers used multiple communication strategies for parent involvement, such as phone calls, text messages, emails, conferences, and social media. Students sharing life experiences during discussion helped them understand the material and establish classroom culture and diversity. Thus, implications indicated school divisions and building administrators should continually participate in cultural competence training, provide teachers
with professional development to establish regular and consistent communication channels with students' families to build positive relationships, provide teachers with professional development to implement culturally responsive pedagogy, provide time for teachers to incorporate open-ended questions and alternative perspectives into lessons to stimulate critical thinking, and building-level administrators should foster a school culture that embraces diverse values by establishing and consistently reinforcing clear expectations of respect for all students and adults.
Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships

Kisha Frye

General Audience Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. The synthesis of the literature review and the results of this study could provide information that would assist middle school teachers not only with the ability to build relationships with their students and their families and positive peer relationships but also improve cultural knowledge to increase and enhance academic achievement and decrease discipline concerns.

A qualitative study design was used in one urban public-school division in the central region of Virginia, which incorporated a teacher interview protocol questionnaire with open-ended questions. The researcher sought to examine: How do middle school teachers utilize and incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to build and maintain positive relationships with students, families, and peers? An analysis of the responses to the interview questionnaire from the middle school teachers revealed strategies used consistently and inconsistently throughout the sample. From the findings, implications for practices and recommendations for future studies were supplied.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful and loving family. First, to my husband, Charlie Frye, Jr, for his unwavering support, patience, and love shown to me throughout this process. The motivation and perseverance he provided to me were faithful to our vows of “for better, for worse.” Second to my three heartbeats, TâNesha Keondra, Charlie Lee, III, and Kamron Lamar. You all are my reasons for persevering, showing that no matter what life throws your way, you can achieve anything you set your mind to and make all things possible. My life has never been easy, and you all know that I felt like anything I wanted, I had to fight to make happen. However, I wanted you all to know that there is nothing worth having that you cannot work hard enough to have and secure as your own. I want you all to know that the world is yours, and your goals are yours to achieve. You never let anything, or anyone block your vision.

I also dedicate this study to Mama and Daddy, who were always there for me whenever I needed them. As an infant, they protected me until the day they both closed their eyes. They always instilled honor, hard work, and family as my priority. They never turned their back on me, and for them, I am forever grateful. May they continue to be my Guardian Angels.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my students’ families for entrusting me with your child’s education over the many years. Most importantly, students, thank you for inspiring me to have the ability to grow as an educator over the years through the many diverse cultures and learning from you. As the years continue, I look forward to growing, learning, and educating as one team!
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to give God all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise for the blessings he has done in my life. Without faith the size of a mustard seed, I would not be where I am, nor would I be the person I am today. “I am who I am today because God used my mistakes. He worked them for my good like no one else ever could. It all was necessary!” (Fantasia, 2016). Since I was a young child at my Dad’s church, I always had the little kids around me, trying to teach them different information, right from wrong, and take them for treats to the store nearby. As a young teen, I wanted to have my own daycare to work with and instruct children but ended up having my daughter, and that changed my life, thought process, and routine. When I officially started my career, I began working in customer service at Capital One. After five years, I came home and finally started my in-home daycare. Three years later, I started working in education and have been going strong since then. I believe all children have the potential to learn; some may learn differently than others, but all children can learn.

I want to express my gratitude to my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Jodie L. Brinkmann. You are one formidable force to be reckoned with, but you never give up when you see someone with potential, and I am grateful. You made me use my true intellect when I felt unable or like I was overdoing it but actually was not giving my all. You helped to pull pieces out of me that I did not realize were there. Your determination, coupled with mine, was an actual mixture that I had never experienced before, but it made me move to another level. For the laughs, the tears, the push, and the exceptional feedback, I want to say, “Thank you!”

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Carol Cash, Dr. Ted Price, Dr. Marceline Catlett, and Dr. M. David Alexander. Each of you assisted me on my doctoral journey with
excellent feedback and valuable guidance. Because of each of your doctoral expertise, I have become a brighter researcher. I appreciate your time, continuous guidance, and enduring support.

My friends and colleagues Taheshia Watson, Pamela Diggs, Dr. Jennifer Fleming, Dr. Nina Huff, Dr. Taneshia Rachal, Dr. Andrea Bumbrey, Lori Bridi, Dr. Rickie Hopkins, Dr. Kecia Lipscomb, Delia Clayton-Fulcher, and Felicia Burkhalter each have helped to inspire me in multiple ways that you may not have realized, but I will forever be grateful.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................................... ii

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT .......................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION .................................................................................................................................. v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Study Overview ............................................................................................................................. 1

Report of Data Trends ................................................................................................................... 1

National Data Trends .................................................................................................................... 5

Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................................. 8

Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................................... 10

Research Question ....................................................................................................................... 12

Overview of Study ....................................................................................................................... 12

Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................................ 12

Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................................... 15

Limitations and Delimitations ...................................................................................................... 16

Overview of the Dissertation ...................................................................................................... 17

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature .......................................................................................... 19

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 19

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria .................................................................................................. 20

Culturally Responsive Teaching .................................................................................................. 20

Effective Culturally Responsive Teaching .................................................................................... 23
History of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy ................................................................. 29
Implementation and Strategies ................................................................................... 32
Preparing Teachers to be Culturally Responsive ...................................................... 36
Summary and Significance of Literature Review ....................................................... 44

Chapter 3: Methodology ............................................................................................. 46
Purpose of Study ............................................................................................................ 46
Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 46
Research Design: Methodology ................................................................................... 47
Selection of Setting and Participants ........................................................................... 48
Data Collection Procedures ....................................................................................... 49
Instrument Design ........................................................................................................ 50
Instrument Validation (and Reliability) ..................................................................... 50
Interview Protocol ........................................................................................................ 54
Confidentiality and Ethical Treatment of the Data ..................................................... 54
Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 54
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 4: Results ....................................................................................................... 58
Participant Information ............................................................................................... 59
Results ........................................................................................................................... 60
Research Question ......................................................................................................... 60
How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens? 61
What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students? .......... 64
What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families?
.......................................................................................................................................................... 66

How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy?.............................................. 69

How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are? ................................. 72

How do you invite and involve families in your classroom?...................................................... 74

How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families?
.......................................................................................................................................................... 76

In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity?........... 78

How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion?
.......................................................................................................................................................... 80

In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives?... 83

How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected? ............................... 85

How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values? ....... 88

Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 90

Chapter 5: Findings, Implications, and Future Research........................................................... 93

Finding 1 ........................................................................................................................................... 93

Finding 2 ........................................................................................................................................... 94

Finding 3 ........................................................................................................................................... 96

Finding 4 ........................................................................................................................................... 97

Finding 5 ........................................................................................................................................... 99

Summary of Findings ....................................................................................................................... 100

Implications for Practice ................................................................................................................... 101

Implication 1 ................................................................................................................................. 101
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2022 Grade 8
          Reading Data................................................................. 5

Figure 2  National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2022 Grade 8
          Mathematics Data............................................................. 7

Figure 3  National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2022 Grade 8
          Science Data................................................................. 8

Figure 4  Domain II: Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice......... 13
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching ............................... 32
Table 2  Design of Culturally Responsive Teaching Activities .................. 39
Table 3  Interview Questions for Building Positive Relationships through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy ......................................................... 53
Table 4  Participant Information with Years of Experience ...................... 60
Table 5  How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens? ................................................................. 61
Table 6  What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students? ....................................................................................... 64
Table 7  What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families? ................................................................. 67
Table 8  How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy? .................................................................................................................. 69
Table 9  How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are? ..................................................................................................... 72
Table 10 How do you invite and involve families in your classroom? ....... 74
Table 11 How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families? ................................................................. 76
Table 12 In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity? .................................................................................... 79
Table 13 How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion? ................................................................. 81
Table 14 In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives? ................................................................. 83
Table 15 How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected? ..................................................................................................... 86
Table 16 How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values? ................................................................. 88
Chapter 1: Introduction

Study Overview

Research indicates that some teachers set low expectations for students of color and low socioeconomic status (Lynch, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022). This study focused on building culturally competent pedagogy and practice for positive student, family, and peer relationships. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom.

Report of Data Trends

The purpose of reporting data trends in subjects like English, mathematics, and science is to understand how well students are performing in these areas. By analyzing trends, educators and school administrators can identify areas of strength and areas that may need improvement. This data-driven approach helps in making informed decisions about teaching strategies, curriculum design, and overall school policies.

When incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, the goal is to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that considers the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. Building positive relationships with students is crucial for effective teaching and learning.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in partnership with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), is an assessment given to students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in core academic subject areas such as English, mathematics, science, and history,
music and visual arts, and technological and engineering literacy areas in order to determine what the students understand, the capacity to use their skills, and knowledge. The standard evaluation is administered nationwide and within the United States, and results are available for 27 urban districts. The NAEP report data are available by grades 4, 8, and 12 through average scores, student group scores, and achievement-level results (About: NAEP, 2022). The data from NAEP will reflect eighth grade achievement as this is a middle school-level review reviewing reading, mathematics, and science.

**Analyzing the State Data Trends.** NAEP provided reporting data in grades 4, 8, and 12 of the participating states and districts. Virginia showed average scores, student group scores, and achievement-level results (NCES, 2022). The data reflected eighth grade, as this is a middle school-level review of reading, mathematics, and science. Virginia's overall reading average score had no significant change between 2022 and 2019. According to the NAEP State Results Overview Report, when comparing Virginia’s state achievement level against the national achievement level in reading, this percentage also did not significantly differ. The percentage of eighth-grade students who were at or above proficient in Virginia was 27%; the rate of those who performed at the primary level was 38%; those who performed below basic were 31%; and those who performed at the advanced group were 4% of the students in the districts and divisions in Virginia who participated (NCES, 2022). *The Nation’s Report Card* showed that Black students, on average, performed 25 points lower than White students in reading. Also, Hispanic students performed 21 points lower than White students in reading. These areas of performance gaps have not seen any change (NCES, 2022). According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the average score of all students who took a reading Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment fell within the 66% pass rate during the 2020 – 2021 school year (VDOE, 2022).
NAEP’s *State Results Overview Report*, when comparing states and districts who participated with the national achievement average, showed 51 states decreased in mathematics performance between 2022 and 2019. Virginia was a state that had a significant decrease by 8 points from an average score of 287 in 2019 to an average score of 279 in 2022. In Virginia, the ratio at or above proficiency was 22%; the rate of those who performed at the primary level was 34%; those who performed below basic were 35%; and those who fell in the advanced level range were 9% of the students in the districts and divisions in Virginia who participated (NCES, 2022). In mathematics, *The Nation’s Report Card* showed that Black students, on average, perform 31 points lower than White students. Also, Hispanic students are performing 23 points lower than White students. These areas of performance gaps have not seen any change (NCES, 2022). According to VDOE, the average score of all students who took a mathematics SOL average score fell within the 66% pass rate during the 2020 – 2021 school year (VDOE, 2022).

NAEP provided the Science *State Results Overview Report* from 2015 directly on 31 states and districts. Some other states and districts participated; however, they have yet to make a significant change from the 2009 scores. According to NCES on the science assessment, Virginia is a state that showed no significant difference between 2009 and 2015. The percentage of eighth-grade students who were at or above proficient in Virginia was 37%; the rate of those who performed at the basic level was 34%; those who performed below basic were 26%; and those who achieved at the advanced group were 2% of the students in the districts and divisions in Virginia who participated (NCES, 2022). According to *The Nation’s Report Card* from 2015, Black students, on average, performed 31 points lower than White students in science. Also, Hispanic students performed 23 points lower than White students in science. These performance gaps have not changed since 2000 (NCES, 2022). According to the VDOE, all students in the
state of Virginia’s average score in science totaled a 65% pass rate during the 2020 – 2021 school year (VDOE, 2022).

In summary, reporting and analyzing data trends in various subjects allow educators to tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a tool that helps build positive relationships by recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds of students, ultimately contributing to increased effectiveness in improving academic scores.

Analyzing State Discipline. According to the VDOE State Report Card, the 2020 – 2021 totaled number of offenses equaled 11,458. The VDOE State Report Card for 2020 – 2021 subgroups and percentages, categorized the short-term suspensions: American Indian, 0.3%; Asian, 0.9%; Black, 26.1%; Hispanic, 10.3%; Native Hawaiian, 0.1%; White, 54.2%; and Multiple Races, 8%. The VDOE State Report Card for 2020 – 2021 subgroups and percentages, classified the long-term suspensions: American Indian, 0.8%; Asian, 1.6%; Black, 21.7%; Hispanic, 13.2%; Native Hawaiian, 0%; White, 55.8%; and Multiple Races, 7%. According to VDOE, all expulsions in 2020 – 2021 were within two subgroups; Hispanic, 40%; and White, 60% (VDOE, 2022). Therefore, the discipline data does not directly have an effect on the assessment data scores based on subgroups. When evaluating discipline data, short-term suspension projections showed higher for Black students in which Black and White students were a majority. Long-term suspension data showed that Black and White students were well exemplified, but Hispanic students’ data showed they were not far from the other ethnicities. However, when examining expulsions, the only ethnicities with data shown were Hispanic and White students.
National Data Trends

According to the NAEP *National Results Overview Report*, scores in reading in grade-eight students performing at or above the proficient level included American Indian/Alaskan Native (18%), Asian (56%), Asian/Pacific Islander (55%), Black (16%), Hispanic (21%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (25%), two or more races (35%), and White (38%) (*About: NAEP, 2022*). The overall reading scores were three points lower in 2022, with the average of 260, than in 2019, with the average of 263. In addition, overall Black students performed the lowest in all categories for reading. NAEP also provides data-based percentages of those who performed basic, below basic, and in the advanced range for reading. The reading achievement-level breakdown is available in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2022 Grade 8 Reading Data*
In the reading category, *The Nation’s Report Card* shows that Black students perform at an average score of 24 points lower than White students. Furthermore, the performance gap for the Black subgroup has not significantly improved (*About: NAEP, 2022*). Overall, the Black subgroup performs at a high rate below basic in reading and at the lowest rate at an advanced level (*About: NAEP, 2022*).

According to the NAEP *National Results Overview Report*, scores in mathematics in grade-eight students performing at or above the proficient level included American Indian/Alaskan Native students (13%), Asian (58%), Asian/Pacific Islander (56%), Black (9%), Hispanic (14%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (17%), two or more races (28%), and White 35 (NCES, 2022). Overall Black students performed the lowest in all categories for mathematics. NAEP’s overall mathematics scores were eight points lower in 2022, by an average of 274, than in 2019, by an average of 282. However, the average score is 12 points higher than that of the first assessment in 1990. Additionally, NAEP provides data-based percentages of those who performed basic, below basic, and in the advanced range in mathematics. The mathematics achievement-level breakdown is available in Figure 2.
The Nation’s Report Card shows that Black students performed at an average score of 32 points lower than White students in mathematics. Furthermore, the performance gap for the Black subgroup has not significantly improved (NCES, 2022). Overall, the Black subgroup performs at a high rate below basic in mathematics and the lowest rate at an advanced level (NCES, 2022).

According to NAEP, the overall science score of 154 in 2019 was similar to 2015. The NAEP data reported on the National Results Overview Report, the percentage of eighth-grade students performing at or above the proficient level included White students (43%), Black (13%), Hispanic (20%), Asian/Pacific Islander (45%), Asian (46%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (20%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (19%), and two or more races (36%) (NCES, 2022). Overall Black students performed the lowest in all categories for science.

Furthermore, NAEP provides data-based percentages of those who performed basic, below basic,
and in the advanced range in science. The science achievement-level breakdown is available in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2022 Grade 8 Science Data*

According to *The Nation’s Report Card*, Black students perform at an average score of 34 points lower than White students in science. The performance gap for the Black subgroup has not significantly improved (NCES, 2022).

**Statement of the Problem**

This study was designed to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. For almost three decades, research has shown that nearly half of the educators in public school systems underrated the value of academic success for students of color and low socioeconomic status by not respecting students of color and low socioeconomic status education.
solely on these factors and setting the rigor low (Lehmann, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022). It has been conveyed that teachers lack skills in identifying students’ cultural differences and view them as barriers rather than assets to learning (Lehmann, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022). The educational culture students engage in within their school environment represents a different cultural experience than many students have at home or in their communities. When the educational experience is presented at school, there are times when the educational experience is represented stereotypically (Lynch, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022). As a result, the stereotypical experience has an impact on a students’ classroom experience, academic performance, and overall educational well-being (Lynch, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022).

According to Lynch (2016), due to the lack of wealth within the nation’s public schools, which provide positive student outcomes, an instructional theory is a move toward a pedagogy that focuses on an academically enriching environment for all students of all cultures and ethnicities. However, before an educator can learn about their diverse students’ cultural backgrounds, they should thoroughly investigate their heritage, upbringing, and potential cultural and racial biases (Lehmann, 2016; Lynch, 2016). As educators become more culturally responsive, they can reflect on the fears, stereotypes, and biases they once held onto as individuals based on their culture (Lynch, 2016; Will & Najarro, 2022). In addition, by becoming reflective educators and learning about others’ cultures, an individual willingly begins to investigate and appreciate the traditions and values of the learned cultures (Lynch, 2016).

When educating students, it is essential to acquire cultural competency (Lehmann, 2016). According to Lehmann (2016), cultural competence requires first an understanding as educational leaders, where they come to school with a sense of knowing who they are. Unless they reflect on their identity and how their reflection creates a lens through which they view the
world, they will not be able to thoroughly honor the uniqueness of the students and faculty whom they serve. Leaders who display cultural competence strive hard to be aware of the needs of their school community, listen, and be responsive to all stakeholders so they feel their cultural identities are known and appreciated (Lehmann, 2016; Lynch, 2016). As Dr. Martin Luther King (1967) stated, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that” (pp. 62-63). Lehmann (2016) notes that this quote is truly the heart of cultural competence.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. The Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency provided four domains that require continuous reflection, attention, and practice over time (VDOE, 2022). However, the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency’s purpose of Domain II: culturally competent pedagogy and practice and focuses on building relationships with students, families, and peers (VDOE, 2022). In this domain, educators look forward to recognizing the relevance of culture and adapting professional practices to meet the needs of students from all backgrounds (VDOE, 2022).

Domain II has five micro-competencies, which include: “establish a classroom and school culture in which all dimensions of diversity are respected and valued; provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection and interpersonal interactions with diverse peers, support the development of self-regulation strategies, empathy, and civil discourse; build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and
maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting; communicate with students, staff, families, and the community in linguistically and culturally responsive ways; and build student capacity to think critically and consider alternative perspectives” (VDOE, 2022).

The micro-competency from Domain II, which is the main principle focus of this study, is to “build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting” (VDOE, 2022). Culturally competent pedagogy and practice show respect and value exhibited and understood by students when providing all students with a good start within the classroom and school (VDOE, 2022). Also, developing people who can apply future skills of growth opportunities and an ability to utilize self-regulation strategies is created through culturally competent pedagogy. Lastly, it shapes students into critical thinkers with the strategy to build and grow to see different perspectives (VDOE, 2022).

In addition, if the implementation of Domain II’s micro-competencies of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency is implemented, the culturally responsive pedagogy positively impacts all students’ education, learning environment, and communities (VDOE, 2022). Research shows that when providing all students with a good start within the classroom and school, respect and value are exhibited and understood by students. Lastly, culturally competent pedagogy and practice shape students into critical thinkers with strategies and different worldly perspectives (VDOE, 2022). In addition, an intended outcome for educators will be to recognize the relevance of culture and adapt professional practices to meet the needs of students from all backgrounds (VDOE, 2022).
Research Question

This study was designed to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilized to build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The question that will guide this research study is as follows:

1. How do middle school teachers incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to enhance the learning experience, foster positive relationships with students, engage with families, and collaborate effectively with peers?

Overview of the Study

This study included interviews with middle school teachers regarding their culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies. The teacher interview protocol questionnaire was completed, which contained open-ended questions on building positive relationships. During the interviews, teachers answered a series of questions with real-life experiences. The research site consisted of seven teachers from a middle school within an urban public-school division in the central region of Virginia. The criteria for participation were one or more years of teaching experience in general education, special education, exploratory, etc. Finally, the participants could donate a file or hard copy of an artifact that solidified their culturally responsive strategies or lesson plans.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework was created to illustrate the predominant steps for implementing culturally competent training, followed by culturally responsive teaching practices and the inclusiveness of culturally responsive pedagogical instruction (VDOE, 2022). Research
stated that when applied, the conceptual framework showed the expected outcome of equitable classroom learning occurs when training is completed and adequately followed (VDOE, 2022). The students learn at a higher, more rigorous level, the learning environment is inclusive, and more student-teacher relationships are established when practical cultural competency training is completed (Escudero, 2019, p. 108). The visual representation in this study is shown below in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Domain II: Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice*

(VDOE, 2022, The Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency)

This conceptual framework starts with completing the cultural competency training. In 2021, Virginia policymakers established a new requirement to support culturally competent educators within the Commonwealth of Virginia (VDOE, 2022). The requirement issues guidance that establishes minimum standards for the cultural competency training that each school board must require of its licensed employees, which includes fully or provisionally
licensed teachers, principals, superintendents, school counselors, and other licensed staff, at once every two years (VDOE, 2022).

Culturally responsive teaching uses strong knowledge regarding cultural diversity through understanding different racial and ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, and contributions to society and encompasses that portion of knowledge into their culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Will & Najarro, 2022). Additionally, teachers include multiple perspectives in their instruction and ensure classroom images reflect culturally relevant curricula. As teachers begin to understand diverse communication styles, modify classroom interactions accordingly, and show appreciation and respect culturally relevant teaching is being modeled. Finally, to be effective in culturally responsive teaching, teachers can connect their students’ prior knowledge and cultural experience in everyday learning (Gay, 2000; Will & Najarro, 2022).

Culturally responsive pedagogy functions from three fundamental pillars: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness, which work together to achieve success (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1995a). Teachers who set high academic standards cultivate the minds of their students by being culturally relevant teachers, having high and transparent expectations, and ensuring that they meet their students where they are when instructing (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1995a). Cultural competence involves teachers utilizing their students as the base for learning (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). During this process, the students can apply their cultural beliefs and practices while learning and achieving academic success (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Furthermore, sociopolitical consciousness requires teachers to actively educate themselves and their students on the personal and sociopolitical issues that impact their students, their students’
communities, and the world, and incorporate this into their teaching and instruction (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Finally, to be successful with culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers should positively consider their students, their communities, the curriculum, instruction, and their role as teachers (Escudero, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1995b).

**Definition of Terms**

The following key terms have been provided as a resource for understanding the knowledge and content of this study.

*Black* – “A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘Black or African American’ or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian” (United States Census Bureau, 2022, p. 2).

*Cultural competency* – “The capacity of educators to understand their own cultural identity, understand the different dimensions of diversity, and use those dimensions of diversity to foster academic achievement, growth, and empowerment for all students” (VDOE, 2022).

*Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)* – “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, pp. 482-483).

*Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)* – Teaching “uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2000, p. 106).
Critical Consciousness – “Teaching students how to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems, especially those that result in societal inequities against marginalized groups” (Will & Najarro, 2022).

Hispanic – “Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (United States Census Bureau, 2022, p. 1).

Pedagogy – “Instructional methods, practices, techniques, and strategies” (VDOE, 2022).

Standards of Learning (SOL) – “Establishes minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course” (VDOE, 2022). “SOL assessments measure students' success in meeting the Board of Education’s expectations for learning and achievement” (VDOE, 2022).

Urban Area – “developed, densely populated area where most inhabitants have nonagricultural jobs, a density of human structures, such as houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways” (National Geographic, 2023).

White – A person “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘White’ or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian” (United States Census Bureau, 2022, p. 1).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are factors, such as characteristics, traits, actions, and influences, that fall outside the researcher’s control. This study was conducted with middle school teachers with varying experience levels within an urban Virginia school district. Other diverse or non-diverse
school divisions within the Commonwealth of Virginia may share varying strategies to build positive relationships with students and families and maintain positive peer relationships through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the educational learning setting. Some respondents may not feel that the questions asked were notable and may not have a factual answer, while others may have answered thoroughly and expanded. Due to the nature of this study, the research did not include the students’ or families’ perspectives; only the educators’ perspectives were investigated.

Delimitations of the study were factors and parameters established by the researcher. In a qualitative study, these factors will limit the generalization of the findings. Only middle school teachers with at least one year of teaching experience were interviewed. The participants received detailed interview questions defining experiences and strategies used in a culturally competent classroom that builds positive relationships. The researcher conducted the study in a middle school with a Pk-12 public school district in the central region of Virginia to further obtain knowledge and understanding. This study did not include a rural school division; however, it does include an urban school division.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the historical perspectives and the importance and positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy for all students’ education, learning environments, and communities. In this chapter, background national and state data were provided to establish the overall necessity for this study based on the craving improvement in the academic areas of reading, mathematics, and science. These are the academic areas where data is available for middle school students. Also, state data was provided for overall discipline for middle school students. Also, the study’s purpose and significance were
provided, including the purpose statement and research questions, the definition of terms, limitations/delimitations, and a summary. Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of related literature that details how fundamental cultural competency is essential to all students’ learning, and the research on how culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that entails the importance of having a student’s culture referenced in all their learning aspects. Chapter 3 discusses selecting the participants and the setting, data collection procedures, design and validity, interview protocol, confidentiality and ethical data treatment, justification of the study, and data analysis. Chapter 4 details teachers’ perspectives from the one-on-one interviews, which focused on strategies for communicating, building relationships, and valuing respect and diversity. Chapter 5 contains the presentation of the findings, findings of summary, implications, and recommendations for future studies.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study focused on building culturally competent pedagogy and practice for positive student, family, and peer relationships. To successfully implement a culturally relevant and sustainable pedagogy, teachers should believe that all students can prosper, sustain an affirming student-teacher relationship, and perceive distinction as an intricate standard considering student multiplicity and individual differences (Django, 2012; Paris, 2012). Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) requires teachers to value and strengthen students' languages, literacies, and cultural tools that embody society's prevalent and marginalized sectors intentionally and effectively (Django, 2012; Paris, 2012). According to Gloria Ladson-Billings in her book, *The Dreamkeepers*, she defines *culturally relevant teaching* as a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (1994, p. 17-18; Bassey, 2016). Finally, CRP requires teachers to implement best practices effectively and believe such methods are essential to culturally and linguistically diverse students (Bassey, 2016; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

This literature review examined the inclusion and exclusion criteria, culturally responsive teaching, effective culturally responsive teaching, history of culturally responsive pedagogy, implementation and strategies, preparing teachers to be culturally responsive, state data trends, and the conclusion. For the literature review, *teaching* is defined as what is being instructed, and *pedagogy* is defined as how learning takes place. Further, the literature review evaluates how vital cultural responsiveness is to academics because it addresses equity while ensuring all students receive a quality education (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014).
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Between August 2021 and May 2023, extensive searches were conducted across Virginia Tech (VT) Library Databases, focusing on keywords such as culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive learning, equity in the classroom, and positive relationship building. The searches yielded a total of 939 peer-reviewed articles, with contributions from various databases, including Vtech Works, EDTs, and EBSCOhost.

Google Scholar was also reviewed. The search constraints were adjusted to target the focus area for the investigation using the following words: positive relationship building, peer and student relationships, relationships and cultural competency, and building positive student relationships. The selected timeframe for this investigation spanned from the year 2000 to 2023.

A total of 136 abstracts and 45 articles were read completely, which included articles on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) websites. These additional searches were completed following consultation with Dr. Brinkmann, chair advisor, and other committee members.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Stowe (2017), in culturally responsive teaching, students are seen as worthy, intellectual humans who come to class with the knowledge needed to increase their learning within the classroom. Based on the literature, Ladson-Billings initiated the phrase culturally responsive teaching for three purposes: “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who
can both understand and critique the existing social order” (2014, p. 75). According to Durden et al. (2015), culturally relevant teaching is a method used to engage students by applying cultural references. In addition, according to Durden et al. (2015), culturally relevant teaching is instruction that rouses students' mental, public, psychological, and political thoughts and provides students with a solid knowledge base, ability, and mindset. Culturally responsive pedagogy requires specific characteristics that include values, traditions, and language but stretch to communication, learning styles, and relationship norms (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes teaching as instructing the whole child with the primary goal of helping students find their success through multiple pathways (Stowe, 2017). Han et al. (2014); say that culturally responsive pedagogy is a professional and personal development process that involves advocacy for instructing and, through cultural diversity, improving ethnically diverse students' achievement. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) say that the purpose of culturally responsive teaching is to ensure that the teachers respond to students in multiple ways to build and maintain meaningful, positive relationships for teachers to care for students rather than care about the students. When caring for students, teachers actively engage in activities that positively affect the students; on the other hand, when caring about students, teachers express their feelings of concern for the students’ state of being (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

Two groups of children should be considered when dealing with the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy. The first group was students currently living within the United States but not achieving, and the second group was those expected to arrive in the United States (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Students currently living in the United States and not achieving are
native-born students born in America, not meeting the achievement scores set by each state. Conversely, students who are expected to arrive in the United States are those migrating to America and born in a different country. According to Stowe (2017), culturally responsive teachers have a roadmap to students’ success and focus on finding ways to engage students in the presented content.

Emdin said, “A fundamental step in this challenging of structures is to think about new ways for all education stakeholders—particularly those not from the communities in which they teach—to engage with urban youth” (2016, p. 36). As new methods of culturally responsive teaching are continuously implemented, an innovative term has emerged: culturally sustaining pedagogy (Django, 2012; Paris, 2012). This term requires pedagogy within the classroom to be more than receptive or relevant to cultural experiences but also to support the youth by sustaining their cultural and linguistic abilities within their communities while maintaining contact with central cultural capability (Django, 2012; Paris, 2012). According to Ford et. al (2021), culturally responsive curriculum and instruction should be implemented as students not only need the challenge, but they also want and need relevancy in what they are being learned the materials used, and how they are taught.

A study conducted by Byrd-Wright (2020) found that culturally relevant teaching and school racial socialization can promote positive ethnic-racial identity and positive attitudes. Culturally responsive teaching builds on students' strengths from their cultural experiences while understanding their different heritages, language influences, perspectives, and learning approaches (Bergantz, 2021). According to Byrd-Wright (2020), culturally relevant teaching focuses on students’ culture through three primary methods: high expectations, cultural
competence, and critical consciousness. When discussing high expectations, teachers ensure the curriculum is challenging and students’ learning is scaffolded based on prior knowledge (Byrd-Wright, 2020). Culturally relevant teachers build on students’ strengths and take responsibility for all students. The teachers ensure they have a suitable experimental learning method in their classrooms. By teachers understanding their students in cultural competence, they can identify with their communities and lives (Byrd-Wright, 2020). Next, the teachers increase students' knowledge by using previous experiences and information from family and communities within the classroom. Finally, students raise critical consciousness within the school by concentrating on social justice and racial inequality (Byrd-Wright, 2020). It is done by having students identify problems or issues within their communities and find ways to resolve them (Byrd-Wright, 2020).

**Effective Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Krasnoff (2016) explained that being culturally responsive in teaching is vital to an effective teacher. Krasnoff provided five qualities to distinguish an effective, culturally responsive teacher. First, maintain high expectations for all students and assist all students in learning based on growth assessments or other alternate measures. Secondly, contribute to students' positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes. For example, regular attendance, on-time graduation or promotion to the next grade level, and cooperative behavior are ways to hold high expectations for all students. Thirdly, use diverse resources to plan lessons, have engaging learning opportunities, monitor student progress, differentiate instruction, and evaluate learning. Then, contribute to developing classrooms and schools that value diversity and community. Lastly, collaborate with colleagues, administrators, parents, and education
professionals to ensure student success, including students with high-risk or special needs (Krasnoff, 2016).

Hoffman (2018b) provided four themes that focus on the importance and effectiveness of working in culturally diverse classrooms. These four themes are acknowledging culture, self-cultivated educator factors, pedagogical decisions, and student-teacher relationship factors. For example, in buying culture, many teachers do not realize there is an issue with colorblindness. When teachers say, “I do not care if they are red, green, or polka dot, I treat them all like children,” the teacher dismisses the student’s identity and does not acknowledge this in lesson plans and instruction (Hoffman, 2018b). Self-cultivated educator factors occur when teachers dig deep into their judgments, beliefs, assumptions, biases, and those held by their culture, before beginning to understand another culture. Pedagogical decisions happen when teachers connect content with student experiences. Student-teacher relationship factors when teachers show commitment, care, and friendliness to their students but hold them to, and expect them to achieve at, a superior level (Hoffman, 2018a).

Ford et al. (2014) described low effectiveness when increased discipline referrals are present for students with special needs, which reflects a profound misunderstanding among cultural differences, diversity, and disability. Lindsay Fallon and Marlana Mueller (2017) promote the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program as culturally responsive support to improve climate, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and support positive student behavior within schools. PBIS is considered a wraparound approach aligned with culturally responsive pedagogy, which has a plan that includes three to five positive behavioral expectation statements for the school, procedures for teaching appropriate behaviors
to the students, reinforcement systems to acknowledge appropriate behaviors, and procedures for delivering consequences for inappropriate behaviors consistently (Fallon & Mueller, 2017).

Krasnoff (2016) advised that the Teacher Expectations Student Achievement Interaction Model identifies 27 measurable teacher behaviors that provide equitable response opportunities and effective feedback. The behaviors are described in detail as teachers communicate their high expectations. For instance, when the teachers welcome students by name, they feel influential and respected when they enter their classroom. However, by doing this, teachers must make every effort to remember and adequately pronounce each student’s name, as this symbolizes respect for the student and their culture. Likewise, teachers ensure the use of eye contact with high and low-achieving students. Using eye contact helps to emulate the teacher's expectations, and not making eye contact in some cultures can mean that the teacher has few or no expectations for the student. Therefore, using proximity with high- and low-achieving students equitably, even though observed as favoring those students, culturally responsive teaching means that the teacher must work the room to show the same to all students (Krasnoff, 2016).

Nonverbal actions have multiple meanings and views when received by specific cultures. Teachers arrange the classroom to accommodate discussion and build relationships between teachers and students (Krasnoff, 2016). To ensure a culturally responsive classroom, bulletin boards, exhibits, instructional supplies, and other visuals should effectively replicate and support all students' racial, ethnic, and cultural environments. The environment becomes uninviting when students need to see culturally appropriate pictures, posters, or other classroom materials. Various visual aids and props to support student learning can be highly effective. Having an inviting classroom ensures that the students are encouraged to learn. Learning, using, and
displaying some words in students' heritage language is engaging and effective. The students’ language and culture are resources to increase learning. By modeling graphic organizers, teachers help support a student's insight and knowledge. Using class-building and team-building activities to foster peer support for academic accomplishment allows the students to become comfortable with their peers. Using random response strategies creates a compassionate, inclusive, safe, and culturally and linguistically rich student community. They are using cooperative learning structures. The educational environment helps us learn about diversity, problem-solving, and working collaboratively. Structuring heterogeneous and collaborative groups for learning promotes social interaction among all diverse students (Krasnoff, 2016).

Teachers incorporated probing and clarifying techniques to assist students in answering, such as giving a hint, a clue, a prompt, or scaffolding questions (Krasnoff, 2016). Acknowledging all students' statements, replies, inquiries, and contributions should be acknowledging, improving, or probing for the students in a supportive way and seeking multiple perspectives by validating all perspectives. Teachers need to be sure that the response allows the opportunity for all students to overhear. The teachers use various approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content. Teachers must be sure to have multiple ways to assess their students. They identify students' current knowledge before instruction, believing all students are capable and prepared with essential knowledge and experiences. Using real-life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives helps strengthen motivation. Teachers use the wait time to give students time to think before responding to teacher questions. Also, pausing before affirming, correcting, or probing allows the students to think about their responses. Asking students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction helps to improve their teaching (Krasnoff, 2016).
Providing students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion allows teachers to effectively communicate the goals necessary for learning. Giving students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance ensures that students begin to ask important questions, make decisions, and self-evaluate during the process (Krasnoff, 2016). Providing multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard, which is to re-teach and reassess actions that give students the ability to master taught skills, is another method for effective communication. Explaining and modeling positive self-talk, and eliminating students' fear, helps improve their academic difficulties (Krasnoff, 2016). Asking higher order questions equitably from high- and low-achieving students plays a vital role in the classroom. Providing individual support to high- and low-achieving students helps build confidence and shows teachers how much they care about their learning. Krasnoff (2016) explains that this helps communicate high expectations to all students regardless of race or cultural background and shows effectiveness.

The VDOE established a six-performance standard for superintendent, principal, and teacher evaluations, focusing on culturally responsive and equitable leadership and practices (VDOE, 2022). The superintendent evaluation for performance standard six observes culturally responsive and equitable division leadership. Standard six performance focuses on the superintendent establishing and executing division goals, priorities, and strategies centered on equity and culturally responsive practices that defend student achievement (VDOE, 2022). The principal evaluation for performance standard six focuses on culturally responsive and equitable school leadership. Standard six performance for principals is focused on how the administration can demonstrate its commitment to equity while cultivating culturally inclusive and responsive practices that align with the division and its school goals, priorities, and strategies that support
achievement for all students (VDOE, 2022). The teacher evaluation for performance standard six focuses on culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices. The standard six performance for teachers emphasizes demonstrating their commitment to equality while providing instruction and classroom strategies that result in a culturally responsive learning atmosphere and academic success for all students (VDOE, 2022).

Byrd-Wright’s (2020) findings showed that principals must be present and demonstrate clear communication for instructional expectations. Principals routinely observe the implementation of culturally responsive teaching observations and their effectiveness. Based on a study finding, principals allowed teachers to meet frequently to plan for instruction. Byrd-Wright (2020) presented another finding where students who had culturally responsive teachers achieved better on division-wide assessments.

The study Booth (2021) conducted was a quantitative research design, which comprised a selected group of elementary assistant principals. Booth's purpose of study was to “investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the culturally responsive school leadership framework.” Booth’s (2021) findings show that leaders desire professional development growth opportunities that focus on supporting culturally responsive teachers. In conclusion, Booth (2021) stated that leaders also indicated a strong need to engage students, parents, and contexts. The findings showed that principals express that leadership programs are not preparing leaders to guide in culturally diverse school settings.

According to Booth’s study, out of the 44 assistant principals solicited to participate in the study, only 26 completed the survey, which revealed six key findings. Firstly, despite prior
research indicating otherwise, assistant principals generally feel prepared to lead in diverse school settings. Secondly, a majority (60%) believe their current duties equip them to be culturally responsive leaders. Thirdly, only half of the participants reported using the culturally responsive school leadership framework in their practice. Additionally, the study identified a need for professional growth opportunities, particularly in supporting the development of culturally responsive teachers and engaging with students, parents, and Indigenous contexts. Lastly, a notable 36% of assistant principals expressed dissatisfaction with how leadership preparation programs are preparing them for leading in diverse school settings.

**History of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Ladson-Billings (1995b) coined the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* in her seminal research article, written 17 years ago; she initiated the term and states that it “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Ladson-Billings’ (2014) essay *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0* is known as the remix of the original theory, where she discussed the meaning of hip-hop and the spoken word. Ladson-Billings (2014) expressed how “culturally sustaining pedagogy allows for a fluid understanding of culture and a teaching practice that explicitly engages questions of equity and justice” (p. 74). The first official version of *culturally responsive teaching* came when Ladson-Billings defined this as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (1994, p. 17-18).
Culturally responsive pedagogy can be viewed as instructional practices focusing on detailed cultural characteristics, making students different from each other and their teachers (Rychly & Graves, 2012). All students have unique differences in areas such as social and emotional development, social and economic background, academic ability, learning styles, interests, and potential. Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). Gay (2000) also defined culturally responsive pedagogy as “the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them” (p. 35). This literature review focused on achievement for two groups of students, those who are native born in the United States, and those who are immigrants to the United States. The groups consist of students who live within the United States and are not achieving or meeting set standards and the students whose arrival to the United States is anticipated (Rychly & Graves, 2012). For students living in the United States, their levels of academic achievement address the need for culturally responsive pedagogy. The students arriving within the United States will need to be assessed to see if the evidence relates academically (Rychly & Graves, 2012). These groups are evaluated based on evidence that the American public education school system does not equitably meet diverse students’ needs (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The number of diverse students is expected to continue to rise in the American public education school system, which continues to articulate the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Various culturally responsive teaching frameworks in literature were cited and used during preservice and professional development. Villegas and Lucas (2002) provided the highly
referenced culturally responsive framework in teacher education. The framework included six salient attributes of a culturally responsive educator: understanding how learners construct knowledge, learning about students' lives, being socioculturally conscious, holding affirming views about diversity, using appropriate instructional strategies, and advocating for all students. A culturally responsive educator creates lessons that are culturally inclusive and open-minded (Bergantz, 2021). The studies view the norms, beliefs, and behaviors passed down from generation to generation (Bergantz, 2021). Culturally responsive lessons can help bridge the gap between teacher and student by allowing the teacher to understand their students, and the students can comprehend their teachers care about the importance of their success. In addition, when educators learn more about their students’ lives, they become increasingly familiar with the community and the school population (Bergantz, 2021).

Socioculturally conscious educators understood that their perspectives are not suitable or superior to those of others but take time to understand other views (Bergantz, 2021). Educators affirm viewpoints concerning diversity to ensure that the classroom reflects a diverse setting with class norms, including inclusive conversations and student collaboration (Bergantz, 2021). Culturally responsive educators use direct, interactive, experimental, and independent studies as instructional strategies (Bergantz, 2021). Ultimately, educators are advocates for all students, not just specific students, and stand up for, speak up for, and work hard to enhance the lives of all students (Bergantz, 2021). According to Lucas and Villegas (2011), successfully instructing students from culturally linguistically diverse backgrounds involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques, which requires a new way of looking at teaching that obtains an understanding of the role of culture and language within learning. As Gallavan and Webster-Smith (2012) point out, the more teachers work to ensure cultural competency within their
instructional delivery, the more significant the momentum increases from their energy and involvement in education.

Implementation and Strategies

While conducting research, various frameworks were cited for observational tools. However, Danielson’s *Framework for Effective Teaching* is an observation tool commonly used by school leadership and mentorship that provides feedback on four central teaching domains.

**Table 1**

*Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN 1: PLANNING AND PREP</th>
<th>DOMAIN 2: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</td>
<td>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</td>
<td>Establishing a Culture for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Instructional Outcomes</td>
<td>Managing Classroom Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources</td>
<td>Managing Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing Coherent Instruction</td>
<td>Organizing Physical Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</th>
<th>DOMAIN 4: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Students</td>
<td>Reflecting on Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</td>
<td>Maintaining Accurate Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Students in Learning</td>
<td>Communicating with Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Assessment in Instruction</td>
<td>Participating in the Professional Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness</td>
<td>Growing and Developing Professionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Showing Professionalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Danielson, 1996, pp. 3-4)

There were four categories used for evaluating ratings in all four domains: distinguished, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. All the reviewed domains for each teacher are under
the evaluation system. The tools are an enrichment guide for the teacher that impacts the students’ academic achievement (Gist, 2014b).

According to Zacarian and Soto (2020), leaders who hold themselves culturally responsive must hire teachers who know how to effectively use culturally responsive teaching techniques and hold them accountable. To effectively meet those standards in an engaging format, teachers should be able to self-reflect, explain implicit biases, and explore microaggressions while addressing them. Teachers should also embrace collaborative reflection, create a mistake-safe, culturally responsive school, and apply excellence through an equity lens. Lastly, teachers should be able to effectively use a culturally responsive scorecard tool (Zacarian & Soto, 2020). Minkos et al. (2017) discuss that educational leaders are motivated by equity and culturally responsive practices for all students, and these eight elements depict those practices: understanding culture and context, recognizing diversity as an asset for learning, ensuring equitable access to vital academic resources, creating fair policies to address student misconduct, confronting bias, preparing students for a diverse, global society, acting with cultural competence and responsiveness, and addressing equity and cultural responsiveness.

Teachers in programs needed an introduction to culturally responsive teaching that focuses on theory and gives them field practice because coursework is insufficient (Moore et al., 2021). Hammond debated the authenticity of culturally responsive teaching, being in a relationship, and having a social-emotional connection (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Han et al. (2014) proposed a curriculum to help prepare educators to become culturally responsive, but in teacher or educator preparation courses, diversity or multicultural education courses are now a program requirement. Rychly and Graves (2012) state two ways to implement becoming
culturally responsive: practicing classroom teachers and college students in teacher education programs. First, classroom teachers can be assessed and provided with specific suggestions to improve their culturally responsive teaching (Rychly & Graves, 2012). A college student in the teacher education program would greatly benefit from the experience of the studying abroad program and the requirements within their study to help initiate the empathy and care needed as a culturally responsive teacher (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The simulation and immersion experiences learned in professional development show that these exercises should be replicated widely across the country (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Being able to participate, see models, and engage in classrooms where teachers are culturally responsive has made this practice accepted across the country (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

House Bill 1904 (2021) and Senate Bill 1196 (2021), endorsed by the Virginia General Assembly, developed requirements for K-12 educators to implement the *Guidance on Cultural Competency Training for Teachers and Other Licensed School Board Employees* in Virginia Public Schools. The Virginia General Assembly established new conditions that validated educators to become culturally competent in November 2021. As a result, the VDOE (2022) developed an online training module called *Cultural Competency Training Module* that is free for all educators to access. According to VDOE, all educators, including all school board employees, teachers, administrators, and other licensed staff, must complete the training by the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year (VDOE, 2022). In addition, any employee who is licensed and recertifies must show proof of completing the training when submitting their paperwork for license renewal as a requirement (VDOE, 2022). The *Guidance on Cultural Competency Training for Teachers and Other Licensed School Board Employees* document presents the minimum standards covered in the training module, along with the definitions and
knowledge of cultural competency (VDOE, 2022). Cultural competency informed the development of the *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency*, which includes four main domains of cultural competency. The *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency*'s four main domains also have micro-competencies that fall within those domains and are requirements for training to comply with local policy (VDOE, 2022).

Virginia school divisions were expected to provide cultural competency training to their staff at least every two years but have the option to do so more often (VDOE, 2022). The *Virginia Cultural Competency Framework* focuses on cultural competency that allows educators to concentrate on fully understanding the beliefs, behaviors, lived experiences, and practices and their impact on one’s educational decision-making and interaction with others overall (VDOE, 2022). The *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency* provides standardized definitions and understandings for cultural competency, which is established in The Board of Education Guidance on Cultural Competency Training (VDOE, 2022).

The *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency*, Domain One, focused on self-reflection as a micro-competency that allows one to continuously focus on their beliefs, behaviors, personal lived experiences, and practices that have impacted their educational decisions and how they interacted with others (VDOE, 2022). Within the *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency*, Domain Two focuses on pedagogy and practice, with five micro-competencies: establishing classroom and school cultures that represent diversity with respect and values; opportunities for students to self-reflect and interact with diverse peers while providing strategies to enhance self-regulation, the development of empathy, and how to display civil discourse; creating positive relationships between students and families, exemplify to a
student the importance of maintaining positive peer relationships while learning; communicate culturally responsively with students, staff, families, and the community; and find ways to shape student capacity to think critically and in different perspectives (VDOE, 2022). Additionally, Domain Three focuses on learning environments as a micro-competency that builds a safe and culturally responsive learning environment where diversity is continuously respected, and all students are expected to show elevated expectations (VDOE, 2022). Finally, Domain Four focuses on community engagement with three micro-competencies: encouraging students to learn about the diversity in the communities while providing opportunities for students to be active participants in their community; generating prospects for students, families, and community engagement through building relationships beyond the classroom; and teaching students and families how to respond and report incidents of discrimination (VDOE, 2022).

The Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency Domain Two is essential as it represents the effectiveness of implementing the training provided by leadership focusing on pedagogy and practices. In Domain Two, educators recognize the importance of culture in teaching and instruction and adapt professional practices and strategies to meet all students’ needs (VDOE, 2022). As a result, students can think rigorously and build positive relationships, which is ideal and imperative when educating a diverse student population.

Preparing Teachers to be Culturally Responsive

According to Krasnoff (2016), culture powerfully influences attitudes, values, and behaviors brought to the instructional process by students and teachers, preparing teachers for the major problem-solving factors that arise from underachievement. Teachers can be accountable for their students’ outcomes if they are sufficiently trained for their students’ learning styles
(Krasnoff, 2016). Villegas and Lucas (2002) found during their research that there are six characteristics to help teachers become culturally responsive. The six characteristics include socio-cultural consciousness; attitude; commitment and skills; constructivist views; knowledge of student's life; and culturally responsive teaching. Socio-cultural consciousness is a teacher's way of thinking, behaving, and being influenced by race, ethnicity, social class, and language; they must recognize discrimination within themselves (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Attitude analyzes a teacher’s approach toward students based on their culturally diverse backgrounds and how this impacts their learning, belief in themselves, and academic performance; schools and classrooms become inclusive (Krasnoff, 2016). Commitment and skills review a teacher's position to confront obstacles, create collaboration skills, and be a change agent; schools become equitable. Constructivist views are the teacher's belief that all students can learn. The views require scaffolding between what they already know and what they need to learn; critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and multiple perspectives become identified. Knowledge of a student's life involves a teacher learning about a student's past experiences, home, and community culture and building relationships. This information helps during teaching and learning. Culturally responsive teaching is when teachers use the above strategies to support a constructivist view of knowledge. Teaching and learning help students construct knowledge, build on personal and cultural strengths, and view the curriculum, creating an inclusive learning classroom (Krasnoff, 2016).

According to Bennett et al. (2018), culturally responsive teaching requires connections between school, home, and community for implementation on behalf of teachers and students. Bennett et al. provide four elements of a framework: conversations, multiple perspectives,
relationships, and authentic experiences. First, as conversations occur within a culturally responsive teaching classroom, effectiveness is shown when students, teachers, and parents are engaged in discussions while all parties listen with respect and care. Second, to actively engage all students in the classroom, multiple perspectives are incorporated when the teacher uses various resources and tools, allowing the many diverse cultural backgrounds into the school. Third, through culturally responsive teaching, relationships form with all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, caregivers, family, and peers. Finally, authentic experiences occur throughout lessons created for students to learn about themselves, the real world, and their peers (Bennett et al., 2018).

Dalton debated that students' knowledge becomes produced when teachers combine their instruction and curriculum with their experiences from home and within their communities (Tanase, 2021). According to Bergantz (2021), when implementing a culturally responsive design, the focus is on emulating students' cultural learning styles. In addition, educators should adapt their lessons to be inclusive so that the students want to be engaged (Bergantz, 2021). Table 2 is an example of subjects with adjustments based on findings in the communities of the Southwest region of the United States (Bergantz, 2021). The chart shows cultural interests in each content area. These cultural interests help increase momentum within the classroom through instruction, participation, and learning. For example, in science, the teachers listed items such as crop planting and hunting; in math, the teachers listed items such as selling and budgeting; in health and PE, the teachers listed first aid and childcare; in literacy, Bible study and family stories; in history, mapping and immigration routes; and in arts, folk music and masonry. Below Table 2 is a design of culturally responsive teaching activities shared by Bergantz (2021).
Table 2: Design of Culturally Responsive Teaching Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>crop planting, hunting,</td>
<td>Bible study, family stories,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fixing mechanical</td>
<td>family letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Social studies, history,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selling, managing income,</td>
<td>geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>budgeting</td>
<td>local mapping, local history,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>building codes, immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, PE</td>
<td>Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childcare, first aid</td>
<td>folk music, carpentry, textile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procedures, games,</td>
<td>design, masonry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Design of Culturally Responsive Teaching Activities. Adapted from: Bergantz, (2021).

Tanase (2021) stated, "When teachers incorporate their students' culture and everyday experiences into learning, they legitimize their students' real-life experiences, making them part of the official curriculum (p. 366)." In addition, those teachers work consciously to be culturally responsive. Culturally responsive mathematics and science teachers described some strategies they use in the classroom: rocks, plants, and clocks when introducing new or complex concepts, visuals, grouping, and hands-on activities while holding their students to high expectations and using real-world examples (Tanase, 2021). Bond (2014) provides strategies for culturally responsive teaching in a choral classroom while understanding that knowing their students, connecting with their lives, and maintaining high expectations of them are extremely important. The seven strategies for integrating culturally responsive teaching into a choral classroom include knowing the students, building on student strengths, connecting home and school
experiences, using a wide variety of music, presenting music in its social and political context, acknowledging and sharing multiple perspectives, and encouraging a sense of community with high expectations for all (Bond, 2014).

Ford et al. (2014) presented engaging learning strategies for students of all levels, including students in the inclusive classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy is necessary for all classrooms and uses techniques compatible with students with disabilities and their unique needs. However, culturally responsive pedagogy is a practice that is best for all students and benefits all in multiple ways. Effective instruction, teaching, and learning strategies influence students’ academic and language development. When the students engage in activities, their proficiency level increases, and their achievement improves. Strategies to engage the students include graphic organizers, leveled study guides and outlines, taped text and jigsaw readings, highlighted word patterns and meanings, word walls with words and images, personal dictionaries, concept definition maps, and rehearsal through word games. These strategies and their students' resources from home and the community can help teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy (Ford et al., 2014).

Noah Borrero (2016) initiated a study that examined new teachers’ perspectives and experiences as they prepare to enter the educational teaching profession with a vision for change and equity. Borrero (2016) used the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy framework in the study to assist teachers. The new teachers presented a distinction between learning the conceptual and theoretical foundation of CRP and the ability to use this in their classroom (Borrero, 2016). Edwards and Edick (2013) stated that teacher educator programs must prepare teachers to build on strengths and cultures to appropriately challenge and develop students who will be competing
in the ever-changing and growing society. According to Edwards and Edick (2013), teacher-educator programs must embrace the challenges of creating programs that are not only pedagogically responsive to the diverse learners' needs but are also culturally responsive.

According to Fullerton (2022), involving families in the classroom is essential early in the year. This helps to build relationships with the families and to create a strong sense of classroom community (Fullerton, 2022). Fullerton uses a letter at the beginning of the year, which invites the parents to learn more about the teacher as a person and, in turn, requests the parents to communicate with the teachers about their child. In this letter, the parent can explain what their child likes, how they best learn, and any other pertinent information the parent would like to share (Fullerton, 2022). Also, video conferencing is another strategy that has grown since the pandemic, which allows teachers and families more availability to meet and build relationships. Often, teachers create a family corner, where they send artifacts and anecdotes home, which allows the families into the classroom (Fullerton, 2022).

According to Brown Ruiz and Scott (2021), communication is highly ineffective when an educator avoids discussing a student’s well-being or life outside of school. This conversation is essential as it strengthens the students' and educators’ communication. The student also senses that the educator cares, and they then become more open to caring about their educational achievements. Culturally critical consciousness is self-reflection and the analysis of one’s “personal beliefs and instructional behaviors regarding the value of cultural diversity, and the best methods to educate ethnically diverse students for the maximum positive effects” (Brown Ruiz & Scott, 2021).
According to Gaias et al. (2019), culturally responsive classroom management emphasizes how teachers establish and enforce expectations equitably, communicate with students in culturally dependable ways, accommodate and integrate students’ cultural and familial backgrounds, and inspire engagement and participation through building close, caring, and individual relationships. Classroom management practices gain control over the various strategies educators use daily to build a positive classroom setting that is structured, engaging, and valuable and supports student learning and growth (Gaias et al., 2019). According to Gaias et al. (2019), educators who encounter effective classroom organization practices utilize a range of strategies to expand appropriate behavior and decrease inappropriate behavior, which vary based on the complexity and severity of the behavior.

According to Nasr (2021), building relationships in culturally responsive classrooms to enhance students’ social-emotional learning (SEL) can be done in multiple ways. Teachers must know their diverse students by profoundly understanding their cultural and linguistic behaviors (Nasr, 2021). For example, validating cross-cultural or cross-linguistic behaviors enhances student engagement in dependable disciplinary learning and SEL. A normal cross-cultural/linguistic behavior that can be supported in the classroom is overlapping conversations (Nasr, 2021). Overlapping conversations occur when students engage in non-linear discussion and when verbal expressions coincide or in an “overlapping” technique (Nasr, 2021).

Sharma (2013) conducted a qualitative study with eighteen participants. Sharma’s research purpose was to explore an initiative created by an initial teacher education program involving educators in public school practicums. The research study found that engaging lesson plans were rated highly necessary for students. According to Sharma (2013), a teacher reported
that “her greatest insights came from units she planned for a practicum on persuasive writing” (p. 158). The teacher said that the lesson allowed the students to share their thoughts in a meaningful and sensitive way. At the same time, she was able to teach the students the right tone to use, and she was also able to learn from the students what was important to them, such as whom they wanted to write to and what they wanted to write about. Another teacher believed that using personal life experiences was the way to build trust and bonds with his students (Sharma, 2013).

Byrd-Wright (2020) conducted a qualitative study involving twelve high school and middle school principals in an urban district, aiming to explore the influence of culturally responsive behaviors exhibited by principals on mathematics teachers and, subsequently, on the conceptual knowledge development of their students. Another objective was to investigate how teachers’ culturally responsive actions impact the performance of African-American students in mathematics. The research employed the Reformed Teaching Observation Tool, preliminary screenings, observations of principals and mathematics teachers, and a survey.

Byrd-Wright's study revealed seven key findings. Firstly, culturally responsive principals demonstrated critical consciousness and cultivated interpersonal relationships, providing comprehensive support to teachers and students. Secondly, these principals effectively communicated clear instructional expectations for rigorous mathematics instruction, incorporating equity-focused teacher evaluations. Thirdly, they implemented a system approach and organizational structure that facilitated teacher collaboration on lesson design, implementation, and student performance monitoring (Byrd-Wright, 2020). The fourth finding highlighted that culturally responsive teachers acknowledged and utilized the diversity students bring to the classroom, showing awareness of their own racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.
The fifth finding indicated that these teachers possessed robust content knowledge, enabling them to differentiate instruction and build conceptual understanding through various representations (Byrd-Wright, 2020). The sixth finding emphasized that culturally responsive teachers engaged students in mathematical discourse, fostering reasoning and justification of solutions. Lastly, the seventh finding suggested that students with culturally responsive teachers excelled on division-wide assessments, contributing to a reduced achievement gap between African-American and White students (Byrd-Wright, 2020).

**Summary and Significance of Literature Review**

When preparing current and new teachers, understanding culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching, implementing the school process effectively, and understanding the principles of interaction, accommodations, and ownership to build significant relationships are essential. Sharma (2013) described three components--high expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness--which can apply to any cultural group within any given group and any classroom. Sharma (2013) interviewed teachers who discussed challenges with the Diverse School Initiative developed to help design professional development for teachers and candidates. The professional development was also to help the teachers create lesson plans to help engage their students and ensure that the lesson plans developed are culturally competent for all students. The findings issues were discovered during teacher interviews, and not all teachers were prepared. Teachers with diverse backgrounds were more involved with keeping their students engaged than teachers with varied experiences. Byrd-Wright's (2020) research focused on the behaviors of high and middle school principals and how they influenced their teachers to help guide their students' concept knowledge of mathematics. Although the principals exhibited critical interpersonal relationships and communicated clear instructional expectations, only students with culturally
responsive teachers performed better on division-wide assessments. They reduced the achievement gap between African-American and White students. Byrd-Wright's research showed that not a certain amount of teachers should participate in culturally responsive teaching, but all. Booth's (2021) research focused on how prepared leaders are to guide in a culturally responsive school setting. The study showed that even though assistant principals perceived that they were prepared to lead effectively in a diverse school setting, they did not utilize the framework to help them succeed. Also, the assistant principals showed a need for professional development for their teachers.

The United States educational system faces challenges in preparing all students for an ever-changing worldwide society. To effectively address this ever-changing world, all students must be critical thinkers, and all teachers must be able to make this happen. However, the main question is what strategies teachers use to build positive relationships with culturally diverse students and their families while providing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to ensure positive peer relationships occur within the classroom. In addition to the strategies, the students will improve academic achievement, show growth on achievement assessments, decrease discipline incidents, and close the achievement gap in learning. Educators will be able to utilize culturally responsive pedagogy and practices during instruction.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides details of the methodology and procedures that were used to conduct this study. The purpose of the study, research questions, research design: methodology and justification, interview protocol, data collection methods, data analysis, and a summary will be discussed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers in one school division utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. Creswell and Poth (2018) provided that “qualitative research is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored and an understanding of the contexts in which participants in a study address a problem is warranted” (p. 46). Moreover, qualitative research anticipates searching for understanding and meaning through participant perspectives, narrative descriptions based on candid discussion, and data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Question

This qualitative research study identified strategies that middle school teachers utilized when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. The primary research question for this study was, How do middle school teachers incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to enhance the learning experience, foster positive relationships with students, engage with families, and collaborate effectively with peers?
Research Design: Methodology

Research identifies the educator’s lived experiences and success stories while alleviating bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative techniques are essential when studying a small group of people and analyzing direct information from those sampled. Qualitative researchers study concepts in natural settings to understand or interpret their meanings. This was a qualitative study in which the methodology involved "narrative descriptions based on candid discussion and participant perspectives" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). Qualitative research inspires individuals to share their feelings and stories, hears their voices, and lessens the power between the researcher and the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants agreed to participate through individual interviews. A qualitative method provided a structure that identified the strategies that middle school teachers utilize to build positive relationships with students and families and instruct students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Existing literature contains strategies that middle school teachers could utilize to build positive relationships with students and families and instruct students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting (Gay, 2000). For example, having an inviting classroom, listening to the students, being aware of their cultural backgrounds, learning the students’ names and pronouncing them correctly, and making eye contact when speaking with students are a few strategies that previous research noted to help build positive relationships (Krasnoff, 2016). This qualitative study was designed to add to the research literature by investigating and identifying the strategies middle school teachers use to
build relationships and maintain positive student and community relationships to engage student learning through culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Selection of Setting and Participants**

The school division chosen to complete the research was identified based on their alignment with serving a diverse student population and targeting areas with economic challenges as indicated with being a Title I funded middle school. The student population at the middle school was between 950 to 1000 students. According to the VDOE (2022), the student population was greater than 50% of students who are economically disadvantaged, which means they receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch. The VDOE (2022) also showed the racial and ethnic groups to be a minority-majority high rate with a population greater than 75% of the students falling into this category. In addition, this division allowed the opportunity to focus on diversity and inclusivity in education, especially in the context of an urban environment with unique challenges and opportunities. Overall, the selection of the school division aligned with educational goals that focused on research and providing quality education to all students, irrespective of their socio-economic or demographic background.

Interview participants were selected based on their experience as middle school educators and their physical location in a pre-selected district. The researcher used purposeful sampling for this qualitative research study. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), a “purposeful sample will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (p. 148). Therefore, to obtain purposeful sampling with vital information, the criteria used were required due to the necessity for the study and to select participants who provided the most relevant data based on the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants, which included individuals who served as middle school teachers in a Pk-12 urban public-school division in the central region of Virginia. The criteria for the participants were based on being a general education, special education, or exploratory teacher with at least one or more years of teaching experience. During this process, IRB approval was received, appendices completed, and then the researcher was able to move forward. The researcher emailed the superintendent and deputy superintendent and provided them with a letter requesting approval to conduct research within their division (see Appendix A). Once approval was received, the researcher was advised to receive approval from the middle school principal and send the principal a letter requesting permission through email (see Appendix B). The researcher then worked to identify participants willing to share their reflections and in-depth experiences regarding the strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Once the participants were identified, they received an informed consent agreement (see Appendix C). Pseudonyms were used for each participant, and their identities were kept confidential.

Data Collection Procedures

First, the researcher developed an interview protocol focused on building positive relationships through culturally responsive pedagogy that was used with each participant in each group (see Appendix D). The interview protocol for building positive relationships through culturally responsive pedagogy was developed to obtain the necessary data on the strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families. Then, the researcher sent emails to prospective participants with the Informed Consent for the Interview attached (see Appendix C),
requesting their participation. Once participants responded and a pool of teachers was established, the researcher responded requesting available times to meet. The interview times were planned by each individual participant and researcher based on availability and careful preparation. Next, participants, core academic and exploratory middle school teachers, were interviewed in a Zoom conference room for 30-45 minutes. The researcher conducted interviews using guided interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After all the interviews were conducted, the researcher then began to transcribe interviews and analyze the data.

**Instrument Design**

The interview contained seventeen demographic and content questions, with twelve content questions in an open-ended format. The flexible structure allowed participants to answer the questions thoroughly, engage deeply, and reflect on their words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions were designed to gather specific information from the respondents. The main purpose of the interview questions was to collect data regarding enhancing the learning outcomes through building positive relationships through culturally responsive pedagogy with students and families. The interview questions reviewed the respondent’s awareness, effectiveness, and the ability to review the insights provided to guide strategic planning and decision-making for necessary adjustments or improvement.

Overall, the interview questions served as a structured means for gathering information, which enabled the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions from the collected data.

**Instrument Validation (and Reliability)**

Interviewing middle school educators allowed for the collection of strategies to build culturally competent pedagogy and practice for positive student, family, and peer relationships.
A Special Education (SPED) and English teacher reviewed the interview questions, which indicated that individuals with expertise were involved in the validation process. Involving teachers with different specializations ensured diversity of perspectives and expertise in the validation process. The researcher created the semi-structured interview protocol used in this study where those teachers reviewed and gave feedback. The final semi-structured interview protocol was completed once feedback was received and adjustments were made. Two teachers reviewed the semi-structured interview questions, and feedback was provided. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), validation was used to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants. The validation process involved ensuring that the interview questions were aligned with the topic. This was critical in establishing content validity, ensuring that the question was relevant to the research objectives. The research questions were overtly designed to include elements related to the VDOE Culturally Competency Training Domain II: Culturally Competent Pedagogy. This indicated that the questions were aligned with established standards and guidelines. Considering the focus on Culturally Competent Pedagogy, the questions were likely to have enhanced content validity by directly addressing aspects fundamental to effective teaching practices in a diverse and inclusive educational environment. The methodical inclusion of elements related to cultural competency in the research questions suggests a commitment to exploring and understanding the cultural dimensions of teaching, which can contribute to the overall validity of the study.

Reliability was enhanced when the researcher obtained strong detailed field notes through good-quality recordings and transcribing of files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, it is essential to establish the validity and reliability of the instruments used in the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher created a draft of the questions that
coincide with the research question (see Table 3). The individuals involved in the review process were trained researchers, which indicated that they possess the necessary qualifications and expertise in research methodologies, adding credibility to the reliability assessment. The reviewers specifically examined the length of the interview questions to ensure that fatigue would not be a factor. The reviewers identified aspects of the questions that were unclear and provided feedback, which was crucial for addressing potential issues that could have compromised the reliability of the questions. In response to the feedback received, adjustments were made to some questions. This process represented a high commitment to improving the reliability of the interview questions. The reviewers specifically noted that some questions were unclear, indicating an awareness of the importance of question clarity in maintaining reliability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Semi-Structured interview protocol questions</th>
<th>Alignment to Domain II: Competent Pedagogy and Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do middle school teachers incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to enhance the learning experience, foster positive relationships with students, engage with families, and collaborate effectively with peers?</td>
<td>• How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens?</td>
<td>• Build positive relationships with students and families…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students?</td>
<td>• Build positive relationships with students and families…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families?</td>
<td>• Build positive relationships with students and families…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy?</td>
<td>• Establish a classroom in which all dimensions of diversity…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are?</td>
<td>• Provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you invite and involve families in your classroom?</td>
<td>• Communicate with students, families…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families?</td>
<td>• Communicate with students, families…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity?</td>
<td>• Provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Current events impact students, their families, and communities and affect every aspect of our lives. How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion?</td>
<td>• Provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection and interpersonal interactions with diverse peers; support development…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives?</td>
<td>• Build student capacity to think critically and consider alternate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected?</td>
<td>• Establish a classroom in which all dimensions of diversity…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values?</td>
<td>• Establish a classroom in which all dimensions of diversity…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Protocol

The interview protocol in this basic study followed Creswell and Poth’s (2018) research-based process and was used consistently throughout each interview. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix D. In this study of building culturally competent pedagogy and practice for positive student, family, and peer relationships, investigating and identifying strategies are essential to students and future educators.

Confidentiality and Ethical Treatment of the Data

All data and transcripts are vital to understanding the strategies necessary to build relationships with students and families. The interviews were held through Zoom, which is a conference platform. Once completed, the Zoom transcripts and recordings were stored on a password-protected laptop. In addition, once completed, the emails sent to obtain permission to conduct research, Word documents, and recordings were maintained in a password-protected account. The researcher and committee chair will have exclusive access to this study and all associated documents. The data plan consisted of organizing and preparing the data for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pseudonyms represented all participants’ names, school names, and divisions. Any data and transcripts are maintained for three years from the completion of the official study. All recordings are destroyed after the three-year required time period.

Data Analysis

The core academic and exploratory teacher interviews were held with each participant through Zoom. Once the interviews ended, Zoom downloaded the recordings, the researcher saved the recordings files, and then began transcribing them through Word. The data analysis phase started once all the transcriptions were available. The investigator thoroughly conducted an in-depth analysis of each transcript, paying close attention to details, similarities in answers
and differences, and noted specific details in each answer. Once completed, the investigator started charting the data analyzed, documenting the themes found, and ensuring the use of pseudonyms for the teachers. During the analysis process, the investigator could see the students' impact through their teachers' answers.

Before the data analysis occurred, a peer reviewer reviewed the data collection procedures and validation of themes. The data analysis benefited from a peer reviewer, involving another graduate who has received their doctorate, which indicates a high level of expertise and experience. Using vignettes indicated a commitment to contextual relevance in data analysis. Aligning the analysis with real-life scenarios helped in drawing practical and applicable conclusions in the educational data research. Theme emersion was an inductive approach used in data analysis. This approach allowed the themes to emerge from the data rather than creating preconceived categories, which can lead to more authentic findings. Coding was a systematic process that involved categorizing and organizing the data to assist with identifying patterns, themes, or concepts found within the dataset. The discovered evidence will be incorporated into the data for use in the findings and implications. This information was critical to ensuring that recommendations are supported by the evidence gathered during the research.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), when needing to summarize field notes, the examiner reads and documents emergent ideas. The memoing process organized the data into themes and effective strategies (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, the examiner read the transcripts to obtain the details before analyzing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quotations brought the content to fruition based on the information shared by the participants (Yin, 2011). Any quotation or excerpt used should support the interpretations and explanations presented by the participant (Yin, 2011). When providing a lengthy extract, the data table reflected the
participant’s experiences (Yin, 2011). The process that the investigator concluded to analyze the data and methodically decipher the data included (a) organize and prepare the data analysis by transcribing the interviews, as well as sorting and arranging the data into different sections based on the findings; (b) read or look at all the data, reflect on the information overall, combine the overall ideas, and field notes; (c) begin coding the data, organizing the data into chunks by writing a word representing the category; (d) create a description and themes, details about the people and setting, while the themes represent the significant findings; and (e) represent the description and themes, the researcher used a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data collected were analyzed to reveal the participants’ life experiences and stories in the educational field and changing events or epiphanies through the strategies provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used Creswell and Poth’s (2018) methodology of interviewing to gather life experiences that reflect the stories that share the strategies needed to build positive relationships with middle school teachers, the effectiveness of culturally competent pedagogy and practices that help maintain positive peer relationships, and the perceptions of middle school teacher participants’ own experiences.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the methodology used to conduct the research study. A basic qualitative method provided a structure that explored strategies utilized when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. In addition, the IRB process and procedures were followed to ensure approval to conduct the research study. Purposeful sampling was used to distinguish the participants for this
study. The participants were solicited through a school division, and interviews were held once informed consent was obtained via Zoom. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the process for participants, schools, divisions, and any other identifying information.

The researcher created the semi-structured interview protocol and allowed two experienced teachers to review and provide feedback to ensure validity and reliability. Interviews were conducted via Zoom conferencing platform. The transcripts, recordings, and all other records were stored, and then the recordings will be destroyed after the three-year required time period. However, this did not take place until full approval was given. Overall, the reliability of the interview questions has been strengthened through the involvement of trained researchers, peer review by individuals with doctoral qualifications, attention to potential sources of respondent fatigue, a feedback mechanism, and adjustments based on feedback.

The data analysis process was multi-faceted, incorporating peer perspectives, qualitative methodologies, contextual alignment, inductive theme emergence, coding techniques, and a commitment to evidence-based practice. The researcher reviewed and analyzed the collected data to appreciate the participants’ perspectives and understanding of their experiences as educators to build relationships, best provide instruction to build peer relationships and increase academic abilities. Any themes, collaborative findings, and significant differences are shared in the findings and implications.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. The researcher investigated the variety of strategies used by the teachers and the experiences provided in maintaining and developing positive relationships with students and their families. Eventually, the results of this study will help increase positive relationship-building with students, peers, and student families through incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices from middle school teachers.

The conceptual framework used for this study was from the *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency* and the vision of the expectancy shown from the training outcome (Escudero, 2019; VDOE, 2022). This framework provides training to support culturally competent educators within the Commonwealth of Virginia (VDOE, 2022). The framework helps to ensure that students learn at a higher, more rigorous level, the learning environment is inclusive, and more student-teacher relationships are established, while also connecting their students’ prior knowledge and cultural experience in everyday learning (Escudero, 2019; Gay, 2000; Will & Najarro, 2022).

In this chapter, the research study is reviewed along with the participants. Following, the data collected from the interview questionnaire based on the research question as presented:

1. How do middle school teachers incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to enhance the learning experience, foster positive relationships with students, engage with families, and collaborate effectively with peers?
Participant Information

Teachers serving as middle school educators in a Pk-12 public school system in Virginia who had completed training and used the *Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency* was the main identifier for participants for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to allow the researcher to select the potential participants from a particular candidate pool. The teachers were selected based on their experience as middle school educators with one or more years of teaching experience. The researcher worked to identify participants willing to share their reflections and in-depth experiences regarding the strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. From this purposeful sampling, 12 middle school teachers were possible candidates. Seven of the 12 potential candidates who responded to the email request agreed to participate in the research study. The participant pool included two special education teachers, one English language arts teacher, one history teacher, one English language learner teacher, one science teacher, and one math teacher. The teachers’ professional experience as an educator ranged from one year to 28 years.

The first five questions- please tell me your highest level of education; how many years of service do you have teaching; what grade level do you currently teach; what content area(s) are you currently teaching; and are you currently a general education, special education, or other (explain) teacher- were addressed in Table 4, which also notes the pseudonyms for each participant, the grade(s) taught with the content area, and the number of years of teaching experience.
### Table 4

**Participant Information with Years of Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Grades/Content Area/General/SPED/Other</th>
<th>Number of years of teaching experience (total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 1 (MST1)</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Grades 6-8/All Content/SPED</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 2 (MST 2)</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Grade 8/ELA/General</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 3 (MST 3)</td>
<td>Bachelors +</td>
<td>Grades 6-8/Math/SPED</td>
<td>28 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 4 (MST 4)</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Grade 8/History/General</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 5 (MST 5)</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Grades 7-8/ESL/EL</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 6 (MST 6)</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Grade 8/Science/General</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teacher 7 (MST 7)</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Grade 7/Math/General</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Results

The following section represents the study's results, which begin with the research interview question number 6.

**Research Question**

How do middle school teachers utilize and incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to build and maintain positive relationships with students, families, and peers?

To interpret the findings, it is important to understand how the participants established successful relationships with students and their families. The researcher accomplished this by asking the participants to reflect on their experiences as to what effective strategies are used
within their classroom to build relationships, the strategies used to communicate, and how respect and value are established. The researcher engaged in a dialogue regarding the participants’ classroom and how it reflects culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, the researcher asked the participants to discuss strategies for inviting families into their classroom and if the students’ learning environment reflects who they are. The following data represent the responses from the participants for each interview question.

**Interview Question 6: How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens?**

The seven participants identified multiple ways they established relationships using a culturally responsive lens. Table 5 outlines the ways relationships were established.

**Table 5**

*How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of students’ cultures</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarize with individual students through an interest inventory survey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customize curriculum to reflect student culture</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/instruction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply oneself; discussion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate images of like representations of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reviewing the data, seven out of the seven participants, 100%, indicated that engaging in the awareness of students’ cultures is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST1 stated, “It depends on the students. Some students, their parents prefer for them not to have their picture taken because of their cultural background, or they can’t eat certain foods because culturally they don’t eat certain items.” MST3 stated, “…they can ask the question and feel safe about asking that question.” MST4 stated, “Just establish relationships by getting to know them.” MST5 stated, “I typically start off when I first meet my students by letting them know and making them totally aware that English is my second language as well…”

The second theme found was to familiarize themselves with individual students through an interest inventory survey, where four out of the seven participants, 57%, stated this is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST4 stated, “You know I have surveys that I put out there. I try to figure out their interest, celebrate them, compliment them, listen to them, listen to questions, and concerns.” MST7 stated that he always gets to know the students, what they like, what they dislike, and how they learn.

The third theme found was to customize curriculum to reflect student culture, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST6 stated, “I got a grant for a series of posters about scientists, current scientists from all different cultures and I keep them displayed in the classroom…”

The fourth theme found was through pedagogy and instruction, where three out of seven participants, 43%, stated this is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST6 stated, “I got a grant for a series of posters about scientists,
current scientists from all different cultures and I keep them displayed in the classroom, and it kind of explores not just what they do as far as science, but what they do outside of their career field, what they enjoy doing in their time off.”

The fifth theme found was to apply oneself and discussion. Two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST5 stated, “I typically start off when I first meet my students by letting them know and making them totally aware that English is my second language as well, and usually just knowing that puts them at ease and they feel the connection.” MST3 stated, “developing relationships with students. I meet my students on their level. I talk with them, not at them, and I always have a listening ear so that they know that they can come to me if they need to discuss something, or if we’re in the classroom that they can ask questions and feel safe…”

The sixth theme found was to integrate images of like representations of students, where one out of seven participants, 17%, stated this is how they establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. MST6 stated, “I have tried to incorporate representation in my classroom through the images that I have displayed around the room… I also try when I’m giving examples in class, vary the names of those that I use, tables, or the images, I try to make sure that any images that I pull for worksheets or presentations have a lot of representation in them.”

Over half of the participants’ responses indicated that the theme of cultural awareness and cultural diversity was found to be the most commonly represented. MST2 stated, “I feel like I try to really just get to know them, and you know, understand who they are individually to best help them become the best learner possible.”
**Interview Question 7: What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students?**

The seven participants identified multiple strategies used to build positive relationships with their students. Table 6 outlines the ways relationships were established.

**Table 6**

*What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinforcement &amp; praise</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferencing</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest &amp; positive connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe learning environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, four out of the seven participants, 57%, indicated that positive reinforcement and praise was a strategy to build positive relationships with their students. MST1 stated, “A positive reinforcement. So, say we're working in class, and they get something right. I make sure that they know that they've done a great job and reward their good behavior. They're good. If the answer isn't right, we go over what the correct answer is. We take some time away from it and come back to see if they retain that information.” MST5 stated, “If the students
receive positive reinforcement when getting the answer correct, that is wonderful. It is even better to show positivity when they get the answer incorrect but help them find the correct answer and understand their mistake without making them uncomfortable.”

The second theme found was communication, including the sub-themes of conferencing and discussions, where five out of seven participants, 71%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students. MST3 stated, “To build positive relationships, an open-door policy line. I speak with the students, and I also stay in touch with the parents.” MST6 stated, “…I've asked for their opinions on things to listen to, things to read, things to watch.” MST7 stated, “board games that we play to build the relationship and also let them know that even teachers can have fun when you go down to their level and go back to having fun, they feel comfortable in the classroom.”

The third theme found was having an honest and positive connection, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students. MST5 stated, “I treat them like a family. It's a family. It’s my classroom family. They're my children, I'm responsible for them, and they know I truly, genuinely care.”

The fourth theme found was goal setting, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students. MST4 stated, “We do a lot of goal setting. I try to do a beginning-of-the-year and middle-of-the-year goal setting. I try to figure out what I can do to help them out as their teacher. Like what I can do as a teacher or try to get more information from them and get their insight and anything I might be able to do to help them out to be successful in the classroom.”
The fifth theme found was to provide a safe learning environment, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students. MST7 stated, “I have different strategy games, board games that we play to build the relationship and also let them know that even teachers can have fun; when you go down to their level and go back to having fun, they feel comfortable in the classroom.”

In summary, the theme of communication, both communication and discussion, was 71%, and was found to be the most common strategy represented, and positive reinforcement and praise was 57%. MST2 stated, “1 to 1 conferencing or group conferencing where like I get to talk to them about what we're doing. You know, instruction-wise, but then also it just starts the conversation into what you know how things relate to them.”

*Interview Question 8: What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families?*

The seven participants identified multiple strategies used to incorporate and build positive relationships with their students’ families. Table 7 outlines the ways relationships were incorporated.
Table 7

What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Procedures &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build a Team Network</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build Connectivity &amp; Trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the question, What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families, four themes were found, and one theme had two sub-themes. The first theme found was communication with sub-themes of email and in-person, where six out of seven participants, 86%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students’ families. MST2 stated, “Open communication with them. So, I feel like. You know, from the moment we are there put into my class, I'm starting my communication, whether it's e-mail or meeting them in person at, you know, school-sponsored events or in the community. I do try to attend some of the events in the Community or the after-school sports events and stuff to talk to their parents, but just open communication with them.” MST2 stated that open communication with the families from the moment their students are put into her class. The form of communication can be email, in person, or school-sponsored events or in the community.
MST3 stated, “I send emails. The e-mail needs to be translated. I use the translator on the laptop. I also sit and make telephone calls. And I provide them with my information, my e-mail and my phone number and extension of the school.” MST6 stated, “When I'm able to, I reach out with positive news, not just when I have a referral, A discipline referral, or something like that.”

The second theme found was consistent procedures and expectations, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students’ families. MST3 stated, “Parents from day one, from orientation day when they first bring their child into my classroom. I let them know what my procedures are, what my expectations are…”

The third theme found was to build a team network, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students’ families. MST3 stated, “…and I ask for their assistance and their help and preparing their students for the next grade.”

The fourth theme found was to build connectivity and trust, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is a strategy to build positive relationships with their students’ families. MST5 stated, “When I first meet them, I make it clear that English is my second language, and I explained to them how I struggled, just like they did when I came to this country, and I didn't know a whole lot of English. Usually, that just clicks the connection with them. In the sense of trust.” MST4 stated, “I try to encourage, no matter. You know, even if language is a barrier, I try to encourage them to reach out to me.”

In summary, the theme of communication, email and in-person was 86%, and was found to be the most effective strategy represented. MST1 stated, “Open communication is a big key. I
probably communicate with my families almost daily about behaviors that may be happening.

Great things that happen in class, new things they've done that they haven't done prior.” MST7 stated, “When students have achievements, say they get a 90 or above on a test or ace test. I make custom-made, achievement awards on Word documents, and send them home to their parents so that they can see and also call for good news as well.”

**Interview Question 9: How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy?**

The seven participants identified multiple ways their classroom reflects culturally responsive pedagogy. Table 8 outlines the ways the classroom is reflected.

**Table 8**

*How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student cultural awareness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion/ask questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of student culture through curriculum</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an environment that reflects students’ cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent procedures/expectations for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reviewing the data, four out of the seven participants, 57%, indicated student cultural awareness, is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST1 stated, “We go by the unique curriculum. So anytime that there may be cultural month. We make sure that we instruct our kids about all the cultures, especially those that are in our school because we have such a wide variety. So, I want to make sure that they get a wide spectrum, and it's not just things that happen just in the United States. There's other holidays, celebrations that happen outside of what the norm is.” MST3 stated, “My classroom is open. I have different. And diverse activities for my students. Because my students are all on different levels. So, there are different activities. I meet my students where they are. So, some students are probably working on one thing at one point in time until they achieve that goal, or at least are able to go to the next level.”

The second theme found was discussion and asking questions, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST5 stated, “I allowed them to speak in their own language, if they know truly little English, I ask questions and allow them to share facts and information about their culture. Some of the things, for example, that I do is, I allowed them to pray in my classroom during the day if they need to, I have mostly Muslim students and respect their religion, their culture.”

The third theme found was integration of student culture through curriculum, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST3 stated that their classroom is open, and they have diverse activities for their students. Each of those activities is on different levels because her students are on different levels.
The fourth theme found was creating an environment that reflects students’ cultures, where four out of seven participants, 57%, stated this is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST2 stated, “I try to create an environment where students feel they can have safe open dialogue and everyone is celebrated and everyone feels like it is an open place for them to be and I don’t feel like I visually represent specific cultures or specific beliefs and things like that, but I do try to make it a safe space for all students to express whatever it is that they need to or want to.” MST4 stated, “I just have to try to have motivational quotes all around… The data wall if you will to. Create like a friendly little competition I put up. Put up the necessary words that students should know for my content area; I try to make it welcome.”

The fifth theme found was collaboration and activities, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST6 stated, “So it's not just lecturing and worksheets, but I try to build in some hands-on things. If I can get kids up and moving around, I try to do that as well. I also try to, if I'm going to be incorporating food, for example, I try to be. Culturally responsive about what my students can eat, what they can touch, knowing if they have dietary restrictions.”

The sixth theme found was consistent procedures and expectations for students, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a strategy to reflect culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. MST7 stated, “When the students walk in, they always have exactly what they need to be starting to work on the board. All of the dates and important details are on the board as well, so it's a wall of either not knowledge of the lesson we're going over important dates coming up and as well as any of the students’ achievements saying, they ace their test, they put those on the wall as well.”
In summary, there are two themes that were found to be the most common strategy represented. The first theme was student cultural awareness, and the second theme was creating an environment that reflects students’ cultures.

**Interview Question 10: How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are?**

The seven participants identified multiple ways the environment the students learn in reflects who they are. Table 9 outlines the ways the environment is reflected.

**Table 9**

*How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Display of student work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>represent their scholarship;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learner identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open environment, accepting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of individuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage and create a stable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, four out of the seven participants, 57%, indicated display of student work represent their scholarship and learner identity, is how the environment their students learn in reflects who they are. MST1 stated, “We try to decorate like our classroom with all of their artwork from their class participation. I make sure that their things are hanging around the classroom and it's not just me decorating the room. I let them help decorate the room so it's a room that they want to be in and that they have collectively helped me decorate.” MST2 stated, “I feel like their work is displayed in their environment. I would say mainly that that's who they
are, I guess displayed through their work.” MST3 stated, “I decorate my classroom with my students’ work.”

The second theme found was an open environment accepting of individuality, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is how the environment their students learn in reflects who they are. MST4 stated, “Well, I guess. You know, I try to have an open environment where they can. Appreciate who they are if that makes sense like. They are open to them, accepting who. They are individually as a student.”

The third theme found was to encourage and create a stable learning environment, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how the environment their students learn in reflects who they are. MST5 stated, “They are allowed to make mistakes and they feel comfortable. Speaking and trying to express themselves. Even though their language, their English is limited, they know my classroom, and when they’re with me, it’s a safe zone.” MST7 stated, “When the environment in the classroom is, is peaceful and easier to learn in that lets us know that the students are becoming more comfortable with one another, and it makes it all of our own respectful, easy to learn environments.”

In summary, the theme of display of student work representing their scholarship and learner identity was found to be the most common strategy represented. MST6 stated, “I have for representation also displaying some of their work? Not, and maybe not just the academic things they do. If they have some downtime, like after a test and they do a coloring page, putting those up on the wall so that they see some of themselves.”
Interview Question 11: How do you invite and involve families in your classroom?

The seven participants identified multiple ways teachers invite and involve families in their classrooms. Table 10 outlines the ways invitation and involvement occurred.

Table 10

How do you invite and involve families in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom celebrations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent volunteer</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remediation/tutoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (Instagram)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent notifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, two out of the seven participants, 29%, indicated classroom celebrations, is how they invite and involve families into their classroom. MST1 stated, “This year we did, and this is just one instance. We did like a Mother's Day celebration, and we had the kids draw them or we had them paint flowers on canvases, and then we had a Mother's Day like little tea for all the moms to come and celebrate with their kids.”
The second theme found was parent volunteers, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is how they invite and involve families into their classroom. MST7 stated, “…always willing to give a helping hand, whether it be extra tutoring for the student ...”

The third theme found was communication with phone call, text messages, emails, conferences, and social media (Instagram) as sub-themes, where six out of seven participants, 86%, stated this is how they invite and involve families into their classroom. The sub-themes showed phone calls, emails, and conferences with two out of six participants (33%) and text messages and social with one out of the six participants (17%) who were within the communication theme. MST4 stated, “I can't say that I really invited them per se, but I do encourage, you know parent-teacher conference involvement.” MST7 stated, “…one-on-one parent-teacher conferences with the parents.” MST2 stated, “Well, parents, I always do communicate that whether it's a mass e-mail or whether it's on the phone, they’re always welcome to come into the classroom.” MST5 stated, “I am usually. Always communicating with them. I use talking points, which is an app that translates directly to their family’s phone and in the form of a text message.” MST3 stated, “Including my families in emails, I let them know when there are activities and things that are going on where they have to translate the e-mail or the letter. I also do phone calls reminding them of when things are coming out.”

The fourth theme found was social media through Instagram, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is how they invite and involve families into their classroom. MST6 stated, “I in the past have maintained social media in Instagram presence. That's a school only, not by not posting students' faces or anything identifying, but things that we've been doing in the. Class so that they can take that home and show, you know, show their adults, their families at home, what we're doing in the classroom.”
In summary, the theme of communication was found to be the most common strategy represented. When the sub-themes were analyzed, phone calls, emails, and conferences all were equally represented, and text messages and social media were equally represented.

**Interview Question 12: How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families?**

The seven participants identified multiple ways to communicate and make an effort to build relationships with their students’ families. Table 11 outlines the ways communication and relationships were established.

**Table 11**  
*How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone calls</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher websites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a social environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, six out of the seven participants, 86%, indicated communication with sub-themes of text messages, emails, phone calls, teacher website, talking points, and notes.
home, is how they communicate and make an effort to build relationships with their students’ families. The sub-themes were analyzed based on the six participants, which revealed that teacher websites and notes home were indicated by one out of the six participants (17%), talking points were indicated by two out of the six participants (33%), text messages were indicated by three out of the six participants (50%), emails were indicated by four out of the six participants (67%), and phone calls were indicated by five out of the six participants (83%). MST1 stated, “I call, we text; we e-mail. I have an incredibly open communication with all of my parents, but calling, texting, and emailing are my big communication pieces.” MST2 stated, “that she called and emailed her students’ families. MST3 stated, “Through emails. Through phone calls and notes home with the students. And just being open and receptive, letting them know I am available, and if I can't get right back to them, then I will get back to them as soon as I possibly can.” MST4 stated, “Probably the best thing is just reaching out via e-mail or telephone. You know, giving them a phone call would be the best only thing really.” MST6 stated, “I have had in the past I've had, you know, talking points app set up, which is really nice because it allows you know, it allows for almost a texting situation which a lot of a lot of people are comfortable with and it automatically translates so that if I have, if I have families. They don't speak English at home. They're still able to communicate with me about their, about their students and what's going on in the classroom and what's going on at home.”

The second theme found was creating a social environment, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is how they communicate and make an effort to build relationships with their students’ families. MST7 stated, “Definitely wishing happy birthdays when they come around and asking the students what their birthdays are. Keeping track of how the students’
families are doing, because sometimes family can have family drama and stuff going on with the family, which can alter how this student is able to work in the classroom.”

In summary, the theme of communication with sub-themes of text messages, emails, phone calls, teacher website, talking points, and notes home was found to be the most common strategy represented. MST5 stated, “Talking points is a major one. Sometimes they like to just hear my voice and they call me, or I call them or. We have a conference call with the parents and students and things so that we're all on the same page. And the parents truly, deeply appreciate the effort of communication because. They feel that in other classes the teachers may be a little bit more hesitant about calling the family because of the language gap.”

*Interview Question 13: In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity?*

The seven participants identified multiple ways to help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity. Table 12 outlines how the methods’ cultural instructional identity was developed.
Table 12

*In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion to obtain an understanding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to share different perspectives; real life connections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide rules/ expectations &amp; procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminate negative reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, four out the seven participants, 57%, indicated encourage students to share different perspectives and make real life connections, is the method they use to develop positive cultural instructional identity. MST2 stated, “I try to, you know, always encourage them and, you know, be honest with them because they don’t always, especially with English language arts, don’t always like everything that we’re doing. They don’t always find it easy because it’s not, but I try to be honest with them.” MST6 stated, “You know, people they can look up to talking about what we can do, like making science real, what they can do with it later in their life…” MST5 stated, “They’re allowed to bring their culture into the classroom as long as it's instructionally sound and instructionally appropriate.”

The second theme found was open discussion to obtain an understanding where three out of the seven participants, 43%, indicated this is the method they use to develop positive cultural
instructional identity. MST1 stated, “We talk about if I know that one of my students celebrates something or believes in something that maybe the other kids don't, we try to talk about it.” MST2 stated, “I try to intrinsically motivate them to care about their learning rather than it being about their grades or something.”

The third theme found was to provide rules, expectations and procedures, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is the method they use to develop positive cultural instructional identity. MST4 stated, “Have a policy in my classroom that everybody is not the same, but we are all equal as human beings, and we should all be treated fairly, and everybody should have a good relationship with everybody else. Mutual respect is what I call it and the first day they come in, I let them know that we will respect each other.”

The fourth theme found was to eliminate negative reinforcement, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is the method they use to develop positive cultural instructional identity. MST7 stated, “Trying to eliminate any negative reinforcements that they may hear or may experience in the past or even in around them, always go with the growth mindset and never a fixed mindset.”

In summary, the theme of encouraging students to share different perspectives and make real life connections were found to be the common strategies represented. MST4 stated, “We teach cultural geography, and we learn about different cultures, and I try to welcome, you know, being a very culturally diverse school. I try to welcome any input from students who could maybe relate to anything that we're discussing in the classroom at that time.”

Interview Question 14: How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion?
The seven participants identified multiple ways to incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion. Table 13 outlines the ways students’ lived experiences were incorporated.

**Table 13**

*How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom discussion/share life experiences in the classroom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiate instruction, units, and text/materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be aware of student actions/behavior changes and show support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, six out of the seven participants, 86%, indicated classroom discussions and sharing experiences in the classroom, is how they incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion. MST1 stated, “That goes back, especially for my population, back to their disabilities. We discuss what their disability is, what it means, and how they learn.” MST4 stated, “Current events are many times brought into my classroom. It may be a daily warm-up. Whether it's something that happens locally or internationally, a lot of times, I won't pull in current events. And explain to them how geography is always in the news and then also bringing that cultural piece.” MST5 stated, “I allow them to share their experiences. I value where they're coming from and what their experiences are. And typically, they are really open about sharing. You know how things were in their country and what was typical and what was atypical school in their country make comparison.” MST6 stated,
“…Science is really, really good for this as far as talking about what they've, experienced in the world, things that they've seen, they have questions about, and we can talk about. We could talk about in a from a science lens. And overarching kind of cultural experience like why? Why are things this way? And get them thinking about why situations may have been the way that they were, why history may have gone the way it's gone, and what we can do. Going forward to maybe, you know, not make sure things don't happen again…”

The second theme found was differentiate instruction, units, and text/materials, where two out of seven, 29%, participants stated this is how they incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion. MST2 stated, “Well, I definitely think that we tailor our units around things that students can relate to so that there is always time for them to feel like, you know, even if there is an instructional skill that we're doing that they don't feel the strongest at… I do feel like we try to keep our units vary and even the text that we read vary. On trend to them, so they change every single year.”

The third theme found was to be aware of student actions/behavior changes and show support, where one out of seven, 14%, participants stated this is how they incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion. MST3 stated, “Most of the students' lives are varied, and I don't know all situations, but when I am aware that something is going on or something is happening, I leave the door open so that students can communicate that change with me.”

In summary, the theme of classroom discussions and sharing experiences in the classroom was found to be the most common strategy represented. MST7 advised in math this can be a little tricky. An example given was a student struggling with understanding sales tax and discounts. MST7 stated “For one example, for one student, he was having trouble
understanding how sales tax and discounts and everything. It works well, he actually went shopping with his family for Christmas shopping a while back. And he was, he note. I was like, OK, well, you saw the signs where they said 50% off and they markup mark down and the sales you saw the sales tax and the checks and everything. He was like, yes, but I know that meant and then it was easier to show him where these terms came from in real life and then show them. Tell him the mathematical way of doing it. You are too. When you break stuff down for students based off of what they experience like that, which I do a lot of examples of that just by the depending on what the kid has experienced, it's a lot easier for them, for it to click in their head.”

*Interview Question 15: In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives?*

The seven participants identified multiple ways to foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives. Table 14 outlines the ways critical and alternative perspectives were considered.

**Table 14**

*In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open dialogue/open-ended questions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge and differentiate students’ critical/social thinking skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to be creative and free expression</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reviewing the data, three out of seven participants, 43%, indicated open dialogue and open-ended questions is how they fostered their students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives. MST2 stated, “I feel like we are talking about things that maybe not every student has experience or has an experience with, but it is something that I like to open the conversation up about and make them think critically like.” MST6 stated, “Asking them lots of questions… Talking about both sides, if there is. For example, we talked about natural resources and presentation. We present both sides of you, knowing why people might think this is good from a monetary standpoint or a resources standpoint. Versus what? What's actually good for the environment…”

The second theme found was to challenge and differentiate students’ critical/social thinking skills, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how they fostered their students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives. MST3 stated, “I like to challenge my students and to see where they are, and once I understand and know where they are academically, I will get activities for them to do. So, I have variety and different levels of activities that have exposed them to some of these are.” MST7 stated, “That I always tell the students that there's a million ways you can solve a math problem. Many ways that you can solve it are based on race. Some problems rely on creative proportions, but you don't always necessarily have to create one. If the student is having trouble solving it one way, there's another simple, more simple way for them to solve it as well.”

The third theme found was free to be creative and free expression, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how they fostered their students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives. MST1 stated, “Okay, so say I'm learning about math. Not all of my kids can. Just sit down and write a math problem, so we might take things that they like,
options that they like. So, if one of my kids likes pizza and we're doing fractions, I'm going to work that eight slice of pizza into their fraction lesson because it will help them better understand if it's something to which they can relate.” MST5 stated, “Again, given them the freedom to just be creative and allow them to use what they know, for example. A student may not be able to write in English what they want to say or what they want to express, so they might be able to draw pictures instead, or write it in their own language.”

In summary, the theme of open dialogue and open-ended questions was found to be the most common strategy represented. MST4 stated, “The critical thinking, I definitely try to incorporate open-ended questions. Throughout the time, like, you know, what do you think you know, have them look at and analyze things ahead of time and ask them like. What do you think? About this versus, you know, like the before and after scenario if that makes sense.”

**Interview Question 16: How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected?**

The seven participants identified multiple ways they established a classroom culture where diversity is respected. Table 15 outlines the ways classroom culture diversity was established.
### Table 15

*How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open/organic discussion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect for all adults and student/promote positive peer interactions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caution surrounding any form of bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay special attention to each student’s differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, three out of the seven participants, 43%, indicated open and organic discussion, is how they establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected. MST1 stated, “We have discussions. I myself am part of the LGBTQ community. So, you know, we talk, … but I want to make sure that when they go out into the world, they understand that there's a diverse culture out there and not everybody is Black and White. There's many cultures about skin differences and maybe eye color differences. When I'm one of my kids calls me pink, and she calls other people tan, and some people are brown, so we talk. About the differences in skin color, hair texture and especially about, you know, someone might not be able to sit in here while we're eating at different times depending on what religion they are and whether they have to fast during a certain time.” MST6 stated, “I don't tolerate any kind of bullying at all. So, picking on somebody for their, you know, for any kind of difference, whether it's race, religion, ability, it is not going to be tolerated and then showing, you know, their organic conversations that come up
about different things that we're able to say, hey, this is actually kind of an asset… that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.”

The second theme found was mutual respect for all adults and students and promote positive peer interactions, where five out of seven participants, 71%, stated this is how they establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected. MST2 stated, “I don't let them do mean things to each other. I am always on them about, you know, being respectful towards each other. And just because you don't agree with something does not mean you don't have to be respectful of something.” MST5 said, “I make it clear to them that we are all English language learners sometimes. We all have an accent, we all speak a little differently, and that's okay.” MST4 stated, “I just tried to nip any type of. Comments immediately. Try to nip those. In the bud right away. Try to explain that we need to be accepting. No matter what our background…”

The third theme found was caution surrounding any form of bias, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is how they establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected. MST3 stated, “That I do the mutual respect…” MST7 said, “… make this a respectful, learning environment, which will be comfortable for everybody.”

The fourth theme found was to pay special attention to each student’s differences, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is how they establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected. MST6 stated, “I don't tolerate any kind of bullying at all. So, picking on somebody for their, you know, for any kind of difference, whether it's race, religion, ability, it is not going to be tolerated and then showing, you know, their organic conversations that come up about different things that we're able to say, hey, this is actually kind of an asset… that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.”
In summary, the theme of mutual respect for all adults and students and promoting positive peer interactions was found to be the most common strategy represented. MST2 said, “…I think that’s something that I established on day one. That, you know, respect is mutual in the classroom...” MST7 said, “Go by the Golden Rule...Treat others the way you would like to be treated.”

*Interview Question 17: How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values?*

The seven participants identified multiple ways they established a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. Table 16 outlines the ways classroom culture accounts for all diverse learners’ values was established.

**Table 16**

*How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MST1</th>
<th>MST2</th>
<th>MST3</th>
<th>MST4</th>
<th>MST5</th>
<th>MST6</th>
<th>MST7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiate based on needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate culture experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide an open and accepting environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring communication is key</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an environment safe for sharing of cultural experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reviewing the data, one out of the seven participants, 14%, indicated that differentiation based on student needs is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for
all diverse learners’ values. MST1 stated, “So we figure in my classroom because it is a self-contained autism classroom. Some of my kids can use computers, some can’t. So, we have to figure out whether they need a paper copy of the assignment we’re doing, whether they can do it on the computer, whether someone has to assist them, and they get choice cards on answers to, say, work.”

The second theme found was to incorporate culture experiences, where four out of seven participants, 57%, stated this is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST3 stated, “try to teach them to try to understand and that everybody’s not the same. Everybody does some things differently, and everybody should have an opportunity to do their work whether they do it slowly or they are quick at doing it, whether they easily understand where it takes a while. But I try to plan so that the activities include everyone in within the classroom.” MST2 stated, “…Smaller populations, our minority populations, and we try, or I try to incorporate all of that. So, you know, sometimes, like I said, we’re learning about things that not every kid has experienced or will ever experience. But you know, we do try to incorporate everyone’s culture, diverse situations into all of it.”

The third theme found was provide an open and accepting environment, where four out of seven participants, 57%, stated this is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST5 stated, “Again, acceptance and acceptance and knowing that safe place, and they are part of the classroom.”

The fourth theme found was to open dialogue, where two out of seven participants, 29%, stated this is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST4 stated, “My expectation is respect, no matter what a person’s values are. I just encourage
students to understand that everybody comes from different backgrounds and have different values and to be respectful of that.”

The fifth theme found was ensuring communication is key, where one out of seven participants, 14%, stated this is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST6 said, “A lot of that comes down to just talking with the kids, having conversations with them and making sure you know, establishing boundaries in the 1st place, establishing guidelines of how we'll be, how we speak to one another.”

The sixth theme found was to create an environment safe for sharing cultural experiences, where four out of seven participants, 57%, stated this is a way to establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST7 stated, “That everybody is everybody comes from different backgrounds, so you have to respect their backgrounds…”

In summary, the themes of incorporate culture experiences, provide an open and accepting environment, and create an environment safe for sharing cultural experiences was found to be mutually common strategies for establishing a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values. MST7 stated, “… if you're unsure about it, you can either ask questions, but you still have to ask it in a respectful manner…”

Summary

The interview participants' responses provided a variety of strategies and similar perspectives for establishing relationships and incorporating a culturally responsive lens, pedagogy, and communication, including (a) establishing relationships with students, (b) establishing relationships with families, (c) culturally responsive pedagogy, (d) considering alternative perspectives and fostering critical thinking, and (e) culturally responsive learning
Engagement in cultural awareness is a perspective that the participants identified as effective when building relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens. When incorporated into the classroom, the students respond and are engaged. All participants, in some format of an answer, stated that communication or open discussion is an essential strategy or method to achieve and incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to build and maintain positive relationships with students, families, and peers. Classroom discussions and sharing life experiences also allow students to relate and make connections to their academics, which helps them to gain a better understanding. Exhibiting mutual respect for all adults and students and promoting positive peer interactions is a strategy that allows students to show adults and their peers respect and will enable students to learn about each other’s culture.

The middle school teachers in this study showed a strong understanding and commitment to the students and community they served. Their reflections provided a profound knowledge of their students’ needs regarding cultural diversity, the importance of ensuring that diversity is prevalent within the classroom, and establishing relationships between students and their families. The participants exemplified how engaged, caring, and serious they were about their students and education. The participants demonstrated an intense understanding of the multiple cultures, diversity, peer relationships, and the importance of having an awareness of cultural diversity included in the instruction daily to establish a strong culturally responsive pedagogy.

The data presented in Chapter 4 provided a foundation for understanding the available strategies currently being used within the classroom. The experiences reflected exhibited participants’ consistency with students regarding communication to build relationships with students’ families and guaranteeing the students’ environment they learn in reflects who they are. Results demonstrated that these individuals connect to the students, their families, and the
diversity within their school community. These participants used the opportunity to understand the importance of relationship building, the impact of the students’ daily lives on their education, and the significance of communication. Chapter 5 centers on the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 5
Findings, Implications, and Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. The research question for this study is: How do middle school teachers incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices to enhance the learning experience, foster positive relationships with students, engage with families, and collaborate effectively with peers?

Chapter 5 includes the five major findings, implications, and recommendations for future researchers. The five findings indicate that over 50% of the participants interviewed noted the respective strategies necessary for incorporating culturally responsive pedagogical practices to build and maintain positive relationships, along with an understanding that the students’ lived experiences can impact their educational knowledge and learning.

Finding 1

*Teachers develop an awareness for students’ cultural backgrounds through building relationships with students and families with information obtained through individual student interest inventory surveys.* Participants said that being aware of the cultural backgrounds of students played a critical role in establishing meaningful relationships. They also highlighted the significance of utilizing student interest inventory surveys as a means to understand individuality, contributing to the establishment of strong connections. When asked how have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens, the seven
participants responded in various ways with some providing more than one answer (see Table 5). Seven out of the seven participants indicated they utilized awareness of students’ cultures. Four of the seven (57%) indicated they used student interest inventory surveys to learn about individuality. Another four out of seven (57%) indicated they customize curriculum to reflect student culture and pedagogy.

When asked what strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students, the seven participants responded in various ways with some providing more than one answer (see Table 6). Six out of the seven (86%), indicated they use communication methods to build positive relationships with their students. Also, four out seven (57%) indicated they use positive reinforcement and praise.

This finding is aligned with prior research that indicated teachers can create meaningful relationships to ensure they can respond to students in multiple ways and care for their students, not about their students (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Tanase (2021) advised that, when educators incorporated the cultural backgrounds and daily experiences of their students into the learning process, they recognize the authenticity of their students' real-life encounters. Krasnoff (2016) feels that when teachers greet students by their names, it instills a sense of empowerment and respect as they step into the classroom. According to Gaias et al. (2019), communication with students in culturally stable ways accommodates and incorporates students' cultural and family backgrounds and encourages engagement and involvement through building close, caring, and personal relationships to support classroom management.

Finding 2

Teachers establish positive relationships with their students’ families through effective
communication strategies. Participants highlighted the importance of effective communication in building relationships with students' families, emphasizing the use of diverse methods such as phone calls, text messages, emails, and conferences. When asked what strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 7). Six out of the seven (86%) participants responded with communication and provided multiple methods. When asked how do you invite and involve families in your classroom, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 10). Six out of the seven (86%) participants responded with communication and provided various methods. When asked how do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 11). Six out of the seven (86%) participants responded with communication and provided various methods. Some of the methods that were mentioned: email, phone calls, text messages, conferences, and teacher websites.

According to Brown Ruiz & Scott (2021), when an educator avoids dialogue about a student’s well-being and their life outside of school, this limits a transition team’s ability to build true and genuine relationships. According to Fullerton (2022), the pandemic opened the world to video conferencing. This type of meeting is simple and very time-effective, as the parents can choose to hold this meeting wherever they would like (Fullerton, 2022). The ideal initiative for teachers would be to hold a meeting with families prior to the start of school, within the semester, or at any time a parent requests (Fullerton, 2022). Collaboration among colleagues, education professionals, and families take place to ensure student success (Krasnoff, 2016).
Finding 3

*Teachers utilize culturally responsive pedagogy by creating an environment that reflects students’ identity and making real-world connections.* Participants said that incorporating student cultural awareness into their classrooms was a key aspect of reflecting culturally responsive pedagogy. They emphasized that creating an environment aligned with students’ cultures was instrumental in embodying culturally responsive pedagogy within the classroom.

When asked how does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 8). Four out of the seven (57%) participants responded with student cultural awareness. Also, four out of seven (57%) participants responded by creating an environment that reflects students’ cultures. When asked how does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are, the seven participants responded in various ways (see Table 9). Four out of the seven (57%) participants responded with display of student work representing their scholarship and learner identity. When asked in what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural identity, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 12). Four out of the seven (57%) participants responded by encouraging students to share different perspectives and make real life connections. When asked how do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 13). Six out of the seven (86%) participants responded with classroom discussion by sharing life experiences.

According to Paris (2012), the pedagogical approach in the classroom should align with cultural experiences and uphold students by nurturing their cultural elements. Teachers can
modify their lessons to be inclusive, encouraging students to actively participate (Bergantz, 2021). Educators incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their teaching and ensure that classroom visuals align with culturally pertinent curricula (Gay, 2000; Will & Najarro, 2022). Bryd-Wright (2020) advised that educators incorporating clear communication for instructional purposes is exemplifying pedagogical practices.

Finding 4

*Teachers utilize culturally responsive pedagogy by encouraging students to consider alternatives differing from their own experiences through open dialogue, open-ended questions, and sharing life experiences, fostering critical thinking.* Participants advised that engaging in discussions and posing questions, and collaborative actives fosters culturally responsive pedagogy, encouraging an approach that considers alternative perspectives and nurtures critical thinking. They also said that open discussions directed at understanding promote the same pedagogical practice. When asked how does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 8). Two out of the seven (29%) participants responded with discussion and asking questions. Also, two out of seven (29%) participants responded by collaboration and activities. When asked in what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural identity, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 12). Three out of the seven (43%) participants responded by open discussions to obtain an understanding. Also, four out of the seven (57%) participants responded by encouraging students to share different perspectives and make real life connections. When asked how do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion, the seven participants responded in various ways with
some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 13). Six out of the seven (86%) participants responded with classroom discussion by sharing life experiences. When asked in what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives, the seven participants responded in various ways (see Table 14). Three out of the seven (43%) participants responded with open dialogue and open-ended questions. Also, two out of the seven (29%) responded with challenge and differentiate students’ critical and social thinking skills. When asked how do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 15). Three out of the seven (43%) participants responded with open and organic discussions. When asked how do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 16). Four out of the seven (57%) participants responded by incorporating culture experiences. Another four out of seven (57%) participants responded by creating an environment that is accepting and open to the sharing of cultural experiences.

This finding is aligned with prior research that indicated teachers have to be able to express a concern for their well-being, engage in activities that positively affect the students, and show they care about their experiences (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). When teachers use real-life experiences to connect to their instruction, this helps to strengthen the student’s motivation for learning (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Pedagogical outcomes occur when educators connect content with students’ life experiences (Hoffman, 2018b). A culturally responsive teacher engages students in the content they present successfully and finds a way for students to remain focused on their roadmap for student success (Stowe, 2017).
Finding 5

*Teachers establish a culturally responsive learning environment by modeling high level of mutual respect for all adults and students and promoting positive peer interactions.*

Participants emphasized that cultural awareness is instrumental in establishing a classroom conducive to culturally responsive learning. Mutual respect demonstrated towards all adults and students was identified as another key element in establishing a culturally responsive learning classroom. When asked how have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens, the seven participants responded in various ways with some providing more than one answer (see Table 5). Seven out of the seven participants indicated they used awareness of students’ cultures. When asked what strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students, the seven participants responded in various ways with some providing more than one answer (see Table 6). Four out seven (57%) indicated they use positive reinforcement and praise. When asked how do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 15). Five out of the seven (71%) participants responded with mutual respect for all adults and students and promoting positive peer interactions. When asked how do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values, the seven participants responded in various ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 16). Four out of the seven (57%) participants responded by incorporating culture experiences. Another four out of seven (57%) participants responded by creating an environment that is accepting and open to the sharing of cultural experiences.

Krasnoff (2016) advised that the atmosphere becomes unwelcoming when students require culturally fitting images, posters, or other classroom resources. Creating a welcoming
classroom environment ensures that students are motivated to engage in learning (Krasnoff, 2016). According to Krasnoff (2016), teachers rearrange their classrooms to purposely accommodate discussion within the classroom and build relationships between their students. Conversations and communication transpire within a culturally responsive classroom, when students, teachers, and parents are engaged in discussions while all parties listen respectfully and care (Bennett et al., 2018).

**Summary of Findings**

The findings were derived from the open-ended protocol interview question responses. This study confirmed that the participants interviewed demonstrated multiple similar strategies available regarding communication, classroom discussion, positive reinforcement and praise, and cultural awareness and cultural diversity. All participants reported that established cultural awareness contributed to their ability to establish relationships with their students through a culturally responsive lens.

Findings from this study highlight the importance of incorporating students' cultural diversity into pedagogical strategies, emphasizing the recognition of diverse cultural backgrounds. Establishing positive relationships with students' families is utilized as a critical aspect, with effective communication strategies being instrumental in this process. Participants emphasized the utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy, encompassing the building of student cultural awareness, creating identity-affirming environments, and establishing real-world connections. Furthermore, the promotion of culturally responsive pedagogy is emphasized through encouraging alternative perspectives, fostering critical thinking, and facilitating open dialogue, open-ended questions, and sharing life experiences. The establishment of a culturally
responsive learning environment is seen as pivotal, with a high level of mutual respect exhibited for all adults and students, along with the promotion of positive peer interactions. Collectively, these findings advocate for a comprehensive and inclusive educational approach that embraces cultural diversity, effective communication, and the promotion of a positive and respectful learning environment.

**Implications for Practice**

In consideration of the findings of this study, five implications for practitioners have emerged.

**Implication 1**

**School divisions and building administrators should continually participate in cultural competence training.** This implication is associated with Finding 1. The participants provided multiple methods for building relationships with their students using a culturally responsive lens. This training can include awareness of cultural norms, communication styles, and learning preferences, enabling teachers to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive classroom environment. During their discussion, they shared ways that they established relationships and focused on their individual students. School-level administrators should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers on cultural competence. The workshops, seminars, and training sessions can help educators continuously enhance their understanding of cultural diversity and refine their teaching practices accordingly. District-level administrators should develop district-wide policies that emphasize cultural competence as a key aspect of education. Those policies can provide guidelines and resources for teachers and administrators to promote cultural inclusivity in classrooms across the district.
Impact 2

School divisions and building administrators should provide teachers with time and professional development to establish regular and consistent communication channels with students' families to build positive relationships. This implication is associated with Finding 2. The communication can include emails, newsletters, or communication platforms that provide updates on classroom activities, assignments, and student progress. Consistency helps build trust and keeps families informed. The participants provided multiple communication methods for building relationships between students’ families. School-level administrators should organize workshops or informational sessions for families to educate them about the school's communication practices. These sessions will provide guidance on accessing online platforms, understanding grading systems, and staying engaged in their child's education. District-level administrators should develop consistent communication policies at the district level to ensure that all schools follow standardized practices. Those policies can provide guidelines for effective communication, taking into account cultural diversity and accessibility needs.

Impact 3

School divisions and building administrators should provide teachers with time and professional development to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and establish real-world connections between the curriculum and students' lived experiences. This implication is associated with Finding 3. The teachers could relate lessons to current events, cultural celebrations, or community issues to make learning more relevant and engaging. School-level administrators should actively work toward building a diverse teaching staff. A teaching team that reflects the cultural diversity of the student population can provide a broader range of
perspectives and enrich the learning experience. District-level administrators should ensure equitable access to learning materials by providing resources that represent a diverse range of cultures and perspectives. Collaborate with publishers, educators, and content creators to develop inclusive educational materials.

Implication 4

School divisions and building administrators should provide time for teachers to incorporate open-ended questions and alternative perspectives into lessons to stimulate critical thinking. This implication is associated with Finding 4. Teachers should encourage students to explore multiple perspectives and engage in thoughtful discussions that go beyond simple answers. School-level administrators should provide professional development opportunities for teachers on strategies for facilitating open dialogue, promoting critical thinking, and handling diverse perspectives in the classroom. District-level administrators should develop district-wide plans that emphasize the importance of promoting critical thinking, considering alternative perspectives, and fostering open dialogue in classrooms. Ensure that these plans guide teaching practices across all schools.

Implication 5

Building-level administrators should foster a school culture that embraces diverse values by establishing and consistently reinforcing clear expectations of respect for all students and adults. This implication is associated with Finding 5. Teachers should model and promote a high level of mutual respect between all adults and students in the classroom. Create clear expectations for respectful communication and behavior, emphasizing the importance of treating
everyone with dignity. School-level administrators should conduct regular climate assessments to gauge the level of mutual respect and positive interactions within the school. Gather feedback from students, teachers, and families to identify areas for improvement and celebrate successes. District-level administrators should facilitate collaborative networks among schools within the district to share successful practices related to cultural responsiveness, positive reinforcement, and promoting mutual respect. Encourage a district-wide approach to fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments.

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

Several recommendations for future studies are proposed to enhance the intensity and span of research in this area. Firstly, expanding the sample size beyond the current seven participants is suggested. A larger and more diverse participant pool could contribute to more consistent findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used by educators in various contexts.

Secondly, incorporating focus groups for interviews is recommended. This method can serve to stimulate participants' memories, potentially revealing additional strategies, proven data, and methods employed in their teaching practices. The interactive nature of focus group discussions may prompt richer insights and generate a more nuanced understanding of the cultural responsiveness strategies employed by educators. Another valuable suggestion is to include school administrators as participants in future studies. This addition can provide a distinct perspective on the results, offering insights that may be more comprehensive or delve into deeper aspects of cultural responsiveness in educational settings.
In terms of specific topics for future research, exploring the effectiveness of state training programs aimed at cultivating culturally competent educators is proposed. Investigating how school districts ensure the implementation of culturally responsive frameworks in classrooms is another important avenue for research. Additionally, delving into educators' perspectives on culturally responsive teaching, including their attitudes, challenges, and successes, could offer valuable insights for enhancing educational practices. Overall, these recommendations intend to build upon the current study's foundation and contribute to a more robust understanding of cultural responsiveness in education.

Summary

Findings from this study showed how the teachers were able to build relationships with their students, students' families, and the community. The teachers expressed how they established the relationships with strategies and methods based on their knowledge. The participants stated that they used multiple strategies to be successful but felt they had achieved success with the methods they were using and the responses from the students and families.

The teachers in this study discussed the methods and the importance of communication. Most of the teachers advised that email and text were the most effective methods of communication and phone calls were not as effective, but they were used as a last resort. They also took the opportunity to text their family’s information when needed and received responses of confirmation.

Teachers in this study discussed strategies and methods to establish a classroom environment where diversity is fully respected and valued. The teachers allowed the students to
display their own work, whether it was directly from the class, another class, or created during
downtime. The expectation was set at the beginning of the school year to not disrespect peers for
the majority of teachers. However, some teachers did not set an expectation and managed the
situation as it took place.

This study was designed to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize
when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships
with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in
the classroom. Suggestions for future study in this area include increasing the sample size and
interviews to be focus groups instead of individuals to ignite the participants’ memory of
additional strategies, proven data, and methods used, and increase their discussion points.
Researchers who desire to conduct a future study in this area can explore the effectiveness of
state training to be a culturally competent educator, how school districts ensure educators are
using the culturally responsive framework in their classrooms, and how educators feel about
culturally responsive teaching.

**Personal Reflections**

The teachers in this study have successfully met the licensure requirements for teaching
in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This research provided a valuable opportunity to gain insights
into the strategies retained in their classrooms and highlighted the essential role of data in
verifying the effectiveness and utilization of culturally responsive teaching. These educators
expressed genuine care, patience, and a profound understanding of both their students and their
families.
In order to ensure that all staff are professionally equipped and ready to serve students equitably, state leaders can offer training and assistance. Similarly, leaders at the school division level can conduct training sessions to prepare their staff for educating students in a culturally responsive manner. The provision of such training on an ongoing basis by both state and school division leaders can contribute to continuous professional development within the educational community.

My exploration into the history of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) revealed that it is not a recent concept but is actively applied throughout the U.S. to support students from diverse cultures. A crucial realization is that, for the effective implementation of CRP, consistency is paramount. Ongoing and uniform training for all educators is necessary to keep them well-versed in pedagogical strategies that benefit their students.

To enhance the scope of future research, it is advisable to expand the sample size beyond the current dimensions exhibited in the current research, potentially encompassing multiple school districts. Engaging focus groups for interviews and involving school administrators as participants could provide valuable feedback, representing adjustments that I would make for a more comprehensive study.

I'm currently unsure about what will come next. While investigating different opportunities, I have not committed to any specific ideas yet. Although I've inquired about pursuing an additional degree, I would like to take some personal time before making any definitive decisions.
About: NAEP. Retrieved November 11, 2022, National Center for Education Statistics.

https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/


https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-014-0651-8


https://doi.org/10.9741/2161-2978.1058

https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/how-to-engage-culturally-relevant-pedagogy

Evers, J., Kara West, & Emdash Editing (Eds.). (2023). *Urban area. Education*.  
https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/urban-area/

Fantasia. (2016). Necessary [Song]. Fantasia - Necessary (Live on Joyful Noise) - YouTube


https://www.edutopia.org/article/improving-our-cultural-competence-chris-lehmann/

teacher educators (pp. 76-93). Taylor and Francis.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843239


https://www.theedadvocate.org/what-is-culturally-responsive-pedagogy/


*National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) home page, part of the U.S. Department of Education.* (November 11, 2022) National Center for Education Statistics.

https://nces.ed.gov/


https://legiscan.com/VA/text/HB1904/id/2232810


https://legiscan.com/VA/text/SB1196/id/2237505

Virginia schools. (November 19, 2022). Virginia Department of Education

https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/virginia-schools


Yin, R.-K. (2011). Qualitative research from start to finish. The Guilford Press.

Appendix A: Email to Deputy Superintendent to Request Permission to Conduct Study

Subject Line: Requesting Permission to Conduct Study

Date: TBD

Dear:

My name is Kisha Frye, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University [Online Cohort]. The title of my dissertation is Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships. The purpose of this letter is to provide an overview of my study and to request your permission to conduct the research within Fredericksburg City Public Schools. I am conducting a research study to identify the strategies that middle school teachers utilize when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to build positive relationships with students and families while building and maintaining positive student-peer relationships in the classroom. I am interested in obtaining information that will identify strategies to build positive relationships with students and families. This information will assist teachers and educators in building positive relationships with students and families and maintaining positive peer relationships through culturally responsive pedagogy.

This qualitative study includes a 30–45-minute interview with needed participants conducted by me. I would like to interview middle school teachers, which will include general education, special education teachers, and exploratory teachers. Please know that any teacher who participates will not do so during their required teaching hours. A written report of the study will be provided upon completion.
Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to receiving your permission to conduct the study. Please, feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Kisha T. Frye

Doctoral Candidate

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Appendix B: Email to Principal, Requesting Permission to Conduct Study

Email Subject Line: Recruitment for Participation in Utilizing Practices for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships through Strategies Used

Dear ________________,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University [Online Cohort]. The title of my research is Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships. The topic of my dissertation study focuses on the strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families, and peers, through culturally responsive pedagogy. I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you. Criteria for participating in this study include (1) classroom teachers and (2) must have one or more years of teaching experience.

Attached is the approval letter from Fredericksburg City Public Schools. Please send me a list of teachers who meet the above criteria.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Please email me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Kisha T. Frye
Doctoral Candidate

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Appendix C: Informed Consent for the Interview

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Jodie L. Brinkmann

Investigator: Kisha T. Frye

IRB# and Title of Study: Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech, working under Dr. Jodie L. Brinkmann’s direction. I am conducting this research as part of my coursework.

➢ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an interview. The topic of my dissertation study focuses on strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families, and peers, through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Criteria for participating in this study include (1) classroom teachers and (2) must have one or more years of teaching experience. This study will be a basic qualitative study that will include interviews lasting 30–45 minutes with participants, conducted by me (investigator), Kisha T. Frye, in person or via an electronic platform, Zoom. Each interview will be audio-recorded to transcribe responses for data analysis. I would like to interview general education and special education teachers. At no time will their involvement disrupt their daily teaching responsibilities. The research study will conform to the requirements set forth by the Virginia Tech IRB. Additionally, findings from this study may be published and potentially prove beneficial to teachers, administrators, and board members seeking to support public education.

The study should take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time.

The risk associated with this study is the possible awareness of uncomfortable and unpleasant thoughts associated with the past or the present may arise or increase. The study has minimal risks that are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any
questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

➢ CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be audio-recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed. The researchers will code the transcripts using a pseudonym (false name). The recordings will be uploaded to a secure, password-protected computer in the researcher’s office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

➢ WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kisha T. Frye or Dr. Jodie L. Brinkmann. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because you are participating in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office.

*Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.*
Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol on Building Positive Relationships

**Title of the Research Study:** Perceptions of How Middle School Teachers Utilize Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice for Positive Student, Family, and Peer Relationships

**Principal Investigator:** Jodie L. Brinkmann, Ph.D., Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

**Co-Investigator:** Kisha T. Frye, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

*Each interview will be conducted in person or through Zoom by Kisha T. Frye.*

**Interviewer:**

I want to begin by first saying “thank you” for meeting with me and allowing me to conduct my research study through this interview comprehensively. Before we fully begin, please allow me to tell you about this study. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify strategies used to build positive relationships with students and families and provide instruction to students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational learning setting through culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. This qualitative study identifies the strategies used by middle school teachers. Today your participation will take 30-45 minutes. Your responses will be analyzed and reviewed for commonalities, differences, and necessities.

This interview is being recorded via audio only, which means all cameras will be turned off. A fictitious name will document your information shared. This interview will be transcribed, and you will receive the transcription and have the opportunity to change what you believe is necessary once reviewed.

Opening Statement: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. If at any time you feel that you would like to be a participant no longer, you become uncomfortable, or do not wish to answer questions; please let me know. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. Please tell me your highest level of education.
2. How many years of service do you have teaching?
3. What grade level do you currently teach?
4. What content area(s) are you currently teaching?
5. Are you currently a General Education, Special Education, or Other (explain) teacher?

6. How have you established relationships with your students using a culturally responsive lens?

7. What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students?

8. What strategies do you incorporate to build positive relationships with your students’ families?

9. How does your classroom reflect culturally responsive pedagogy?

10. How does the environment your students learn in reflect who they are?

11. How do you invite and involve families in your classroom?

12. How do you communicate and make an effort to build relationships with your students’ families?

13. In what ways do you help students develop a positive cultural instructional identity?

14. Current events impact students, their families, and communities and affect every aspect of our lives. How do you incorporate students’ lived experiences to contribute to instruction and discussion?

15. In what ways do you foster students to think critically and consider alternative perspectives?

16. How do you establish a classroom culture where diversity is respected?

17. How do you establish a classroom culture that accounts for all diverse learners’ values?

At the end of the interview:

Thank you so much for your time, participation, and willingness to share your strategies, stories, and open discussion. I will share the transcript with you and will be happy to share the data analysis with you if you are interested in the dissertation defense that has been completed.
Appendix E: CITI Program Certificates

This is to certify that:

Kisha Frye

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Research Study Design (RSD)
  (Curriculum Group)
Research Study Design (RSD)
  (Course Learner Group)
  1 - Basic Course
  (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?w252b6871-384d-46dd-93c5-4c057557d041-38397509

CITI Program

Completion Date 18-Mar-2023
Expiration Date 18-Mar-2026
Record ID 38397509

This is to certify that:

Kisha Frye

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research
  (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research
  (Course Learner Group)
  2 - Refresher course
  (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?w5f9be71a-7c8b-47a1-ac86-92228b203d94-56497470

CITI Program

Completion Date 29-Oct-2023
Expiration Date 29-Oct-2026
Record ID 56497470