Culturally-Responsive Teaching in Secondary ELA Classrooms

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Culturally-responsive teaching is the recognition of cultural influences on students' learning, as well as the practice of incorporating texts, topics, and learning tasks that bridge the gaps between students' cultures (and those of their peers) and the motivation they can find by seeing themselves reflected in course content. The three main components of this project will be: scholarly research, surveys of in-service teachers, and a culminating "best practices" guide for practicing teachers. The objective of this project is to investigate how, in a field dominated by white, middle-class people, secondary English teachers can responsibly navigate culturally-responsive teaching at all levels of instruction. Our faculty and alumni mention the term "culturally-responsive teaching" in passing or as something we are expected to just know how to do, but I've found that many preservice teachers (myself included) do not have the background knowledge to responsibly do this in our own classrooms. This study aims to discover what secondary English teachers in Indiana know about culturally-responsive teaching and how we can go about developing a stronger presence in our classrooms.

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Process Analysis Statement

In working on this Senior Honors Thesis, I was initially quite nervous to embark on this undertaking. This would be the largest research project that I have ever worked on, and my advisor and I agreed that it would be the most beneficial to me to set deadlines that I could work backwards from throughout the semester. We split the thesis into three parts: a literature analysis of some of the foremost research on culturally-responsive teaching, an analysis of the data that I collected from teachers around the state, and a synthesis of the first two parts to create a sort of guidebook for teachers to use. The framework that my advisor and I established helped to break down this lengthy task into more feasible chunks that I could work on without feeling overwhelmed by the entire project all at once.

The data collection that I conducted was first approved by the Institutional Research Board, which provided a thorough and informative experience on getting research projects approved. Once the paperwork and training was exempted, I set out to collect survey responses from secondary English teachers around the state of Indiana. Since the approval paperwork took longer than I expected, I sent out my survey at a date later than I had initially anticipated. The responses that I collected were helpful for the project, but we did have trouble getting larger numbers of teacher responses.

At the time that the initial survey was sent out, teachers were getting ready to head back to school and had many other stressors to deal with going back into the year, so I got lower engagement with the survey than I had hoped to get earlier in the summer. The responses that I did collect still represented a large portion of teachers, all from different areas of the state and different types of schools, so I feel that even with the lower number of responses, I was still able to garner a range of experiences from teachers around the state. These initial responses were

incredibly helpful when recruiting survey participants for individual interviews, as I was not limited to a single area or type of school when asking for participants.

Overall, the process of working on this project challenged me more than I expected it to. After working out a framework and timeline with my advisor, I felt confident that I could accomplish everything exactly when I needed to and that I would not run into many problems along the way. Then, life happened: I got sick close to deadlines, I presented at a conference out of town and had limited internet access, etc. Things popped up that inhibited my ability to adhere to these deadlines exactly, which in the past, would be something I would have great difficulty accepting. After working to adjust some deadlines and start my revisions on the first drafts of my final product, I felt much more confident about my ability to do this well.

This process also challenged me to get over my inclination to procrastinate working on the drafts until the last minute. Having deadlines occur throughout the semester and broken-down chunks of the writing to do, I was able to schedule time throughout my busy weeks to work so that I was not scrambling at the last second to get everything done. Now, that may have sometimes happened as those unexpected life incidents popped up, but overall, this project helped me to overcome my procrastination in ways that I have not been able to do otherwise throughout my undergraduate studies.

The greatest challenge that I faced along the way of working on this project was in the data collection at the beginning of the semester. I was able to submit everything that I needed in order to start the survey and interview processes, but the time of year that I was working with complicated the number of responses that I was able to get from teachers. As I stated before, I sent out the survey right before the school year began, so it was difficult to get the teacher engagement that I had hoped for; however, this turned out to be less problematic than I had

feared. With the responses and interviews that I collected, I had a fairly representative pool of data to use. The number of teachers who responded represented the major school environments that we have here in Indiana (rural, suburban, and urban), and they also represented varying levels of experience as classroom teachers. Respondents' experience levels ranged from 3 years in the classroom to 27 years.

I chose to investigate culturally-responsive teaching because it was, and still remains, something that many teachers in Indiana do not clearly understand until they are already in their classrooms. From the survey responses and interviews, it became clear that culturally-responsive teaching is something that good teachers naturally end up doing, as we get to know our students and our school and community environments, but it is not something that is typically taught in teacher preparation program courses. The literature on this topic suggests that culturally-responsive teaching is something that everyone understands and already does as part of their instruction, but as the teacher responses indicate, that is not the case. I think that my project therefore highlights this gap in understanding from research to practice and works to provide tools that teachers can use in and out of their classrooms, whether they be in their 27th year of teaching or in their first year of their teacher preparation program.

I came to this topic after having a conversation with one of my English education professors, who suggested that I read the book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood* by Christopher Emdin. I began to see that this was a topic that was vitally important to working with students from different backgrounds, but it was not until I started my data collection that I began to see the larger issue at play. It was when I began to understand this gap that I shifted my approach to the project a bit, not just synthesizing the information that I was finding, but also

writing to advocate for teachers and teacher education programs to better teach and continue to

learn about this topic.

Part I: Literature Review

      We as teachers want to provide the absolute best education for our students that we can give them. Hopefully, this is a goal that is shared by most teachers entering our profession. As a preservice teacher myself, coming up on my final year of college, I am finding myself trying to gather as many resources and recommendations on inclusive practices, strategies representing the needs and satisfying the needs of students, as I can before heading into student teaching. Through this research, I have heard the term "culturally-responsive teaching" thrown around quite a bit, but I cannot recall ever discussing this part of education in my courses directly. My own research has illuminated the fact that we have been practicing with this educational approach throughout my teacher preparation program, but we have not put the label of "culturally-responsive" to these strategies.

      Most of the literature and research that I have been finding, however, refers to the concept as if it is something that most educators are inherently familiar with. When this attitude kept popping up in my own research, started to question how familiar teachers are with this term who completed these programs five, ten, or even 20 years ago, particularly since we never explicitly discussed the term in our teacher preparation program now, in 2019. This line of thinking has driven the inception of this study, which focuses on the current practices and familiarities of teachers with culturally-responsive teaching. In this study, I will analyze the research surrounding this topic, from the literature being published and from the testimonies of current teachers from urban, suburban, and rural school districts in Indiana. I did find that most of my research turned up sources by white authors, and in a future study I would like to investigate why these are the voices being shared more when they are not part of the cultures that are not being represented in our classrooms; however, this issue falls out of the scope of this

project. Most of the initial texts from my research were written by white authors, which most admitted at some point in their writings. In a future line of inquiry, I would want to investigate why these authors and their texts were the most-frequently appearing in my searches and not the works of authors of color on the topic.

What does fall into the scope of this project is the information available to educators on the topic of culturally-responsive teaching. In the next few sections I will be defining what I am investigating as "culturally-responsive" teaching, outlining existing research on the topic, and discussing the common implications of this teaching on student learning experiences.

What is culturally-responsive teaching?

For the purposes of this study, I define culture as "the dynamic mix of race, ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and family that contributes to every students' cultural identity" (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 1). The aspects of students' lives that influence how they think, behave, and learn are all part of that umbrella of culture, as well. Most commonly people associate culture as being tied to region or ethnicity/race alone, but as Wlodkowski and Ginsberg state, it is more of a variety of influences that come together to affect someone's identity. Students' identities are much more complex than just including their cultural backgrounds, so as teachers, we must be aware of these factors impact our students' learning.

The other half of being culturally-responsive in our teaching lies in what we mean by being responsive. We as teachers see issues arise in the classroom and adjust our instruction accordingly. When the term responsive is used, I am talking about a similar kind of adjustment to our teaching. Modifying our instruction is rooted not just in an event or behavior issue; understanding the lives and backgrounds of our students is just as important, too. It is our

responsibility to "anchor [our] curriculum in the everyday lives of [our] students…select participation structures that reflect students' ways of knowing and doing…[and] participate in reforming the institution" (Kozleski 5). Responsive teaching entails bringing students' lives into the classroom with more than just a discussion here or there. It means building opportunities for students to have their lives reflected in coursework and classroom rules. Texts, assignments, and learning tasks should be available to what students already know and how they take in information.

Putting these two definitions together, I see culturally-responsive teaching as the practice of recognizing students' identities, and the influences on their identities, to create classroom experiences that reflect them as people and learners. My own definition resonates with the one articulated by researchers Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, who define culturally-responsive teaching as "a pedagogy that crosses disciplines and cultures to engage learners while respecting their cultural integrity" (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 1). As I stated previously, engaging in culturally-responsive practices allows us to bring opportunities for students to see themselves in our classes.

What are some misconceptions of culturally-responsive teaching?

In trying to integrate more culturally-responsive practices into the classroom, there is a lot of literature surrounding "best practices," particularly in the secondary classroom. As I embarked on my journey to discover more about what is being done in this area of education, I found myself navigating what misconceptions and biases that can inform what is published on this topic. Throughout my research on the misconceptions of culturally-responsive teaching, one practice that came up repeatedly was the argument for color-blind treatment of our students. This

practice has been advocated by individuals who aim to have equal interactions with all their students, regardless of background or appearance. Though this attitude may stem from good intentions of working toward equal treatment of all students, "the colorblind perspective treats race as an irrelevant, invisible, and taboo topic" (Howard 57). Often this approach ignores any existing inequality with students and teachers, which ends up, as Howard states, treating these issues without the due attention that they deserve.

In addition to misconceptions that arise in the colorblind approach, there is often stereotyping and racial bias that comes through efforts to be more culturally-responsive. In the past, when discussing culturally-responsive practices, "it [culturally-responsive teaching] is contrasted with an assimilationist approach to teaching that sees fitting students into the existing social and economical order as its primary responsibility" (Ladson-Billings 314). Similar to the intentions behind the colorblind approach to instruction, asking students to assimilate into our classroom culture and ignore their cultural identities does not reflect students' learning as much as it reinforces the sense of being outside the majority culture, or the culture that we see most represented in popular media. While this approach may stem from an effort to have a more inclusive classroom, it elicits similar problems as designating periods like Black History Month and Teacher Appreciation Week: it implies that these individuals are not worth celebrating the rest of the year.

Some of the practices outlined, which I will be discussing more in-depth later in the study, focus on inserting culturally-responsive practices into the classroom, instead of having them incorporated already into the coursework. One of the key ideas that I am investigating on this matter is whether or not teachers are aware of this divide and what efforts are being made to be more inclusive in practice if this divide is illuminated to them. According to Gary Howard,

author of *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, "individuals from the dominant group are usually unaware of their own power and can carry on the daily activities of their lives without any substantial knowledge about, or meaningful interaction with, those people are not part of the dominant group" (61). This issue is especially prevalent amongst the white, middle-class population of teachers who have historically made up a majority in the population of educators around the country.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to focus on my home state of Indiana. With a historically majority-white population in both student and teacher populations, the goal of my study is to see how that information affects the knowledge and practices of culturally-responsive teaching in Indiana schools. According to the Indiana Department of Education, in the 2016-17 academic year, around 93% of teachers reported that they identify as white. Out of the 71,224 teachers observed in this measure, that means that 66,225 of these teachers identify as white (IDOE: Compass). If a significant population of our teachers are part of the majority culture, what impact does that have on our students who do not fall into this population? About 66 percent of students in Indiana public schools identify as white, but that leaves a significant portion of our students identifying as ethnicities other than white (IDOE: Compass). How do biases, lack of knowledge, and just pure ignorance on being inclusive to other cultures affect our instruction?

What does culturally-responsive teaching do for our students?

Like my earlier point about lack of diversity in academic research on this topic, having a majority white teaching population raises some potential issues in the practices of culturally-responsive teaching. Because people in majority culture are often unaware of the power they

possess as members of the majority culture, white teachers may not recognize that their students' cultures are not being adequately represented in the classroom, or, if they do recognize it, they might try to just insert moments of representation in coursework and not anticipate what it means to have brief moments of recognition rather than true inclusivity. Researcher Geneva Gay, one of the foremost experts on culturally-responsive teaching, claims that "when these distorted attitudes and beliefs [biases and implicit judgements] are present in classrooms (as they invariably are), they interfere with rather than facilitate teaching and learning" (144). How does this insertion of culture impact the ways in which students perceive their roles in the classroom? I would argue that making these efforts to insert students' culture into the curriculum actually "others" students, even if done in good faith in wanting students to have more representation, and reinforces the existing power dynamics between white instructors and diverse classroom learners.

So, if Indiana has a majority of white educators in our classrooms, how can we responsibly practice culturally-responsive teaching? Most of the research that I have found has focused on the power dynamics of the teacher and student interactions, as we have been engaging with so far, but I would like to shift the focus more to what efforts can we make that will actually benefit our students and their learning experiences. In *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, theorist and author Jeffrey Wilhelm outlines several key practices that we as teachers can use in our classrooms. Wilhelm states that "the best way we can care for them [students] is to use what we learn about them to help them develop the attitude and abilities that will both prepare them for success and future and provide pleasure in the present" (185). In order to effectively engage their learning identities in the classroom, we as teachers have to *know* our students and use our interactions with them to inform the ways in which they can learn best. We

cannot engage in culturally-responsive teaching if we do not make those initial efforts to get to know our students as the complex, diverse group of humans that they are.

It is exceptionally important to know our students in order for us to effectively teach them anything throughout the year, but it is equally important that we as educators do the work to overcome the biases or areas of ignorance that we may possess. As Christopher Emdin states in "For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood," "there must also be a concerted effort to improve the teaching of white teachers who are already teaching in these schools, as well as those who aspire to teach there, to challenge the 'white folks' pedagogy' that is being practiced by teachers of all ethnic and racial backgrounds" (9). In addition to making greater strides in responding to our students' cultures and identities, we need to make progress on recognizing the ways in which we as white educators reinforce certain power dynamics. In this recognition, we also need to work on the ways we can effectively work against these dynamics to create a more inclusive classroom environment.

Part II: Data Analysis

This study concentrates on the levels of existing knowledge and practice of culturally-responsive teaching in Indiana schools. For the purposes of time and research, I have limited the scope of this investigation to the secondary, English and language arts educators throughout Indiana. In the following sections, I will be discussing the data I collected on this knowledge of culturally-responsive teaching and highlighting the practices of six individual educators, from varying school districts and years of experience, to dive into what is being done in our schools in Indiana.

In this research study, I surveyed 22 secondary English teachers working in a variety of school districts throughout Indiana. I recruited participants for this survey via Facebook and email, and they had the choice to indicate whether they would be interested in doing an additional, individual phone interview. Of these participants, about 50% reported that they work in a suburban school, 27% reported that they work in an urban school, 18% reported they work in a rural school, and 5% reported that they work in a laboratory school not attached to a community school district. I did not collect the teacher preparation programs or ethnicities of participants. Beyond the initial survey, I interviewed six of the participants through additional individual phone interviews. Here I will provide overviews of each of these six participants, with their names and school names changed to protect their anonymity. I will be labeling each teacher with a corresponding number.

Teacher One is currently in his fourth year of teaching in a rural school district, teaching at the middle-school level. He has worked at two different school districts throughout these four years, and the experiences he shares are rooted in both classrooms. Teacher Two is in her 28th year of teaching in a suburban school district, and has been working with 8th-grade students for

most of her career. She serves on her school's cultural competency committee, which works to provide training and support for more culturally-responsive practices in her school. Additionally, she has been working in genocide education and Holocaust education throughout her career in her classroom here in the US and abroad. Teacher Three is currently in his third year of teaching, in a rural school district. As he is only in his third year, his answers also drew upon his student teaching experiences in a mixed suburban/urban school district. Teacher Four has entered his 27th year of teaching, most of which has been in the same suburban school district. His school has recently adopted more practices aligned with culturally-responsive teaching. Teacher Five began his fifth year of teaching by helping institute initiatives for more cultural competency in his suburban school district. Finally, Teacher Six has taught in the same urban district for almost three years, participating in committees on culturally-responsive teaching and book clubs sponsored by administrators in her building since she was hired.

One of the most important components of this study has been to determine how familiar secondary English teachers in Indiana are with culturally-responsive teaching, and to what extent they have training on in this facet of education. In the initial survey responses, about 86% of teachers reported that they were at least familiar with the term "culturally-responsive teaching." While this number is initially reassuring, the research indicates that most teachers are well-versed in this pedagogical approach. When asked about their experiences in their teacher education programs, not specified to any particular colleges, universities, or alternative licensing programs, about 60% of teachers reported that they did *not* learn about culturally-responsive teaching in their preparation programs.

While the initial responses to the survey indicated that most of the respondents knew about culturally-responsive teaching, most did not have formalized training on the subject.

Without formalized training, some of the teachers from the initial survey have described culturally-responsive teaching as the following:

- "Uses an understanding of student backgrounds and culture to engage students with content and in the classroom."

- "Awareness of cultural impact on student learning and teaching methodology."

- "Culturally-responsive teaching involves working with a variety of students with varying demographics and relating what they are learning to their own cultural backgrounds. It involves seeing themselves in what they read and write."

- "Engaging students with content that is relevant to their racial/ethnic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and teaching them to be critical of literature and media."

These definitions indicate that several of the respondents were able, even without formalized training from their teacher education programs, to describe the processes associated with culturally-responsive teaching. When putting these responses in conversation with the literature I analyzed in the previous section, it seems that most of the participants were able to deduce what culturally-responsive teaching aims to achieve, but did not have as much awareness or proficiency in it as the literature suggested they should.

The individual interviews reveal that respondents had varying experiences with this pedagogical approach. Outlined below are the interviewees' definitions of culturally-responsive teaching and how they approach these practices or their notion of these practices in their own classrooms:

Teacher One

- "For me, I think of culturally-responsive teaching as getting to know your students and your community well-enough to bring their culture and your culture into your instruction."

- "It was always talked about that you should get to know your students and you should like bring in their interests and diverse voices [into the classroom], but I don't remember it ever being called culturally-responsive teaching." While he was able to piece together what the goal of culturally-responsive teaching is, he refers to this practice as essentially forming relationships with his students to know what their interests, backgrounds, and strengths are in the classroom.

Teacher Two

- "I think culturally-responsive means that every student has an opportunity for fair and equal treatment, that you not only appreciate [but] celebrate cultural differences, and that you make sure that your teachers and staff are well-trained in making sure that every student, no matter who they are, has an opportunity to succeed."

- "We probably had some YA novel choices that were presented. It was not a part of any kind of separate training. In fact, I feel like we had some mention of multiculturalism, which I suppose was an 'ism' at the time, but I think it included more of students with learning needs that were different, so it was not as much of the culturally-responsiveness."

Teacher Three

- "I would call that looking at your demographic for your area and then matching instruction to meet the needs of the students and their cultural identities."

- "At [my student teaching placement], I tried to make the stuff match to what the kids would want, and in the poetry class I taught, it was probably the best opportunity I had. We had about an 80-20 split African American to White, and so with that, I did a unit on the Harlem Renaissance. We looked at that and how it impacted hip hop and modern rap, because a lot of my kids were really into that kind of stuff."

Teacher Four

- "I would say it means respecting cultures and looking into and examining cultures with an awareness and sensitivity of including that in the curriculum."

- "No, I will tell you that the only time that has come up is when my daughter, who is currently in some teacher education classes, told me about it."

- "Before I got into the classroom, the concept that was being discussed was multiculturalism. Which was, I think, the beginning of the movement. We started thinking about taking in literature from multiple cultures and how you're going to address the different kinds of environments that you're going to be in. But, it was just the very beginning of it at that point. We did have an understanding that our curriculum was completely Euro-centric, and that we needed to be doing more at that point."

Teacher Five

- "Culturally-responsive teaching, in my view, is teaching that takes into consideration the various and diverse cultural backgrounds of students with regards to developing curriculum, lessons, and instructional practices."

- "So, this type of teaching, for me, is kind of common sense, as far as meeting students where they are. In my studies, I didn't encounter that term specifically, but in receiving your survey, I think that I kind of intuited what culturally-responsive teaching means."

- "Before going into my classroom, I think a lot of it would have been in studying just general pedagogy, and how important cultural backgrounds have become to pedagogical practice in the past 10-20 years especially. And especially, kind of drawing on things like critical pedagogy, helps in a way."

Teacher Six

- "What I think of when I hear it [culturally-responsive teaching], I just think of understanding the cultural background that all of your students are coming from, and modifying maybe your lessons, the stories you read, the novels you read, to reflect the diversity of your classroom."

- "Right now, the unit that we're in is called 'American Voices,' and looking through the book, we are reading a lot of stories from people who are immigrants. And while that's super culturally relevant right now, in the news and in my ELL class, I also wanted to make sure that we were reading about people from America who are minorities in a different way."

- "We had several staff meetings about being more culturally-responsive, and we created our own cultural autobiography and shared that with other people, mostly people I've never met before."

These descriptions suggest that many of these teachers seem to have developed a knowledge of culturally-responsive teaching throughout their classroom and professional development experiences. While the initial data suggests that most of the teachers did not study this concept in their teacher education programs, almost everyone was able to develop recognition of culturally-responsive teaching through working with students and seeking professional development opportunities.

The initial survey responses, as well as the individual phone interviews, showed that most of the Indiana educators surveyed developed their notions of culturally-responsive teaching after *already* entering their classrooms. Since most of these educators did not have the training in their teacher education programs to approach this facet of teaching, they relied on their interactions with students and fellow teachers to drive what they derived as being culturally-responsive. Each of the individual interviewees provided some insight into how they approach this method of teaching, and how this approach has changed their philosophies on working with students and other staff.

Teacher One

- "Getting to know my students, what they're interested in and what their backgrounds are, that's the one. And then, once I know that, I can kind of adjust my focus to different readings that will bring in different topics."

- "I had a lot more students of color in my last year of teaching than I had in previous years, and so I never really had to focus on bringing those perspectives into the classroom, but I really emphasized that this year. It felt more meaningful for me that I could do that for them, and they seemed to get more out of it as well."

- "For projects, I kind of just let them [my students] have a lot of ownership and choice in what they're doing. So, you know, I've had students who want to be singers and so I let them bring those interests into play in what the projects were in that way."

- "So I worked in two different schools, and the best way that I've done it is just keeping an open communication with students. You know, we teach bell-to-bell but we find time to talk to students and see how they're doing, what their day's been like, what they're interested in, and it's surprisingly easy to find out more about them and what their interests are, and they're more than willing to share. So, as you learn about them, you kind of learn where they're coming from."

Teacher Two

- "It's not easy, especially when you're a new teacher, trying to pull together resources when it's overwhelming. And, there's some districts like ours that don't have textbooks, so you're kind of culling from what you think is best."

- "I think that you look at your classes and provide a lot of choice, as best you can, that allows students to pick and choose. What I am fast learning, not necessarily just in my classroom, is that having a token short story that checks off whatever box you're trying to hit does not mean that you are being culturally-responsive. It means that you're trying to make that bridge, but maybe there's more to it than that. It's not just curriculum

writing, it's the clubs that are sponsored, it's the way you support students in how they learn. I'm constantly re-looking at the things that not only we read, but also in the examples that I use. We did a kind of book tasting that we did in the first week of school and I set out all kinds of books, and when I talked about windows and mirrors, I talked about including a lot of things that I hadn't maybe addressed before. It's how well you make it a commonplace in your classroom and not just something separate, I think."

- "Now, we have Monday PLCs [professional learning communities] that currently is all about the test scores, you know, but we do have now our ENL person is full time, for example. He wants to meet with us and talk about meeting the needs of our students who are especially new. When we do have full group meetings, we have offered different trainings on various topics. We've looked at religion, race, it just depends on when it was during the year. I think there's an initiative more corporation-wide, called Undoing Racism, and there's a push to get all teachers to go through the program. It opens your eyes to the privilege that many don't recognize they have, and it's really been pretty life-changing for some of the teachers who sat in our one-hour meetings to say we've had this all before."

Teacher Three

- "For the most part, they're kind of okay with it. Some of them have been really happy to learn about something else [other cultures]. For some, their opinion is that it doesn't matter so they don't really care or get into it. It depends on the year of kids, because some years are better than others."

- "With the context I'm in, you have to approach it a little cautiously. I start out by going into the Romanticism, so then I can connect it to the Harlem Renaissance, so then from there I can build a natural progression, so it's not seeming like I'm brainwashing their kids."

- "I had one instance when I had to change the way I talked about things so one parent could feel that I wasn't trying to control their child. That parent is not what I would consider to be the normal case."

Teacher Four

- "Students that I am serving are not getting a lot of multicultural experiences, and to introduce them to materials outside of their comfort zone is definitely challenging. They don't take a lot of the cultures outside of their own, they have a hard time breaking away from what they're doing."

- "As a department, we've definitely changed the material that we teach, we've expanded it to more regions of the world and cultures. An interesting thing that's going on right now is that we're trying to adopt more sensitive language, too, which is kind of an interesting idea of being aware that we're dealing with people and not defining them by what they are. Our language is even changing in the way we speak about students, the ways that we talk about things."

Teacher Five

- "I think one of the major things is to recognize students' cultural backgrounds as an inherent part of their identity. A lot of people have kind of the intuitive sense to rather

just treat everyone equally, as they were the same. The old kind of idea of color-blindness. We're trying to push past that to recognize that these cultural identities are important, intrinsic to people, and that we can utilize that for the purposes of a more equitable education."

- "Our entire school is going through Implicit Bias training, to make us aware of our own biases. And now, we're trying to get to the next steps of, well, how do you utilize that and how does that convert into practices in the classroom."

- "Right now, it's fairly new. We're about a year old now, and so far, we're kind of in an information gathering phase, where we are gathering data and then compiling those resources to give to teachers; however, ever since we founded it, we've already made some head-way with things like the mission statement, etc. and I've already noticed more conversations happening where we are able to pick up on and educate other teachers about these practices.

- "As I've spoken about before a bit, my administration is spear-heading this. I feel very grateful because I think in a lot of districts, I'd be very much isolated in this practice, but instead, I'm getting a platform to do this work."

Teacher Six

- "The assistant principal [at my school] is big on culturally-responsive teaching and restorative justice, and she actually has this book club that I signed up to be part of. We'd talk about the book, things going on in our classrooms, practices that we could do to be more culturally-responsive and culturally-relevant. I think that was in my second year of teaching."

- "A lot of my students joke that they go to school in the hood and live in the hood, and so for me, I want to find stories that feature a black protagonist who isn't in a gang or who isn't struggling with hunger or street violence. That the fact that they're black is just part of who they are."

- "We actually got new curriculum this year, and that was the first thing that we looked at. [My school] is 70 percent African American, so we have a different demographic than some other schools. I have an ELL [English Language Learner] inclusion class this year, and that changes stuff, too. I change things for that class to be more relevant for them."

With varying levels of support from school staff, administration, and the overall communities they are working in, these six teachers are seeing in their classrooms how important recognizing students' backgrounds is in forming connections and trust. In trying to navigate culturally-responsive teaching on their own, or with support later on in their careers, these six interviewees highlight the triumphs and struggles that they have all encountered in their journeys to find more culturally-responsive practices.

Teacher One

- "I remember reading a book called *The Hate U Give*. There's a character in that book who has the same name as a student that I had, and it's not a common name, but I got that student to read that book even [though] she's not a common reader."

- "It's not something I ever really thought about, I'm a White man, and so it was very common to see myself in a lot of the literature and stuff that was being given to our school."

- "For me, the number one thing is getting to know the students, and I think that's something that should be part of our practice in general. I think, a lot of times, people get to know their students and their home life but have it in a kind of separate folder, than to what they're doing in the classroom."

- "I think trying is better than doing nothing at all."

Teacher Two

- "I think you look at social media, right, who are you following on Twitter. There are some teacher Facebook pages, Project Lit is one that specifically has a collection of books that this year is kind of the focus of what I've been using in my classroom. If you're gearing it toward young teachers, it can get overwhelming. I think there's a huge comparison, too, of my classroom's not Instagram-worthy, and I don't have nearly that library, and it weighs on you. Even for me, I mean, and I've been in that same room for 20 years. It weighs on you when you say 'I'm not doing enough' and yet, every small step, even if you change one thing, is doing something. I always say that with a grain of salt: like, yes follow things, but know what you are doing now that you can be proud of."

- "There's only so much that can be done. It's only really through observation and hands-on [experience] that you're really going to understand. As much as we want to change the education portion of it, and the classroom portion of it, it's got to come with those observations and student teaching programs. Yes, we all make mistakes and sometimes you look back on things that were said and done throughout the years, and it's okay to make those mistakes. Now, with social media, those mistakes become far-more reaching than they used to be. So, it's another level of fear for teachers that what if I show that

movie, and it happened to have had the "n" word in it, and now I'm making the news because a parent didn't understand why it was being used. To try some of these things, especially in small, conservative Indiana towns, you have to be very strong on your rationale, with everything you do as a teacher." But why am I doing this, at this time, with these students, with these resources? You have to answer that question, for yourself and for everybody. And, as long as you do that, be strong in what you think is right."

Teacher Three

- "My school district is very conservative, so there's only so much you can talk about before certain parents are unhappy with you."

- "Widen their own scope of what they read. If you want to do something with culturally-responsive teaching, you yourself need to be culturally-responsive, reading from different perspectives and of different contexts."

- "Having moved to a completely different demographic, now it's more about teaching kids about other cultures not specifically their own."

Teacher Four

- "There's a layer of racism that lurks under pretty much everything that's going on, and every now and then, I'll have discussions about it. As their teacher, I can tell that a majority of my white students are not aware of the experiences that the students of color are going through. So, it's hard to get the majority White population to understand that the students of color are having a different experience. I'll ask them to rate, on a scale of 1-10, how racist do they believe our school to be, and the majority White students always

rate it at a 5 or below, and the students of color will almost always put it over five. They feel that there's a lot more racism there, so."

- "The parents tend to be pretty responsive. I have not had any negative experiences, every time that I introduce things that I want to bring into the class, the parents have always been supportive."

- "Both my department and our administration have been very supportive of any changes that we make."

- "Our adoption of culturally-sensitive literature has been slower than a lot of other places, just because we are 80-85% White school. We don't feel the same drive as a lot of other schools to change what we are doing."

- "The state of Indiana mandates that we go out and get different kinds of training, and at this point, [my district] offers a lot of different in-service opportunities, but in all honesty we haven't had any culturally-responsive training at all."

Teacher Five

- "So, the biggest struggle is that we are teaching in a very conservative area, historically, that is kind of resistant to the changes it's seeing in the community. I head up at my school the Spring Fling, which for us is a kind of arts and literature festival where we showcase the work that students have done. One of the students showed a documentary they put together that showed the history of gay rights in America, and while we showed it at the festival, it was widely celebrated, we did have walkouts. We did face backlash. And not just with LGBTQ issues, but with racial or religious issues as well."

- "We have to give a huge shout-out to our first Native Poet-Laureate, Joy Harjo, who is doing some wonderful work in her role as poet laureate, developing indigenous voices and poets. Also, going into studying literature and recognizing that you'll have this practice of Black History Month and realizing that an entire culture or race of people aren't to be relegated to one month, but are an integral part of literature that should be shared far and wide."

- "[My school district] has been seeing a huge growth in population lately, and it's becoming a more diverse population, whereas it was, historically, a more homogenous population. So, in response to that, the administration in my school has developed what we call the Cultural Understandings Committee, and I am a member of that committee. It's a district-wide organization that is working on several initiatives. Our first thing that we've done is to develop a mission statement for the district, in regards to cultural understandings. We also were able to, through grant funding, welcome speaker Cornelius Minor, to our school, and he's a great voice for these practices as well. He spoke with our staff at the beginning of the year, and we're continuing to build upon that foundation through various means. One team of the committee is putting together what we're calling Food for Thought, which invites various voices throughout the community to sit down for dinner, every so often, and have discussions about our changing community and how to build a more inclusive community. I'm on the team that is working on looking through instructional practices, so we're actually putting together a guide for all the teachers in our district that include things like diverse literature that can be used in the classroom, as well as utilizing things like Teaching Tolerance lessons and other practices to help educate our staff in how to implement culturally-responsive teaching."

Teacher Six

- "I think it is helpful being a younger teacher, you know, I am on Twitter, on Instagram following all these different authors. The authors that I follow are mainly authors of color, and they recommend stories or articles to read, which I've found really helpful since these aren't publicized."

- "I would like to bring more, it sounds so strange, of a male perspective [into my classroom]. The stories that we read, a lot of them I've picked, have had female protagonists.

- "It is so worth it when you find a story that just really connects with students, for me that's the best part."

Almost all of these interviewees expressed that they struggled against underlying racism and other challenges in their communities, and the support or lack thereof from their departments and administration members was a significant factor in their culturally-responsive practices.

    In the final lines of questioning for these six interviewees, each teacher shared their best advice for practicing teachers *and* preservice teachers wanting to develop more culturally-responsive practices in their teaching.

Teacher One

- "I know when I seek out professional development stuff, especially conferences, I like to seek out something that's related to how to like increase engagement, and diversity, and all that stuff."

- "I think it really comes down to getting to know your students. Hopefully, you know, teachers aren't in the position of not caring about their students and their lives outside of

school, but you know, when I get a new crop of students, I want to get to know them, I'm almost more interested in them as people than as students and so, you know, they might not all want to be an English class all the time, but if they want to at least be around me because I'm making that effort to make things relevant to them as much as I can, then that's successful to me. The key is getting to know them and then being unafraid to diverge from standard curriculum and do what you think and what you know to be better."

- "The kids are often going through more than we can imagine, or hope to ever have to deal with, and so it's like one more thing in their day to throw some old story at them by a person who doesn't matter. It's just one more thing that they can't connect to or don't want to think about. And so, like, if you're bringing in different aspects of their culture, it doesn't have to just be like stories or poems. It's taking a step into their world when they don't think you do. They get to see a new aspect of you as a teacher now showing that you care about them as a person. English and Language Arts lends itself to it because you get choice, you get to pick stories, you get to pick poems, you choose the voices that represent the content that you're throwing at them. It's on the teacher to make sure that these voices are reflective of those they see in the classroom."

Teacher Two

- "Anytime that you can give students choice, and choice that they see themselves in, is a positive."

- "I think you have to make it [professional development] accessible, and meet teachers where they are. You have to provide good resources that all teachers can access."

- "Teaching Tolerance has amazing resources, Southern Poverty Law does as well. You can find organizations in your community to get involved in, you know programs for people coming and settling into your town, Black Lives Matter, I mean, it [goes] on and on and on."

- "Look on campus, look at lectures coming in, books that are being published, and there seems to be more and more published all the time, that let you see things from all sides."

Teacher Three

- "I'm subscribed to the English Journal and the NEA [National Education Association], so I get monthly journals from them."

- "I would say that they [teachers] need to know their kids before they throw in any culturally-responsive education. Certain things aren't going to work with every demographic. NCTE has been helpful with that kind of stuff."

Teacher Four

- "It's a battle to show what you have in common, and then you expand from there."

- "They're all kids, and everyone wants to feel respected. Everybody wants to feel that their culture matters and that their culture counts."

- "It's almost like it should be an entire college course at this point. It's time for some sort of initiative, even at the federal, state, and local levels, for some kind of training for everyone. Every year, the state of Indiana mandates that I go through training programs and I think it's time that we start a cultural-responsivity training."

- "Part of it, for me being in Language Arts especially, is creating a more diverse literature that gets away from the standard canon. And having representative voices in the texts we read, and study, in class."

Teacher Five

- "Do your research first. I think that a lot of us can be well-intentioned, but we all have those implicit biases that we carry with us. I think with all the good intentions in the world can't compete with a good knowledge base. You really want to do your research. Read, listen, especially if you are part of the majority, you owe it to students who are not of the majority to do that legwork."

- "You have to have that thirst for knowledge, you should be listening, reading, studying, checking out Teaching Tolerance. Don't fall into the trap of white savior complex, especially if you are white, because that can be a very dangerous and problematic ideology, even if it's well-intentioned. A lot of teachers might see something like *Freedom Writers* and think they can just go in and save people that they don't have a complete understanding of. I think that the more we humble ourselves and the more knowledge and insight we [gain] leads to us developing our own culturally-responsive practices."

- "There's so much good literature out there. For preservice teachers, you're assigned so much reading already so it's hard to want to venture out and do more, but there's a wealth of literature out there, waiting for us. If it's not books, it's podcasts. Or, an even bigger step of course, it's one thing to read and listen to resources, but engage with the populations that you are teaching! Develop relationships with your kids and their families

and their communities. Be part of the communities that you are teaching [in]. I think that

the number one [priority] is that relationship building."

Teacher Six

- "Start accumulating your diverse classroom library early on. I would say build up your

  classroom library, because if students can see themselves in stories, even if those that you

  have in your own classroom, the more likely they are going to read in the first place.

  Don't just think of [representation] as just a black and white issue."

All of the recommendations and suggestions provided seem to center around the idea of, simply

put, getting to know your students and accepting that you need to do some legwork before

incorporating culturally-responsive practices into the classroom. These teachers challenge the

idea of seeking out resources as going beyond academic journals and research articles: these

resources can be novels, blogs, podcasts, social media, and other forms that have not been

traditionally viewed as methods of professional development. These six teachers demonstrate

how that conversation is changing as more people are sharing their practices and research

through new platforms.

Part III: Guidelines

In the first two parts of this study, I note a gap between what the research says that teachers know about culturally-responsive teaching, and what teachers have been taught about prior to entering the classroom. Despite this gap, culturally-responsive teaching has shown itself to be something that comes with time as a teacher, by getting to know our students and adjusting our teaching to be inclusive of their lives and backgrounds. At least, this shift came for the teachers who agreed to participate in the research study and who sought out opportunities for growth in these areas. The research *and* the testimonials on this area of teaching have illuminated one thing together: that in becoming more culturally-responsive, there are several different components of our classrooms that we have to consider. To provide some guidelines and tips on how to best approach culturally-responsive teaching in the classroom, I have condensed the literature and testimonials to focus on the following areas of improvement: acceptance, relationship-building, representation, and professional development.

Acceptance

Acceptance, specifically the acceptance of students' cultural identities in the classroom, is an abstract concept to describe. Does this mean we recognize that we see students and respect their backgrounds, or does acceptance necessitate action to include these backgrounds in our teaching? In thinking about cultural identities, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg provided a strong definition of what is considered to be part of students' culture. As I discussed in Part I, they claim that culture is a "dynamic mix or race, ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and family that contributes to every students' cultural identity" (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 1). Many things contribute to what impacts students' identities, and therefore there are many things we need to

take into consideration when we develop culturally-responsive practices. These influences can be manifested in the culture of our school communities; for. Instance, attending extra-curricular events and spending time in the establishments of the community could help us to better understand these influences of culture and region on students' learning and identities.

Another significant influence on acceptance of students' cultural identities in the classroom relies on our treatment and understanding of culture. The definition above provides a foundation to think about what can be included under the umbrella of culture, but what is the most influential in how we treat culture is our ability to talk about it. In the past, the "colorblind perspective" was favored by teachers--specifically white teachers who were not comfortable addressing issues like race, religion, and sexuality in their classrooms. As Gary Howard notes, though, "too often we expect white teachers to be what they have not learned to be, namely, culturally competent professionals" (6). Developing the ability to talk about these important issues in the classroom, and deconstructing the dominance of white culture in the classroom, is something that as the survey data shows, is not something we are trained on as extensively as other areas of teaching. In order to start this work, we need to become more comfortable talking about race and asking for help from other professionals and organizations, like Teaching Tolerance, to responsibly have these conversations with students in meaningful ways.

The greatest obstacle that I think many of us who are part of the majority culture struggle with, is the idea of addressing our own judgements with culture and overcoming our biases. Many of us may not think that we have biases that impact our teaching, especially if we work to give the best educational experience to our students as we can. Gary Howard states:

> Empathy requires the suspension of assumptions, the letting go of ego, and the release of
> the privilege of nonengagement...empathy is a healing response because it allows us as

whites to step outside of dominance, to see our social position in a new light, and connect

with the experience of others who see the river of diversity from a different perspective.

(77)

We may think that we are being aware and inclusive in our teaching, but as members of the

dominant group, there are a lot of things that we just do not know about. And that is okay. That

is why it is so important to form relationships with students and do the work to understand what

impacts them when they step in and out of your classroom. We should be collaborating with

organizations in our students' communities, like businesses and nonprofits, to better understand

how we can start to understand where our students are coming from, and step outside of that

zone of dominance to see their experiences and how we affect their learning in a new light.

With all these factors impacting our acceptance of cultural identities in the classroom,

what can we do about it to serve students' needs? Teacher Four claims that in order to overcome

biases in our teaching:

Do your research first. I think that a lot of us can be well-intentioned, but we all have

those implicit biases that we carry with us. I think all good intentions in the world can't

compete with a good knowledge base. You really want to do your research. Read, listen,

especially if you are part of the majority [culture], you owe it to students who are not part

of the majority to do the legwork.

This research can come in the form of professional development, which I will discuss in the last

section, but it can also come from forming strong relationships with our students.

Relationship-Building

Part of accepting students' cultural identities is being able to get to know our students in the first place. At the core of culturally-responsive teaching, and arguably, all teaching in general, is being able to form relationships with your students and drive instruction that you *know* will meet their needs. In an English and Language Arts class, as Gloria Ladson-Billings suggests, teaching reading can be a powerful tool in this effort to connect with and learn from students in our classrooms. She says that, for several teachers in her 1992 study on literacy teaching, "rather than attempt to tie their students' literacy to vocational aspirations, they assert that literacy is a tool of liberation, both personal and cultural…it has been less about what is *on* the lines and pages than what is *between* the lines and beyond the pages" (318).

From talking to our students and, especially in Language Arts, getting to know them through their writing, too, we can incorporate texts and concepts that we know students can connect with. They then can have the prerogative to use these resources to discover new ways of thinking and challenge what they already know, which can contribute to creating a stronger sense of community in our classrooms. By investigating topics that students can already somewhat connect to, we can all have different perspectives on issues and concepts that other people may not have considered, which builds a strong community of inquiry in our classrooms that will make us and our students more comfortable to share about issues that we could normally have difficulty in sharing (i.e., race, religion, and sexuality) in other settings.

While it may sound like something that is fairly simple for us as teachers to achieve, building relationships with students can be a challenge for many people. I am not referring to questionnaires at the beginning of the school year, or knowing what extracurricular activities your students are involved with, but actually getting to know them as human beings. Teacher

One mentions that this kind of effort is "taking a step into their world when they don't think you do. They get to see a new aspect of you as a teacher now showing that you care about them as a person." It is beneficial both for your instruction and for your rapport with your classes when you work to build relationships with your students. As one of the teachers who responded to my initial survey puts it, "this kind of teaching, for me, is kind of common sense, as far as meeting students where they are." This can look like incorporating meaningful and reflective writing opportunities, like nonfiction creative writing tasks as frontloading activities for new concepts. It could also look like sharing aspects of your own life experiences, like times of difficulty or challenge, in class discussions to help establish a safe and encouraging space for students to discuss these issues.

Finally, a significant aspect of connecting with students is getting to know not just them, but the communities in which they live, too. Teacher Five outlines this important element of culturally-responsive teaching when they say that we need to "develop relationships with your kids and their families and their communities. Be part of the communities that you are teaching [in]. I think that the number one [priority] is that relationship building." As we read with Wlodkowski and Ginsberg's definition of culture, family and region play a major role in how students develop their cultural identities. While we should not be visiting each and every student's home to get a sense of where they come from, we should be taking healthy steps to get involved in their communities, especially if we do not live in the areas that we teach in. These steps can be hosting open-house nights for students and their families to come in and talk about what we are doing in class, or they can be something as seemingly small as just sending out a periodic newsletter to families highlighting awesome things that students are doing, and what we are working on together in class. Having this kind of communication with parents is helpful not

only in keeping transparency with families strong, but also because students who see their teachers interacting in ways that show excitement and pride in them will be more likely to show the teachers respect and engagement in their classes.

Representation

Alongside forming meaningful relationships with students, teachers should be bringing representation of diverse experiences into the texts that we use in the classroom. One way that we can improve representation in our classrooms is through choice books. This is an area to which English and Language Arts lends itself quite well, as we choose (or have some choice in) the kinds of texts and concepts that we bring into our rooms. Teacher One describes it well when they say that "English and Language Arts lends itself to it because you get choice, you get to pick stories, you to get to pick poems, you choose the voices that represent the content that you're throwing at them. It's on the teacher to make sure that these voices are reflective of those they see in the classroom." Students should have opportunities to see themselves in the works that we study, not just texts about and by the same kinds of people all year long. As another teacher from the survey points out, "they're [students] all kids, and everyone wants to feel respected. Everybody wants to feel that their culture matters and that their culture counts."

How do we work to have stronger representation in our classrooms? Teacher Six suggests that we should "start accumulating your diverse classroom library early on. I would say build up your classroom library, because if students can see themselves in stories, even if those [are just ones] that you have in your own classroom, the more likely they are going to read in the first place." By providing texts that students can see themselves in, we are demonstrating to our students that we respect them, their cultures, and having those cultures celebrated in our

classrooms. As Teacher Two points out, "anytime that you give students choice, and choice that they see themselves in, is a positive." Sometimes it just takes us as teachers doing the work to seek out these books ourselves, or better yet, seeking the help of others. I include a resources list of several websites, texts, podcasts, and other sources that are helpful in getting started in developing more culturally-responsive practices.

Professional Development

      Professional development seems to be the guiding influence for how my respondents initially learned about culturally-responsive teaching. The survey data shows that approximately 60 percent of teachers reported that they did not learn about culturally-responsive teaching in their teacher preparation programs. This is a significant number of our teachers who did not receive this training before heading into their own classrooms. Professional development, therefore, gives us an external resource for teachers to discover concepts like culturally-responsive teaching and learn from other educators about them.

      One critique of professional development that I have heard is that requiring external training for teachers requires us to go out of our way, even when we have a million other things to balance, and pay out of pocket for expensive opportunities like conferences and seminars. Many schools bring in speakers and provide incentives for professional development, but not many schools can provide compensation for teachers who seek out additional resources and opportunities. Teacher Two suggests that, in order to reach teachers who are not able to attend these expensive events, we should instead "make it [professional development] accessible, and meet teachers where they are. You have to provide good resources that all teachers can access." Accessibility for professional development is key in reaching teachers who cannot attend

expensive conferences or purchase monthly magazines. When we can reach these teachers and provide opportunities like free one-day conferences or online webinars that anyone can access, we do the good work of bringing this knowledge to more educators.

In the case of more accessible professional development, the resources and programs available grow when we change the way that we think about professional development. Often, in teaching, professional development refers to seminars, workshops, conferences, and summits that are not always the most helpful events in the world. When we redefine what professional development is, however, we can expand the list of possibilities beyond these events. Teacher Four provides a clear example of just that:

> There's so much good literature out there. For preservice teachers, you're assigned so much reading already so it's hard to want to venture out and do more, but there's a wealth of literature out there, waiting for us. If it's not books, it's podcasts. Or, an even bigger step of course, it's one thing to read and listen to resources, but engage with the populations that you are teaching!"

Professional development does not have to be sanctioned events by host organizations, it can be something as simple as finding podcasts and social media accounts of people doing awesome things in their classrooms. Examples of these types of resources can be found in the next section, wherein I provide some resources and explanations of what each can be helpful for. It can be visiting with people in our communities to learn more about what issues are facing our parents and students. Again, the possibilities become much more expansive when we change the way we think about what professional development entails.

Finally, the greatest obstacle in finding and utilizing the skills and concepts you find in professional development is having the motivation to seek it out in the first place. Good teachers

have intrinsic motivation to seek out resources to improve our teaching, keep us updated on new texts and strategies, and other factors that go into how we teach our students. Teacher Five summarizes why our quest for professional development throughout our careers is so vital to our teaching:

> "You have to have a thirst for knowledge, you should be listening, reading, studying, checking out Teaching Tolerance. Don't fall into the trope of 'white savior complex,' especially if you are white, because that can be a very dangerous and problematic ideology, even if it's well-intentioned. A lot of teachers might see something like *Freedom Writers* and think they can just go in and save people they don't have a complete understanding of. I think that the more we humble ourselves and the more knowledge and insight we [gain] leads us to developing our own culturally-responsive practices."

Communicating with other teachers and education professionals helps us to overcome this "white savior complex" that many teachers can fall into at the beginning of our careers, and maintaining a growth mindset about our practices can help us to elevate our teaching to new challenging and fulfilling heights.

Limitations of the Study

I mainly focused on the issues of recognition of culturally-responsive teaching amongst secondary English teachers in Indiana, and how we can work to become more culturally-responsive in our classrooms when we do not have as much training on it during our preparation programs as we probably should. While I was able to gather data from a range of teachers of varying experiences and school environments, I believe that a larger data pool would have served

the study better. With more participants, I could have conducted more individual interviews and determined just how large the scope of this issue really is throughout Indiana. I did not collect data as to where the teachers studied for their teacher preparation programs, but if I had, I could have compared how traditional versus nontraditional programming focused on this aspect of teaching (if at all). Additionally, with the wording of my initial survey, I believe that several teachers had some context-clues to help them figure out what kinds of things fell under the umbrella of culturally-responsive teaching for their responses, and it's also likely that the teachers inclined to respond to my study were those who were already thinking about these issues.

Conclusions and Paths for Further Research

Overall, I hope that this study provides a foundation upon which we can trace the disconnect between theory and practice, and contains some helpful guidelines in getting started with engaging in more culturally-responsive teaching practices. In the future, I would like to expand this study to investigate how the conversation surrounding culturally-responsive teaching is dominated by white voices, and how this affects what we as teachers are bringing into our classrooms as best practices.

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Appendix: Resources for Culturally-Responsive Teaching

Important People to Know:

- Gloria Ladson-Billings (https://ci.education.wisc.edu/ci/people/faculty/gloria-ladson-billings)

Researcher and educator Ladson-Billings writes on the misconceptions surrounding culturally-responsive teaching and the effects of not being culturally-responsive in our classrooms.

- Geneva Gay (https://education.uw.edu/people/faculty/ggay)

Gay's works are considered to be some of the foremost expert texts on culturally-responsive teaching today. Her works provide research-proven strategies and practices that are aimed to help teachers who are starting the work of being more responsive and reflective in their teaching.

- Ruby Payne (@rubyKpayne)

I mention Payne here as a warning against the misconceptions that her works have created in the areas of culturally-responsive teaching. Her works lean to the "colorblind" approach that I outlined in Part I of this work as being extremely problematic in the classroom. Later in the resources list, I include a Teaching Tolerance article that outlines the extent to which Payne's works are problematic in use.

- Christopher Emdin (@chrisemdin)

In 2017, Emdin published his award-winning book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...And the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education.* In addition to his work in research on culturally-responsive practices, he created the #HipHopEd social media movement. His book and activism promote culturally-responsive practices in practical and usable terms that teachers can easily implement into their own classrooms.

- Zaretta Hammond (@Ready4rigor)

Author of such texts as *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, Hammond is a former English teacher who has been investigating and promoting best practices for culturally-responsive teaching for over 18 years. Her works specifically focus on the effects of culturally-responsive instruction on student learning and psychology, and as this study focuses primarily on familiarity of this topic with educators in Indiana, I did not use it as a primary source. If the study were to be continued and expanded to focus more on student learning, her books would be used.

Helpful Literature

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Professional Organizations

- Teaching Tolerance (https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources)

According to their website, Teaching Tolerance is an organization that sets out to "help teachers and schools educate children and youth to be active participants in a diverse democracy" (Teaching Tolerance: About). They provide free resources (like lesson plans, learning plans, posters, teaching strategies, etc.) for teachers and staff working in kindergarten through high school.

- National Council of Teachers of English (http://www2.ncte.org/resources/)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has been the foremost professional development organization for English teachers for more than 50 years. They have lessons, journal articles, and blog posts available for free, but with a yearly membership teachers and education staff can have access to professional development conferences/seminars, quarterly in-print and online journals, and a plethora of other resources to bring into the classroom.

- Equity Alliance at Arizona State University (http://www.equityallianceatasu.org/about)

The mission of this group is to, according to their website, "promote access, participation and positive outcomes for all students by engaging educational stakeholders, reframing and advancing the discourse on educational equity and transforming public education, locally, nationally and internationally" (Equity Alliance: About). They publish blog postings and a repository of texts (books, journal articles, and presentations) published by members and partners of the organization.

- National Education Association (http://www.nea.org/home/ToolsAndIdeas.html)

The National Education Association (NEA) is the largest professional organization for educators, and advocates for the betterment and advancement of public schools across the country. They

regularly publish articles, research, and professional development opportunities on their website and their social media accounts.

- Southern Poverty Law Center (https://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do)

The Southern Poverty Law Center is an agency that has been working for over 40 years for the advancement of civil rights and protection against unjust laws and discrimination. They are the parent organization of Teaching Tolerance and other organizations such as The Intelligence Project, an organization aimed to track hate groups across the U.S.

- Black Lives Matter (https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/)

The Black Lives Matter movement is an organization whose mission is to, according to their website, "build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (Black Lives Matter: About).

Useful Podcasts:

- *The Cult of Pedagogy* Podcast

Jennifer Gonzalez publishes this podcast, which is a supplemental resource available from *Cult of Pedagogy*, which also publishes blog posts, videos, and classroom resources. In this podcast, Gonzalez interviews teachers, students, administrators, and other educational staff to talk about things such as strategies, classroom management, reform, and technology. They have some resources on culturally-responsive teaching, but their teaching strategies are particularly helpful in becoming more responsive of student needs. They primarily publish their podcast on iTunes, but it can also be found on their website and on Google Play.

- *The Edvocate* Podcast (https://www.theedadvocate.org/the-edvocate-podcast/)

Dr. Matthew Lynch's *The Edvocate* is a weekly podcast on different issues that we face as teachers and, specifically, issues facing public school teachers across the country. While there are many helpful episodes with research-driven practices and suggestions, the fourth episode of the podcast, entitled "Episode 4: How to Create a Culturally-Responsive Classroom," is I think the most helpful of the episodes for strategies and tips. This podcast can be accessed through Spotify and their main website.

- NPR's *Code Switch* Podcast (https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510312/codeswitch)

Code Switch is a weekly podcast, conducted and published by journalists of color, which discusses varying topics under the act of code-switching between different contexts and by different marginalized groups. Their podcast is available on most music-streaming sites, but I recommend using Spotify as the episodes are easily identified and organized.

Study Title *(Culturally-Responsive Teaching in Secondary ELA Classrooms)*
IRBNet #1454071

Study Purpose and Rationale
The purpose of this research project is to identify the current practices and training on culturally-responsive teaching in secondary ELA classrooms in Indiana. This information will be synthesized into a guide book for preservice and practicing educators to use.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria
Participants must be over the age of 18, and have been a practicing ELA teacher in secondary education for at least one year.

Participation Procedures and Duration
Participants in the study will complete a Google Forms survey with 11 questions about their experiences with culturally-responsive teaching. From their responses, candidates with prior knowledge of culturally-responsive teaching will be called for an in-person, video, or phone interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on availability/location. After the interview, participants will be notified when the guide book is complete and will be given access to said guide book, if requested.

Audio or Video Tapes
Interviews will be audio recorded by the researcher and will be kept until the after the research project is accepted by the Ball State Honors College for the Senior Honors Thesis.

Disclosure of Alternative Procedures
If a participant is not within a reasonable distance from the researcher, interviews will be conducted via FaceTime, Skype, by phone, or by other agreed-upon mediums with the participant.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity
All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

Storage of Data and Data Retention Period
Data will be stored in a private Google Drive folder, with only the researcher's faculty advisor given access to the information. This will be stored in this manner until the Senior Honors Thesis is accepted by the Ball State Honors College.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no perceived risks for participating in this study.

Benefits
There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information
For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5052 or at orihelp@bsu.edu.

Researcher Contact Information

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